



WOMEN AS OVERCOMERS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

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ABSTRACT

India, culture and traditions play a major role in shaping the society. The patriarchal society has set certain standard rules for women for ages. There are multiple relationships a woman has to maintain and mould herself in those roles like daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother etc., in a perfect way. This process involves oppression, subjugation, and struggle, inner conflicts results in relationship breakdowns and repair, and expectations of society. The complex structures of society and different cultural perspectives degrade the position of women. Manju Kapur, a post-colonial writer looks into the lives of middle-class women and writes about their position in society. The woman in her novels faces problems of loss of identity, struggle for freedom, self-consciousness, and the impact of modernity and emerging as Overcomers. Her work comprises six novels Difficult Daughters (1998), A Married Woman (2002), Home (2006), The Immigrant (2009), Custody (2011) and Brothers (2016). This paper mainly focuses on her first three novels women characters as overcomers.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy, Society, Struggle, Consciousness, Identity, Overcomers

Introduction

Feminism has its roots in the West; still, it retains its international flavour, meaning and relevance all over the world. Now the English language has become universal, and the idea of feminism reach is vast and it became easy for female writers to express their longings for feminism and their experiences with female oppression. The rise of women novelists in an exponential way has greatly influenced men's attitudes towards addressing women and topics on women as being the main domain of women writers. People acknowledge the novelists as there is a change in the sensibilities of both the writer and the reader. The entire study on women's condition relates to recent changes in women writers in Indian society. Manju Kapur deals with women's issues in joint families and introduces new types of individual questions in the patriarchal society. In her novels, she showcases the interference of Indian culture, and suffering and struggle for identity have become part and parcel of the lives of female characters. The idea of feminism even though it came from Western countries and in India it prevails much before. In ancient India position of women is on par with their male



counterparts. They occupy a pivotal position in the society during Vedic times. Gradually we notice the downfall in the position of women because of invasions and it results in the protection of modesty and welfare of women. Indian women were slowly made to accept the secondary position and became the weaker sex in society. The gender discrimination creeps slowly and society decides the duties of female and male. Industrialization and education bring a lot of changes in the position of women. The Western notion starts influencing the Indian culture and education plays a major role in awakening women. The socio-political development leads to overcoming the tyranny of a male-dominated society. Feminism starts questioning the role of women in the everyday life of people. It starts examining the laws, rules, social standards, customs, conventions, traditions and gender roles in society. India is likely to be recognized for the way it addresses cultural identity. The main concept of postcolonial women's writings is the interplay between gender identity and national identity. Women aspire to carve out a place for themselves in strange environments. Space and geography play a significant part in postcolonial literature's depiction of women's social roles. The goal of this essay is to examine the three female protagonists from Manju Kapur's novels from the perspective of female psychology. Different facets of women's characters lead to the development of self-identity and feminist perspectives. Their lives become increasingly gloomy and uncertain. To assert their identity and find self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment in their life, they stomp and resist patriarchal norms. Postcolonial India is a multicultural country. In a country like India, caste, religion, and class all play different roles in how culture is expressed. Every aspect of literature, including theme, characterization, language, and so forth, is impacted by postcolonial literature. It can be recognized by the way it addresses cultural identity. The main concept of postcolonial women's writings is the interplay between gender identity and national identity.

Manju Kapur is frequently referred to be the country's, Jane Austen. Her novels cover everything relevant to the contemporary family and patriarchal culture. Her books paint a realistic portrait of a modern lady who is yearning to leave her home and create her world. Her books feature a brand-new lady who seeks to define herself. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a large number of female writers with topics relating to women coping with family



