

Woman and Marginality in the Novels of Manju Kapur

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Abstract

Marginality in context of woman prevails in the society from ages. No woman was and is supposed to be free to live, to think, to do anything at her own. Many woman novelists had focused on the same theme in their works. They had written about woman and the society that had been dominating her. Manju Kapur had given her views about woman and her condition in society. She is author of five novels Difficult Daughters, A Married Woman, Home, Immigrant, and Custody. Her woman protagonists stand against the male dominated society and try to be on their own. Manju Kapur emphasized on how a woman is marginalized and is never given any importance. Difficult Daughters deals with life of Virmati, a girl who wants to get educated and thus she goes against her family norms of not educating a girl child. She marries a married professor who never allows her to be successful in her life. He always wanted to marginalize her life. She rebels and shapes her life. A Married Woman deals with education and a girl named Aastha, wants to be educated rebels against her mother who is a victim of society and its rules. Home tells us about Nisha who faces all the odds and achieves her dream to be a successful businesswoman. Immigrant's protagonist is a highly educated woman, her husband never loved her and in need of love, her life is scattered. Custody is different in theme which deals with extra marital affair.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, Marginality, Woman Protagonists, Male Dominance, Identity Crisis.

Introduction

We celebrate woman's day at an international level but society never accepts that woman must be respected and treated equally. They must be respected and must be honored. They are discriminated on the basis of gender. No equality in health related needs is provided. Woman is seen only to be used and to be an object of entertainment. Educating a girl child is denied most of the time or less preferred. No male dominated society ever wanted to educate their wives, daughters. Immediately after their birth the gender bias shows up. Boys are provided better health care, all the facilities are given them, but no care is extended towards girls.

Literature reflects the condition of women in all over the country. Nowhere woman is supposed to be free. The great Indian scripture *Manusmriti* also focuses on the condition of woman that

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:9 September 2019

Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on *Paradigms of Marginality in Literature - Exploring the Nuances*

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“PitahRakshatiKaumare
PatiRakshatiYouvanne
PutroRakshatiVardhaky
Na streeswatantramarhati.” [1]

Manu told that no woman must be at her own, she must be protected by her father in her adolescence, husband to protect her after her marriage, son must look after her in her old age, thus as she is a meek and fragile one she should never be at her own, no freedom is accepted to her by the society. The lines illustrate how women lost their identity and are never permitted to break the chains of customs.

The women novelists like Manju Kapur have focused on the matter of freedom in regards of a woman. Today we are able to see women soaring high in every strata of life but still there is a threat to her chastity. Manju Kapur through her woman protagonists try to show how she abandons the margins set for her by the society.

Dr. John (2012) *A Critical view on Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters* is a critical study of the novel *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur. It is a story of two daughters, Virmati and Ida. Through the story Kapur criticizes on mentality of society. A society accepts man’s guilt and also forgives him, but it does not happen with woman. Manju Kapur wants to tell how Virmati and Ida both become difficult daughters without any mistake to their parents. Harish and Virmati both fall in love, but the punishment bears only Virmati.’ [2]

The protagonist of *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati is a born rebel. She never accepted family to be her first duty to perform. Familial bondages set by society that a woman must give priority to her family her children were of no significance for her. Kasturi, Viru’s mother always tried to make her realize that education is not meant for a girl. She should look after her younger siblings. Kasturi always is in pains as she had delivered eleven children. She is always in an unhealthy condition. Virmati being the eldest one was supposed to look after her younger siblings though she never was interested in such domestic duties.

As family is a dominant milieu, she was supposed to get married before her age. Virmati was in love with a married professor of her college, Harish who always supported her in her studies. He also loved her in return. Virmati opposes her family members to marry a boy of their choice and tries to attempt suicide. When asked about her attempt to suicide she tells that she wants to study and goes to Lahore. The professor follows her there too. She gets pregnant and aborts the illegal child. Harish never asks her about her abortion.

After her studies she marries Harish and becomes his second wife, as a second wife she can't get any rites of a married woman. Harish too ignores her. After she gets humiliated by her family she wants to go back to her mother's place but is humiliated and the people consider her dead as she had made the family name spoiled by marrying a married man. She gives birth to a baby girl. She tries to treat her in the same way her mother Kasturi wanted her to. Ida, her daughter doesn't like her mother and says, "I don't want to be like you."

Virmati the protagonist, who tries to get educated, loves a person but is unable to get love. She becomes a mother but her only child never loves and cares for her. Chhikara, (2010) in the article, 'Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters: A Saga of Feminist Autonomy and Separate Identity*' critically analyses feminism in Kapur's novels. The writer thinks that Manju Kapur presents the yearning for autonomy and separate identity in her women protagonists. In *Difficult Daughters* in the chain growth of the events, Virmati becomes the difficult daughter for her mother as well as Ida for her. [3]

Society prevails everywhere. No value is given to a woman who tries to pursue her dreams and tries to go against the social norms. A woman is always accepted if she remains in margins set for her by the society.

A Married Woman, the second novel, deals with the life of Aastha, who is married but is married without love. She wants to get educated though her mother never wants her to study. She wants to groom her in a way that is accepted by the patriarchal society.

