

Chapter – 6

Conclusion

The detailed study of the aforementioned four novels of Manju Kapur: *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, and *Custody* provides a deep insight into Kapur's treatment of feminism. Kapur is the one such Indian author who has added a new dimension to the concept of feminism in its various aspects. Her novels are the reflections of the image of a woman who is aware of her feminine rights and responsibilities. At the same time, Kapur's protagonist is brave enough to raise her voice against the wrong done to her at every step of life. The woman in Kapur's novels is full of dynamism, and her dynamic spirit does not allow her to bear the injustice and inequality brought to her by the orthodox mindset of the traditional Indian society. She knows the inherent value of being a woman. At the same time she wants to prove her capability inside and outside her family and society. Kapur's heroine does not want to live her life only as a subordinate figure like that of a typical Indian woman in the traditional joint family that loses her originality and existence in fulfilling her obligations expected from her paternal and her in-law's family. She is not willing to accept the traditional role of an Indian woman as the only possible goal in her life. She is not ready to accept the fact that Indian women are supposed to be only the wife of her husband, and the mother of her children. These characters want to live an independent life, and see their life beyond the destiny of being a wife and a mother. Perhaps, Kapur wants to affirm that these young women, exposed to the modern way of life in the Indian metropolitan cities, want to prove that they are no way less than an Indian male.

The age old patriarchal structure of the society has moulded the Indian woman's psychology in such a way that from her early childhood, she starts believing that she is born only to serve, to obey, to be submissive, to be a subordinate to a man in all respects, and to fulfil the

needs of familial responsibilites in the form of wife, daughter-in-law and motherhood etc. But, the protagonists of Manju Kapur, are ready to go to any extent to preserve their originality to fulfil the deep-seated desire and feelings of being a woman. They don't want to get lost in the world around without making a clear identity for themselves. Inspired by their intrinsic dynamism, these female characters embrace the desire to struggle within and even outside their family. At the same time, they don't deny the existence of reality in their life. This acceptance of reality of being a woman adds grace and elegance to their feminine charm.

As mentioned in the introduction of the study, Manju Kapur has written six novels till date. However, this study takes into account the following four novels of Manju Kapur: *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home* and *Custody*.

The present research does not include the other novels of Manju Kapoor as they focus on the subjects like alienation, immigration and the family feud among the various characters. Since the focus area of this research is Indian feminism, dynamism and realism which has not been emphasized in other novels of Kapur.

Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* establishes the character of Viramati as a dutiful daughter who takes the responsibility of her family on behalf of her mother Kasturi who is always occupied because of her continuous pregnancies. Virmati, being the eldest daughter in the family, is supposed to be the second mother of her ten siblings. This makes Virmati irritated, but still she fulfils her responsibilities with utmost sincerity. Despite these family occupations in her life, Virmati has a strong desire for attaining higher education which she desperately pursues after having a conversation with her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala belongs to the category of women who have denied marriage in their life as their single destiny. Shakuntala takes active part in the freedom struggle of India as the novel is set against the background of

Indian freedom movement and partition of the Indian subcontinent. Shakuntala becomes the ideal of Virmati because of her progressive thoughts. In the process of her struggle, Virmati rejects the idea of marriage brought forward by her family. But she passionately falls in love with Harish who is already a married person. This illicit relationship creates huge problems and uproots in her personal life. Despite all these distractions, Virmati stands firm and does not deviate from her desire to attain higher education. During her education in Lahore, she becomes the friend of Swarn Lata and gets an understanding of contemporary politics, freedom fight and the changing status of women in the contemporary society.

She breaks the social norms and develops physical relationship, and gets pregnant with Harish before her marriage. But Virmati does not blame Harish or any body else for her traumatic conditions, and gracefully accepts the sufferings, as a result of her feminine weakness, with a great degree of realism. Virmati poses the traits of dynamism in every aspect of her life. She gets the job of a principal in a school at Nahan and proves herself a very good administrator as well as a good teacher.