issues, domestic violence, health care, education, work, and working conditions began to emerge. Manju Kapur is one of the modern novels that gives her protagonists an edge over the others when dealing with burning problems of the day including lesbianism, adultery, infertility, divorce, and adoption. A novelist of international renown, Kapur is a well-known literary figure in the Indian English literature scene. She shares an equal place with other female authors on the international platform thanks to her six critically praised works. As a contemporary author, Kapur is well aware of how contemporary women are emotionally and intellectually strong and mature enough to deal with issues in comparison with previous generation women. Her books provide a historical account of middle-class Indian society. They accurately portray all the emotions and situations that occur gradually in a middle-class family, including sexual abuse, the politics surrounding arranged marriages, adultery, infertility, adoption, sexual dysfunction, and numerous other domestic concerns. Her main characters are contemporary women who are unwilling to adhere to the outdated conventions and social norms of a patriarchal society. According to W.B Yeats, Poem The Second Coming speaks, "Things are falling apart and the centre cannot hold," it suits women's current situation condition in India The suppression of emerging personalities of women is not possible any longer. Hopefully, both men and women will come to understand that both are equally important in reproduction and enjoying nature's bounty is the same for both genders. Both genders should allow letting go of their ego conflicts. Then, society will be more peaceful, and life will have more purpose. To view feminism as a retrograde movement is a blunder that outlaws a movement hostile to men and a patriarchal society.

So Manju Kapur created her protagonists as strong individuals listening to their inner voice without troubling the patriarchal conventions. All of the main female characters, including Virmati in Difficult Daughters, Astha in A Married Woman, Nisha in Home and Nina in The Immigrants, are on the edge of isolating themselves from male company. The women in Kapur's stories are on an inner quest to find an identity in a society that is predominately masculine. Constant urbanization and Western influences, help them to react positively but the idea is still obscure since social and moral standards are like bondage to them. Although "Difficult Daughters" is largely autobiographical, Kapur states that while the major characters



are based on real people, the circumstances and events have been set up. Every piece of fiction contains some truth from real life, and every piece of truth contains some fiction. Both the novel's opening and concluding lines skillfully recreate a complex relationship of mother-and-daughter connection that the remainder of "Difficult Daughters" revolves around. Ida's mother being a rebel regrets any form of confinement within the graveyard as the book has become for her; the spirit of Virmati continues to haunt us even after the completion of the novel. Kapur has her sparse style. India, as a country, and Ida the daughter of Viramati born at the same time. The novel's main topic is relationships among the family members, she stresses the frequently tumultuous relationships between mothers and daughters, which is continually evoked in the book's opening, austere and controlled language: "The one thing I had desired was not to be like my mother. Now when she was gone, while my family gathered around the pyre and mourned, I stared at the fire that rose from her shrivelled body while being half dead myself and dry-eyed, leaden, and leaden" (I). Kasturi is the mother of eleven kids. She has children one after another, and since Virmati is the family's eldest daughter, all the domestic work of the house and looking after younger siblings have fallen on her shoulders. She struggles with her studies and fails in exams as a result of her hectic schedule. Viramati visits her neighbour Professor Harish's house to get help in her studies and it leads to attraction towards the professor even though he is already married.

The professor and Virmati grow to be close friends. Virmati's parents decide her marriage with Inderjeet, an engineer but the ceremony is put off for two years due to a tragic loss in his family. Manju Kapur attempts to examine the relationship between Virmati and the professor from a completely fresh angle in her debut book, "Difficult Daughters." Virmati in a strict orthodox community where there are too many restrictions on childhood and females have no right access to education or choose their bridegrooms. Viramati chooses the professor even though he was already married, Virmati studies in Lahore against her parent's wishes from the very beginning she goes according to her wishes, demonstrating far too much bravery and daring. Her thoughts and deeds are the results of her education, strong with her viewpoints and with an independent attitude. She is aware of the benefits and drawbacks of such illegitimate connections. She speaks outspokenly to the lecturer. Viramati is brave to



confront Professor Harish in the room behind him and urged, "I want to know where I stand before anything else." She lifted the curtain too low in her haste, preventing the door from closing as a result. The professor finished in a flash. He held her against the wall with his arms around her. He was being pushed away by her. This is not a response," she remarks fiercely. Ida, a divorced, childless, educated woman, appears to live a more liberated life than her mother. But she shares the same deep emotions as her mother. In her statement, Ida claims, "No matter how I might rationalize otherwise, I feel my existence as a single woman reverberate desolately"(3). Ida talks about her mother's desire to reject social conventions. This can also be interpreted as a feminine overcomer and gives importance to personal autonomy and the act of the mother and daughter defies social norms imposed by the male-dominated culture. Ida, Virmati's daughter, and others speak out against male chauvinism. It takes determination and a strong resolve to stand up for oneself.

