

Feminism in the Novels of Manju Kapur

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Abstract: *Feminism is a broad socio political movement specially advocating women's welfare in society. Deriving upon this philosophy many women writers, thinkers and critics have formulated a school of thought that searches for such instances in literature. The main task of the feminist literary critics seems to stand guard against the curbing patriarchal norms which have been inherited perpetually. The marginalizations of women, their predicament, struggle for identity, finding their own space, celebrating the female body are the chief subjects of this trend. The protagonists of all the novels of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all odds. Manju Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels.*

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Feminism is a broad socio political movement specifically advocating women's welfare in society. Deriving upon this philosophy many women writers, thinkers and critics have formulated a school of thought that searches for such instances in literature. Though Feminist literary criticism is the direct product of women's movement of 1960's, its earlier instances in the eighteenth century were found in some writers. The most prominent names among such pioneers are Simon de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf. In modern context can be seen a host of feminist thinkers across the world such as Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Kate Millet, Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The main task of feminist literary critics seems to stand guard against the curbing patriarchal norms which have been inherited perpetually. Thus marginalizations of women, their predicament, struggle for identity, finding their own space, celebrating the female body are the chief subjects of this trend. The feminists also have adopted and adapted the intellectual insights from various schools of thought such as Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Psychoanalysis and Marxism. Owing to this fact we also find experimentation in their works. Julia Kristeva coined the term 'Intertextuality' and Showalter proposed the terms such as 'gynocriticism' and 'gynotexts'.

All the female characters of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all odds. The strains of feminism are obvious in her writing. This is overtly seen in the struggle of her woman characters, their vulnerability, struggle for identity, liberating attitude, the female psyche and the female biological world. The protagonist of her first novel *Difficult Daughters* feels betrayed by the strong bars of traditional patriarchal norms. Sona in *Home* is like a caged bird. Astha, within her heart has to feel the pangs of alienation. Nisha has to acquiesce her will under the pressure of family and Nina faces loneliness, hollowness, sexual dissatisfaction. Virmati has been brought up in a family where the woman has no identity of her own, no right to higher education. She wants to study and have career but is restricted by social conventions of the time and place. She rebels and insists on her right to higher education. Dipika Sahai (2004:09) in this connection opines: "As a rebel she is conscious of her emotional needs. Herself assertion goes to the extent of having illicit love with the married Professor whom she subsequently marries. The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of rejection by her family on becoming the second wife of the professor, and the resultant alienation from society forms the theme of the novel. Her life is a continuous struggle. She wants to establish an order through defiance. She rebels against the accepted and existing moral codes and social norms." But Virmati asserts, feels liberated and makes no compromise in materializing her path and resolving

the conflict. In connection with the theme of women's vulnerability in Manju Kapur's novels, Arpita Ghosh (2013:126) remarks: "Virmati fell prey to professor Harish's desire. Slowly but surely such desire swallowed up Virmati; she transgressed the laws of the threshold and got involved in an illicit affair with Harish both physically and mentally. He forcefully enters cottage and makes love without Virmati's prior consent to the act. In spite of Virmati's protest Harish beastly pounces on her and quenches his thirst for lust. Thus another violence committed in liaison, Virmati was doomed forever."

Astha in *A Married Woman* shows the forte of a liberating soul. She constantly struggles for recognition and a social cause. Her married life offers her sumptuous smoothening through conjugal bliss but slowly she feels the pangs of alienation and dissatisfaction. She is brought up in a traditional homely environment of a typical middle class family. Her husband is busy with the business and Astha feels loneliness at home. She joins the profession of teaching. Hemant has little time to share Astha's feelings and her daily routine matters. Astha develops affair with a woman Pipeelika which offers her much comfort. She is trapped in an inescapable situation. Astha tries to bring everything she experienced on the canvas of painting. She is a good artist.

Nisha in *Home* undergoes sexual assault as a child at the hands of her teenaged cousin Vicky. After the incidence Nisha is sent to her aunt Rupa Masi where she blossoms as good student. By horoscope Nisha is declared as mangli. This again is a torture by fate. Nisha is also forced to observe her first 'karva chouth fast for her future husband even as a ten year child. A good example of the misuse of religion to downscale women is Sona's narration of Vat Savitri Katha to Nisha and the other women in the family. Arthi S studies in this context "It highlights how the ideals of womanhood purveyed over and again, in the numerous myths and legends that form the Hindu collective unconscious insidiously enter, capture and mould the minds of women in this country leaving them cocooned in ignorance and complacent in their secondary status" Nisha falls in love with Suresh but her dreams are smothered under the pressure of family. Nisha's affair with Suresh tarnishes her image. She also loses one offer of marriage on this ground. Another trouble for her is her skin disease eczema. Having all these troubles at back, Nisha moves ahead with studies of her choice. Towards the end of the novel Nisha excels in establishing herself as a designer. However, she is married to a thirty six year old widower who can hardly respond to her passions. It is in marriage and childbearing that she is forced to find ultimate happiness and fulfillment as the society refuses to give her achievement in profession, recognition and identity.

Unfolding the psyche, libidos and desires of her women characters she presents how they struggle to break the age old strictures of tradition with moral courage to combat life in their predicament. *The Immigrant* narrates the predicament of an Indian woman in a foreign land. The feminist writing focuses on the female body and physiology. In the similar vein is depicted unmarried status of Nina by reference to her ovaries and 'the unfertilized eggs expelled every month'. Nina's mother looks forward for Nina's marriage. She is married to Ananda the dentist working in Canada. After marriage Nina has fine experience of living as an immigrant. Ananda tries to provide her all comforts. But gradually it becomes clear that Ananda cannot offer her healthy sex. Ananda remains engaged in his clinic. Nina has to feel loneliness and anxiety. She joins a part time job and enrolls as Library student. At the library she develops an extra marital affair with Anton. Nina finally finds herself frustrated and repents in depression. At the sudden death of mother in India she wails in agony and visits India. But at the end of the novel she makes herself ready for a new start.

Thus the sufferings of a woman at deeper level have been dealt with.

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