

FROM PATRIARCHY TO FREEDOM IN THE PROTAGONISTS OF MANJU KAPUR'S NOVELS

Mr. B. Lakshmanarao

Assistant Professor,
Department of English
GMR Institute of Technology Rajam,
Andhra Pradesh

Mr. Ch. Srinivasa Rao

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
GMR Institute of technology Rajam,
Andhra Pradesh

Manju Kapur is one of the distinguished postmodern Indian women novelists writing in English. She has a worldwide popularity. She has six novels to her credit to date: 'Difficult Daughters'(1998), 'A Married Woman' (2002), 'Home'(2006), 'The Immigrant'(2009), 'Custody'(2011), and the latest being 'Brothers' published in 2017 which is out of the scope of my thesis.

ManjuKapur's first novel 'Difficult Daughters' won the commonwealth prize for the first best novel (Eurasia Section) in 1998. Her second novel, 'A Married Woman' was shortlisted for Encore Award, and 'Home' was shortlisted for the Hutch Crossword Book Award in 2006. She has also tried her writing skills with the other genres of writing like Short Stories: "Necklace in the Harper Collins Book of New Indian Fiction", 'Contemporary Writing in English', ed. Khushwant Singh, Essays and Press Articles: 'The Birth of a baby in Birth and BirthGiving', 'The Power Behind Shame' ed. Janet Chawla, and 'Speaking up for Inter-Community or Cross Marriages' in Outlook (New Delhi) 14 Jan.2007. She is an emerging star of the Indi-Anglican Fiction, and a very popular writer of the day. She is born on 25 October 1948 and married with Gun Nidhi Dalmia, a businessperson. She is down-to-earth, welcoming, considerate and the best of hosts. She has four children named Katyayani, Amba, Maya and Agatsaya. She was lecturer for fourteen years at Miranda House, Delhi University. She did her M.A in English from Halifax University, Canada, and M. Phil from Delhi University. She tried first with poetry then in drama but finding both cumbersome, she found her liking for in the novel and now she is a full time novelist. She desires for a secure and formidable place among the leading Indo-Anglican fiction writers.

The very first novel "Difficult Daughters" was published in 1998 and it won the commonwealth prize for the best first novel in Eurasian region. Virmati, the protagonist of the novel, is the eldest daughter of Kasturi who has given birth to eleven children. Kasturi is the very

embodiment of traditional wisdom and values. Her first priority, as far as girls are concerned is marriage at any stage of puberty. Virmati, inspired by her first cousin, Shakuntula who is educated and economically independent, looks upon her- Shakuntula as her model. By then she has fallen love with the English married professor and desires to pursue higher studies much against the will of her mother. Virmati turns a deaf ear to her mother's advice and she is bent upon pursuing her own course of action. One sees Virmati here as a woman of strong determination and of inflexible will. And in this process, she passes through vicissitudes of various descriptions and finally she becomes educated and economically independent and then marries the married professor and becomes his second wife. Thus, Virmati emerges as a modern woman.

In this context, one may quote Seema Malik who rightly observes:

“Thus we see the budding of a new woman in Virmati defying patriarchal notions that enforce a woman towards domesticity; she asserts her individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. She is not a silent rebel but is bold, outspoken, determined and action-oriented. She displays a marvelous strength of mind in overcoming her dejection.” (Seema 132-137)

In the second novel, *A Married woman* (2003), the protagonist of the novel, Astha, who having been married to an American returned MBA, leads initially a happy wedded-life with two children. When she feels that she has been neglected by her husband, Hemant who now spends all his time in the expansion of his business, leaving his wife and children to loneliness. The protagonist leaves home, works as a teacher and then gets involved in the political activities, only to discover her true identity. She realizes her objective and returns home as a modern woman and join her family.

It is apt to quote here Ishwar observation,

“She feels somewhat suffocated, exploited and unnoticed at home. It is Aijaz's trust which motivates her to think out of the house. He makes her think about the ongoing socio-political activities which become her future interest.” (Ishwar 2)

In the third novel, ‘Home’ (2006) the protagonist is Nisha, who challenges tradition and much against the will of her mother, she pursues her collegiate studies and then unlike any other protagonists of Manju Kapur, she chooses to run the cloth business which is traditionally run by men and he proves to be a very successful entrepreneur and finally she is married and becomes a mother of twins. Nisha finds thorough fulfillment in being wife and mother towards the close of the novel.

And Nina is the protagonist of ManjuKapur's fourth novel, ‘The immigrant’ (2008). Nina, after her marriage, goes to Canada to join her dentist- husband who has been there for the last seven years. He was born and brought up in India in a middle class family imbibing all the traditional values. It is only after he has settled down in Canada, fascinated by Canadian culture, he begins to imitate the culture of his adopted land. There has been a grave incompatibility in the married life of Nina and her doctor-husband; Ananda has been suffering from a serious drawback of premature ejaculation. And in many other respects, their view points and their attitudes to life run parallel to each other's. Finally, Nina leaves her home and her husband goes out into the open world with a supreme self-confidence to discover her self-identity.

In this context, she says,

“Life was what you made of it. You could look at a glass and call it half full or half empty. You could look out of the window and see the sky or

stare at the mud. How often had he heard his parents make these distinctions between types of people. Well, he knew what manner of person he was. And Nina was definitely his opposite. (Kapur 330)

In her fifth novel, *Custody* (2011), the protagonist, Shagun is radically different from any of Manju's previous protagonists. Shagun goes a step further than any other protagonist of Manju Kapur in fulfilling her personal desire towards her self-aggrandizement and to realize this, she leaves her husband and her two children behind and runs away with another man- her husband's boss, Ashok khanna. Her drastic action results in the disintegration of her husband, Raman's domestic family. It does not end with it. It culminates in Shagun's forfeiting her daughter, Roohi in the bitter legal battle when the court gives its verdict that the girl must be under the custody of her stepmother, Ishita.

Conclusion:

Her novels deal with educated urban middleclass protagonists who struggle to extricate themselves from the meshes of tradition and patriarchal hegemony, by setting their back against tradition and finally emerging as women with their own identity embracing modern views. She may justly be described as the chronicler of the lives, especially, of women of the educated urban middleclass families. She is a raconteur with a copious, creative imagination; the dialogues are so realistic, the situations are so natural that there is little scope for improbability. Authorial exegesis sometimes seems to be somewhat lengthy and it is, perhaps, because of the minutest details that cramp the movement of her narrative; the author need not dramatize the situation; the situation itself is dramatic; actually, ManjuKapur's purpose in her novels is quite obvious; her idea is to create modern woman who by grappling with the snaggle of restrictions that impede her efforts from going forward; her protagonists deeply wish to get rid of the age-old burden of tradition and despite all the hurdles in their way, they finally liberate themselves from those shackles that prevent them from realizing their own selfhood that is being stifled at every step; in this process of transforming themselves, they become metamorphosed into modern ones;

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