Manju Kapur portrays the complexity and depth of rapidly evolving human connections in her book "A Married Woman". She presents two or three significant relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, and women. Astha continues to juggle fulfilling her roles with the tension between her responsibilities as a wife, mother, and lover, and she is torn between her need for individuality and her commitment to her family. She is content with married life in the beginning and it became monotonous afterwards unable to overcome her desire for freedom and the duty she owes to her family. Astha experiences irritation, suffocation, and disgust as a result of her fixed identity and status as a wife, which leads her to reject her husband's constant demands at home and control over her body. Manju Kapur is the first outspoken Indian feminist to raise the issue of lesbian love as a crucial one to tackle when promoting women's rights. To speak on issues like extramarital is a taboo and in the nineties, speaking and writing about lesbianism in novels is like an explosion in the literature world. this type of controversy creates an uproar over Kapur's writing on sexuality through her meetings with lesbians. She stated: "This relationship suggests itself to me as an intriguing means of making Astha evolve and transformation into an Overcomer," in an interview with Ira Pandey. She wants to experiment with same-sex relationships instead of having an affair with a man and to see how effectively it works.



Astha is the sole child of her parents. Her parents express the burden of her being a girl child and the responsibility of her marriage, education, and character is there on their shoulders. She is an ordinary girl to live a life of fairy tale type romantic life. Her parents arrange an arranged marriage for her where she enters into wedlock with Hemant, into the household of bureaucrats. Astha for some time enjoys the bliss of marriage and fulfils all the roles in a successful way soon she feels unhappy and tired of her duties as a wife. She expresses her agony and despite her husband and in-laws' objection, moves out to teach at a public school. She gets a chance to meet Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the creator of "The Street Theatre Group," who is an intelligent artist and leads a communalism workshop although the student is still studying in the school. Aijaz even teaches history in school and he works as a social worker and performs dramas to generate awareness among people on social issues during holidays in classrooms, slums, streets, factories, small towns, and villages.

Aijaz Khan nurtures Astha's ambition to write poetry and other types of art, her husband Hemant never paid interest in her works nor appreciates her art. Astha's search for happiness and pleasure from her husband and Hemant loses it because of his attitude and her expectations of him also decrease. She feels isolated from her husband and reaches a point his presence doesn't matter to her and she chills. As he destroys her enthusiasm and she takes her own decisions without waiting for approval from family members. Hemant has no value and no place in her life. His situation is worse than a rubber stamp because if she decides to leave, regardless of his support. She does things according to her without much thought of her husband, kids, or mother-in-law. Astha finally realizes the vacuum in her life and the sacrifices she made as an individual and the loss of her identity after meeting Aijaz. Aijaz Khan succumbs to a brawl in communal riots. her life when she meets Aijaz. During a communal riot, her friend Aijaz Khan dies. After his death, she meets his widow wife Pipeelika who becomes again the source of delight to her. In the company of Pipeelika, she also realizes the national issues and participates in Ram Mandir and Babri Masjid issues. The conflict between her roles of wife, mother, and lover continues and she finds herself torn between her desire for freedom and duty towards her family.



To fill the emptiness in her life Astha needs Pipeelika's relationship and this physical attachment gives her immense strength to carry the freedom on her shoulders of being independent. Pipeelika has to overcome the grief of Aijaj Khan's absence and needs solace needs and enters into a lesbian relationship which leads Pipeelika into forgetfulness. Astha thinks of it as a liberation of the clutched soul and a type of revenge towards her husband; she feels and enjoys the freedom and overcomes the patriarchal norms and works towards her dreams to make her a new woman. Astha feels the towering personality of Pipeelika and tries to come out of the relationship. Peepilika wants to pursue higher studies in the United States and leaves to fulfil her dreams. Astha breaks the bond with Peepilika and becomes a confident entrepreneur, financially stable, making Hemant realize her worth. She decides to run an art gallery and gets support from Hemant and in-laws and emerges as an Overcomer.