Realism is also an integral part of Virmati's character and it is obvious when she accepts the reality of being the second wife of Harish and never claims for superiority to his first wife Ganga. However, in the later phase of her academic life after marriage with Harish, Virmati embraces her education as a shelter to protect herself from the rude and insulting behaviour of Harish's family. This enables Virmati to protect herself from the obscurities of her life. Virmati accepts isolation from Harish's family and resentment of her own family with great endurance, but does not lose her deep spirit of understanding the things, and expresses her protest at every trivial thing maybe it is tea instead of milk on her first morning in Harish's house.

In a nutshell, it can be said that on the one hand, when Virmati accepts her abortion with grace, she shows the realistic aspect of her character, but when she protests for milk against tea in her first morning at Harish's house, she reveals dynamic traits of her personality. Though Virmati's circumstances are never easy yet she never allows them to dominate herself. She never loses her self-control and never gets frustrated like the protagonists of Bharti Mukherjee's Dimple in *Wife* and Shashi Deshpande's Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Virmati's life is really an eternal quest for love which makes her wander throughout her life.

In Kapur's *A Married Woman*, the characteristics of dynamism and realism are carried forward through Astha, the protagonist in the novel. Astha is the representative of the Indian middle-class woman who makes life long adjustment by dissolving her own individual identity in the familial and household responsibilities. Although men and women are considered to be equal in every field of life, yet, in real life we find that it is only the woman who is supposed to make endless sacrifices, especially in the Indian family structure. Being born and brought up in a male dominated family, Astha is supposed to cultivate her mindset to be an ideal wife, a sacrificing daughter-in-law and a devoted mother. Though, Astha has no objection in living the traditional life style of an Indian married woman, still she has a desire to carve her own identity, her own individual space in her house, and also in the world around her. Astha's dynamism, inherent in her character, instigates her to become a newspaper journalist but she is discouraged by her own mother as well as her husband in the name of her duty towards home and family. Astha is advised by them to take up the job of a school teacher in the nearby locality so that her responsibilities towards home and family must not suffer. However, she is not at all happy with this arrangement.

Later, in the course of her married life, Astha gives birth to her first child, a daughter Anu. However, after some time she is expected to give birth to a male heir of the family. Even the gender of Astha's second unborn child becomes the concentration point of each discussion for everyone around her. In this disparity of her life she decides to love both of her children equally whether the second child is a girl or a boy. After giving birth to her second child, Astha's life is fully occupied in responsibilities, leaving no individual space for her.

However, Astha feels herself trapped alone in fulfilling the responsibilities of her home, children, husband and job which are shared by none; still, she decides to develop her hidden talent of writing poetry and painting sketches which provides her a window for her suppressed inner feelings. She is a good painter but her abilities are not recognized by the members of her family. Later, to give vent to her suppressed feeling, Astha joins *Sampradayakta Mukti Manch* through Aijaz who is the leader of Street Theatre Group and comes to the school where Astha works as a teacher to perform *nukkad natak*. Astha was deeply influenced by the talent of Aijaz, and writes small script for his nukkad natak. After Aijaz is murdered in a communal riot with the other members of his group, Astha happened to see the suffering of the people of the family members of Street Theatre Group. To keep the memory of Aijaz alive, Astha decides to provide financial support, through her painting, to the families belonging to the members of the Group. Now, Astha regularly takes part in the processions, goes to Ayodhya, and delivers fiery speeches on the issues of the communal riots highlighting and sensitizing about the suffering of the women that they have to undergo after each riot. All these are the reflections of her dynamic feminine personality.