Aastha was "brought up properly, as befits a woman with large supplements of fear." [AMW]

Aastha wants to be in love. Kapur captures Aastha's fantasy as a teenage girl about a "romantic somewhat shadowy man holding her in his manly embrace." [AMW] She loves a boy who seduces her and leaves her. Finally, after many attempts her parents find a suitable boy for her. She gets married with Hemant, a businessman who is engrossed in his business and is not able to pay attention to his wife. She joins a school as a teacher, and she meets a man who later on dies in Babari Masjid riots. Aastha eventually meets Pipalika and both get involved into a lesbian relationship. Aastha gets love and feels satisfied. She joins the CAR –SEVAKS. She becomes a social worker. Meanwhile her love with Pipeee gets her involved much that she needs no one to be with her. She as a housewife loses her attention and interest towards her family, her children and her husband. Aastha is an artist too. She as a teacher is a salaried person. But she is bound to her family ties. Her life is marginalized by her family duties. Pipeee at times would suggest her to leave her family and to be with her always. They will lead a happy life together but Aastha ignores

Pipee though she is her ticket to happiness and freedom. Aastha realizes and accepts the margins of her family. Sometimes women themselves are obstacles of their way to freedom.

Manju Kapur's novels explore the difficulties of reconciling the devotion to family expected of middle class Indian women with their aspirations and desires for a life outside. As she said "I am interested in the lives of women whether in the political arena or in domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupation in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both inner and outer spaces in their lives- what sacrifices do they make in order to keep the home burning – and at what cost to their personal lives, do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home.[AMW]

Aastha by returning to her family represents those women who want to be free but still need to be in ties of society.

Nisha, the protagonist of Home is abused as a child by her own cousin. Her childhood had seen the troubles of child abusing. In spite she stands, as her uncle and aunt help her and support her. She is a brilliant child, but education is denied to her. Her patriarchal family never allowed her to go and play outside with other children. She rebels and gets educated. While she is in college, a boy named Ramesh enters her life. She gets physically and emotionally involved in him. Her family denies marrying Ramesh as he belonged to a lower caste family. She is unable to get the person whom she loved. Afterwards she develops a skin infection, her skin looks as if it is burnt. Her parents could not find a perfect match for her to marry. She decides to start a business at home. Her mother refuses to start a business as no family would be ready to marry a girl who had her own business. Her father allow her only if she will be able to return the money lent by him twice the amount. Nisha starts the business and becomes successful. Her marriage is arranged with a widower, twice her age as Nisha is a Mangli. She gives birth to twins and this is supposed to be a perfect end of a woman's life. She cannot pursue her dream to be successful and free. It is thought to be better for a woman to be in bondages led on her by society. N.S Warake says,

Though Manju Kapur has portrayed the character of Nisha as an educated, confident, self-assured, bold and independent, high spirited new woman, paying honor to Indian tradition, like Ezekiel believes 'Home is where we have to gather grace.' [4]

She accepts to live by the margins set by the society. Even if a woman rises against her oddities, society never allows her to soar high.

Immigrant tells us about another highly educated girl Nina, she had no father; all she was able to look upon was her mother who looked after her needs made her grow to a position as a professor of English. The novel is about two women Nina and her mother, after the death of Nina's

father her mother was left alone. Nina's grandparents never supported the two ladies. After completion of Nina's education both the ladies shift to Delhi. There too her mother never spent a carefree life.

Seven years and six months to find this room in Jangpura Extension and bring her mother to live with her. In Delhi Nina hoped her mother would lead a fuller life; in Delhi her mother imagined a husband could be found who would give her darling the home she deserved.' (IMMI).

She was always worried for Nina's marriage. They find a boy named Ananda who was a dentist at Canada. After her marriage Nina understands that her husband is not able to satisfy her womanly need. Kapur says:

"Distance grew between them. Nina felt imprisoned by the stress and assured him there were other things besides sex in marriage. Relationship had to develop, feelings had to be shared, and surely, he understood that? Everything she said made it worse" [IMMI]

She is destroyed as Anand never takes interest in spending time with Nina. She meets a man called Anton who loves Nina's body more than her. She breaks up with both the men as they give no priority to her and seduce her only for their satisfaction. Society functions in the same way always. It never allows a woman to be free and to be happy.

Custody is a touching story of separation of children from their parents. Shagun is a beautiful lady with ambitions. Her husband Raman loves her unconditionally, still is of a patriarchal mindset. He never allows Shagun to pursue her dreams. As Shagun says in her criticism of the older world- "It was part of the Indian disease. Ashok was always going on about stultifying tradition. The great Indian family, which rested on the sacrifices of its women." [C]

She always wanted to be a successful model. Needed to find her own identity along with being a good wife and a good mother. Raman's boss Ashok enters in Shagun's life. He starts flirting with Shagun and she is attracted towards him easily. As all the men think that woman is a doll in their hands Ashok plays with the emotions of Shagun. Ashok, who is smart enough to manipulate people and get the best out of them, - "Ashok's reputation was based on his ability to get the best out of people." [C] Eventually she divorces Raman and leaves her house without caring for her two children. Jaidev explains in the article *Problematizing Feminism* –

"Indeed, any sophisticated system today operates not by a direct and visible exploitation of people but by making them retain an illusion of freedom and free

choice, by making them willingly give into its imperatives, and by subtly ensuring that they do not see that they are dupes or victims.[5]

Suddenly Raman is introduced to Ishita, a divorcee, and come close to each other. The two little children are shown suffering through the novel as their parents are always against each other. Shagun though is never fulfilled her dream, Ishita is shown searching for love. They never are satisfied and follow the quest for freedom and love throughout their life.

Conclusion

Thus, the women are marginalized throughout their lives. Sometime traditions play avitalpart in setting limits for them. Sometimes woman feel marginalized as family plays an important role in their lives and leave their dreams unfulfilled.

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