Home (2006) is Manju Kapur's third book. This novel portrays the existing conditions in India after the partition and presents the three generations in a lively way. It is a story of a typical Delhi middle-class family's lives daily. Banwarilala, a cloth businessman stays in the renowned Karol Bagh sector of New Delhi. He serves as the head of the family. He gives much value to Indian culture and tradition. He considers patriarchal norms are the backbone of a family that strictly men are head of the family and bread earners and women are homemakers and follow the commands of the men folk in the house. Women should support in fulfilling the goals of males. The protagonist Nisha is a rebel in her family as she goes against the wishes of her mother and family in fulfilling her self-assertiveness. Nisha lives in a joint family, where she comes across child abuse at the hands of her cousin Vicky. As a kid, she suffers at the hands of her cousin, and she fears disclosing it to anyone in the family. She prefers to stay aloof and silently bore the burnt, which went unnoticed in the house. As Nisha's mother Sona engages in the housework, she sends Nisha to her aunt Rupa's home as Rupa's couple is childless, they welcome Nisha. Rupa being an independent woman, a business person who sells pickles and with liberated views helps Nisha to overcome the trauma of child abuse and allows her to grow independently with complete freedom. Nisha's mother's perception is quite opposite to her sister Rupa's and thinks her daughter should learn all household chores to become a good housewife. Sona wants to restrict her daughter to



serve meals to everyone in the house, this idea of her mother horrifies Nisha and she rebels against the actions of her mother. Sona accuses the upbringing of her sister Rupa as she spoiled her daughter to the maximum extent because of her independent thoughts.

According to Manju Kapur, women can break the older convention and she carries the struggle of women in her work to new horizons. Women make up half of the population of the world still they are oppression continues and the saga continues. There is a denial of equal rights in comparison to men. The question of self-identity takes birth in these circumstances as she survives solely for other people. Nisha faces the side effects of child abuse and it weakens her determination and suffers from mental trauma and is under captivity. Manju Kapur Home is speak about how competent women are there. Nisha's story is different as she overcomes all the difficulties with her dedication towards her dream and moves on with confidence. This book is notably different in many ways from her other works.

Manju Kapur showcases the difficulties a woman can face when she is ambitious concerning her career and society plays a major role in creating problems in these novel Nisha despite many objections from entire family members she was able to convince her male family members to agree with her decision. She dedicates herself to establishing the bridal collections and made a name in the competitive market for her label too. Nisha's bridal collection unveils her managerial skills, aware of her capability and self-assurance and clarity on her future. She has become the sole owner and solves every difficulty, even though her sister-in-law Pooja and her mother help her to run her shop, and she is the decision maker in designing and didn't let them influence her. Despite many difficulties to run the business she did not break down instead, she overcome all these problems with her perseverance. She does not care for her behaviour damaging the image of her family and becoming a towering personality in her business. According to the first feminist Simone de Beauvoir, are "economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society"(5) two important factors that affect women's freedom. Nisha decides to enter into wedlock as she gets a marriage proposal from Arvind, a widower. She demands Arvind for self-identity, autonomy and self-assurance, she will run her business after marriage also, economic independence and equality at home and want her personal space. She wants a registered marriage and Arvind



accepts all her demands and she marries him. She runs the business and she becomes pregnant, she decides to hand over the business to Pooja and puts conditions to run her business so that she will take over it whenever she wants it. She gives birth to twins and performs all roles of being a businesswoman, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. Nisha has become an overcomer as she can carve out a place and identity in society because her education and belief in self-made her a young independent overcomer.

In conclusion, Manju Kapur's novels speak volumes on the women's struggles, and their realization of the need for identity and give importance to their feelings and fulfilling their dreams and introspection of women in the process of emerging as overcomers. Her protagonists Virmati, Astha, and Nisha, all engage in what they believe and their goals. These characters' determination and passion to become self-sufficient, economic independence, own space and Self-identity become the most important aspect of their lives. Their demand for identities in this patriarchal society for the fulfilment of their dreams and hope for individuality they stomp and oppose and become overcomers.

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