Failing in finding physical and mental satisfaction inside the house, Astha starts looking for it outside the house, and finds it in the form of self-confidence, self-respect and self-

recognition which she attains by interaction in social activities and fulfilment in her job. At the same time, Astha happens to develop lesbian relationship with Pipeelika, the widow of her close friend Aijaz to have the real experience of sexual freedom, equality and satisfaction. Astha goes through intense sexual relationship with Pipeelika, and for a while forgets everything around her. Through her relationship with Pipeelika, Astha goes through a process of metamorphosis. She finds something she had never experienced either from her husband or from her close friend Aijaz. The gap in her inner personality was filled by the intense sexual relationship with Pipeelika. There was fulfilment and satisfaction. She was no longer the same woman. She was a changed woman, and had become much more confident in her dealings. Astha is the real example of a modern Indian who is ready to struggle for her personal, financial, physical and emotional freedom, and at the end, she is able to attain what she desires.

Kapur accepts the fact that Astha's relationship with Pipeelika had made her so calm that she never gets frustrated or irritated with anything. However, when Pipeelika forces her to take divorce from her husband Hemant and to ignore her children, Astha firmly chooses her family and puts an end to her unnatural relationship with Pipeelika without making any fuss, and at the end starts living the life of a normal married woman.

Astha understands and accepts the reality of life, and takes her responsibility seriously. Whenever there is a need in the family Astha is always available for them, maybe it is the study problems of her daughter Anu or during the illness of her husband, Hemant. Though she comes back to her family but this new Astha is a changed one who has developed her own identity, her own career, and has earned respect in the eyes of her husband, her children and her surroundings. Through the character of Astha, Manju Kapur has exploded the myth of a traditional woman in the Indian society who is unaware of herself.

Kapur's *Home* is a novel that first shatters the illusion of home and then again establishes it as a reality. The novel *Home* comprises the story of three generations, and all the female characters of this novel have distinct features yet the centre of concentration is Nisha, who, in the beginning of the narrative, is on the margin, but it is her dynamic personality which, ultimately, brings her to the centre of her family. She is physically exploited in her early childhood and moves to her aunt's house and recovers her lost inner strength. But, after a long period of ten years, Nisha has to come back to her parents' home which again brings the feeling of alienation in her personality as the environment in her parents' house is entirely different from her aunt's house.

Nisha has been a bright student in her aunt Rupa's house but in her parents' house no body cares about her education rather everyone is surprised to see that she is a sixteen year old grown up girl, yet she does not know how to cut a ginger. Nisha is not allowed to marry a boy of her choice as he belongs to a lower caste family. She suffers from the skin disease *eczema* which erupts on the different parts of her body because of her suppressed feelings. At the time of her marriage she was rejected several times by the prospective grooms' family as Nisha is a *Mangli* by birth.

However, Nisha does not want to waste her life in waiting for marriage. In fact, she is irritated whenever she has to show herself for marriage in front of the strangers, and every time, strongly protests. She wants to join a fashion designing course to satisfy her creative urge, but even her own mother Sona does not support her. Meanwhile, her younger brother Raju gets married to Pooja, a girl from a rich family. After Raju's marriage with Pooja, Nisha has to adjust with her younger sister-in-law who does not like her. Pooja does not let Nisha play with her own

little daughter because of Nisha's skin problem. Even her mother, Sona, favours Pooja which again gives rise to a feeling of alienation and loneliness in the heart of Nisha.

But Nisha's dynamism does not let her sit silently. She is impatient to do something meaningful in her life rather than just to get frustrated or to get married. She starts her own business of stitching garments, and becomes a successful business woman which is the greatest expression of her dynamic spirit. Though she has to face difficulties in her life from her early childhood in the form of physical exploitation yet she continues to maintain her dynamic spirit, and proves to be an ideal one in every aspect, even for the other women of her family.

In the beginning, Nisha was the one who was on the margin of the family but now she is the centre of concentration. Lastly, she gets married with Arvind, a widower, only after getting a promise that she will be allowed to continue her work after marriage which again shows her dynamism. She never gets frustrated with the challenges in her life, and continues to move forward on the path of success with lots of will power. Nisha accepts reality at every step and adjusts even with the difficult situations. She does not allow Suresh, her one time boy friend, to have a physical relation which again shows her strong moral character and deep respect for the social and moral values. When her familial responsibilities demand her full-time devotion after the birth of her twins, she easily gets ready to take a break from her business but with the commitment to come back to her work which reveals her inner strength and indomitable spirit. Nisha's life story is a journey from illusion to self-disillusionment where she actually finds true satisfaction in her own home without any illusion.

Like the three aforementioned novels, Manju Kapur's fourth novel *Custody* is also noteworthy for its dynamic and realistic protagonists. Both protagonists of this novel Shagun and Ishita have a degree of dynamism, and they refuse to surrender themselves before the

circumstances. Through the characters of Shagun and Ishita, Manju Kapur has touched almost each aspect of feminism. In fact, in this novel she has dealt with so many shades of feminism that it is almost impossible to sum up all the shades in one character. That is why she has taken two female protagonists in this novel. Moreover, this novel can not be confined only to the feminism as it emerges to be a social document of changed moral values in the rapidly transforming Indian society.

Kapur's *Custody* deals with infidelity, infertility, love, corruption, suffocation, alienation and hollowness of modern Indian marriage and family. The characters of Shagun and Ishita serve as contrast to each other. While Shagun is dissatisfied in her married life with Raman despite having everything around herself, Ishita is a victim of narrow-mindedness of her husband and her in-laws. Shagun wants to compensate her marriage in her early age by developing a secret affair with Ashok but later she finds herself trapped in this relation. Shagun, who is extremely beautiful, wants to be a model but being married before the age of twenty-three, and having two children, feels herself trapped in her family responsibilities. But, when Shagun gets an opportunity to move forward in her life, she does not care for any social norm or restriction. She is impatient to divorce Raman and settle with Ashok in New York, so that she can enjoy her life full of enthusiasm and adventure.

Shagun is ready to leave the custody of her children in exchange of divorce from Raman as the responsibility of children, especially of the toddler Roohi, is a hindrance in the way of her expected freedom. She adopts every means to get divorce from Raman and lastly succeeds in achieving her goal. In New York, Shagun starts her own business. But by using her visitation rights she calls Roohi and Arjun, again and again to New York which affects children's psychology but she does not care for her children's future. The constant shifting of children from

one home to another disturbs the real growth in their life, but Shagun is indifferent, and is not bothered about all these.

Though once she wants to come back to Raman but she understands the reality of Ashok's nature and the depths of her own passion, and leaves the idea to go back to Raman. After having a big fight with Ashok over the visits of Roohi to New York and her custody she understands that Ashok's promise to keep her always happy was just an illusion.

Shagun understands the reality of her life and knows that she has to accept and cope up without making any complaint as she is solely responsible for all the problems in her life. Shagun realizes that things cannot be changed as Raman has also moved forward in his life by marrying Ishita. On the other hand, Ishita gets divorce from Suryakanta because of her infertility which is regarded as a curse in orthodox Indian families. Despite having all the qualities of a good wife and daughter-in-law, she faces insult and rejection in her family because of a natural problem for which she is not, at all, responsible. To love Roohi is a means for her to quench her thirst of motherhood. Ishita recovers from the agony of her divorce and joins *Jeevan*, an NGO which gives a positive way to her energy. She is invincible in her feminine spirit because of her sweet and innocent behaviour, and is successful in winning Raman's heart. She knows the value of privacy and when her mother searchs her cupboard to get confirmed about her relations with Raman, she objects and says that she is a matured person, and can take care of herself. After she gets married with Raman she takes active part in securing the custody of Roohi. Ishita's love for Roohi knows no limit, yet she understands the fact that she is not the biological mother of Roohi. This fact makes her restless, and, in return, she coaches Roohi hard to answer the questions to be asked by the judge in the trial room.

Ishita goes to the extent of manipulating Roohi against Shagun to win her custody in the trial room exactly in the manner Shagun had manipulated Roohi and Arjun against Raman to get divorce. It is a soul searching fact that both the female protagonists manipulate the children for their petty gains which finally make children a mute witness of circumstances. Ishita, at any cost, wants to safeguard the happiness of her house which she has established so painstakingly. In order to maintain harmony at home, Ishita has to adjust at every step in her life with the problems of Raman related to his first wife and also with Arjun who does not accept Ishita as his mother. She knows that manipulation is not right but she also knows that Shagun is the biological mother of Roohi and one day Roohi may go to Shagun. So, she plays with Roohi's child psychology for the sake of her own benefit. This reveals Ishita's dynamism as well as her realism. Kapur's novel is a saga of a family sham where nobody cares about the future of the children, and is bothered only about the sake of their immediate selfish gains, and keeps chasing the wild goose. In return, the family loses its honour, dignity and prestige.

Besides, this dynamism and realism in Kapur's protagonists, there is one more characteristic common in all these four novels of Manju Kapur. Each one of these novels is set against some social or historical backdrop. Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* is set against the historical backdrop of the partition of Indian sub-continent and the freedom movement of India. The struggle of Virmati against the age old Indian patriarchy also represents the struggle of a nation for its freedom from the yoke of the British rule. As the agony of partition leaves many bloody stains on the map of the nation forever, the freedom of Virmati also leaves some deep seated scars in her life. Being the second wife of Harish, facing the hatred of Ganga, and the resentment of her own daughter Ida, make Virmati's life unbearable. Virmati has to live a dissatisfied and alienated existence in Harish's house. She breaks all the barriers only to be

shackled again but still her struggle cannot be considered less dignified, as she raised her voice against the orthodox practices at a time when liberty of women was considered to be an alienated idea.

Kapur's second novel *A Married Woman* is set against the demolition of Babri Masjid and the Ram-Mandir dispute in Ayodhya. It was the time when the country was seething in the fire of communal riots in the whole of Indian peninsula. The murder of Aijaz and the other members of the Street Theatre Group is just a tiny glimpse of the communal riots which were taking place all over the country at that time. The demolition of Babri Masjid goes parallel with the shattering of lesbian relationship between Astha and Pipeelika. Astha tirelessly performs her social duties by making contribution to the welfare of the Street Theatre Group through the proceeds accrued after the sale of her paintings. Astha also contributes by delivering speeches, and attending *ekta yatra* to create awareness among the people. This aspect of Astha's personality reveals her dynamism and realism.

Kapur's third novel *Home* is set in an era when women had started stepping outside their home in search of their individual identity. Kapur's female characters had also moved outside their homes in search of green pastures taking bold steps in the field of business and entrepreneurship. These characters had started taking decisions of their lives themselves. Nisha openly exhibits her liking for Suresh, and protests against the age-old caste-system deep rooted in the structure of the Indian society. Later, in the novel, braving all the odds, Nisha establishes her own business, and proves to be a successful business woman.

The fourth novel *Custody* is set in a period when the policies of liberalization and globalization had started taking place in the field of Indian economy. It was the time when Indian society witnessed a boom in every aspect, but at the same time, the impact of this competitive

globaized environment hit the social and personal harmony avilalble in the family relations and in the fabric of the social structure. The increasing amount of materialism dominated the emotional bonding among the close family members. As a result, the family began loosing its grip and became devoid of emotion and respect for its members. The loss of family values can be clearly observed in the story of *Custody* through the family of Raman-Shagun and Ishita-Suryakanta.

With this description, at the end, it can be concluded that Manju Kapur is quite different in her feminism with respect to the character delineation of her female protagonists. Her protagonists possess a certain degree of dynamism as well as of realism. Kapur is an author who has portrayed a new image of an Indian woman who is not submissive in her demeanour. The chief purpose of this study has been carried out in the form of differences between the characters of Manju Kapur and other contemporary women authors. While the characters of other women authors bear sufferings till they get frustrated and lose their self-control, the protagonists of Manju Kapur express their protest at every single step taken against them by the society. Most of the female characters of Kapur do not accept anything against them silently, and raise their voice, which eventually lead them to live a meaningful and satisfactory life.