

**WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR : A STUDY**

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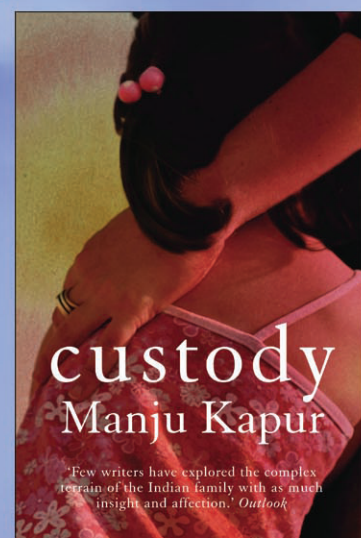
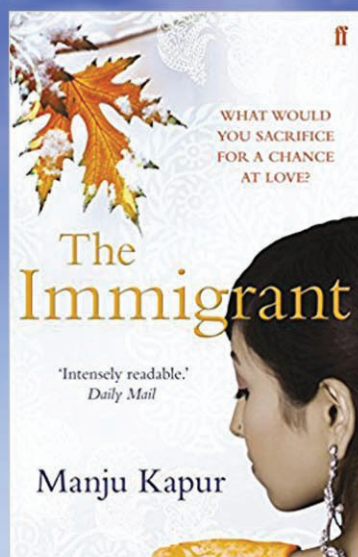
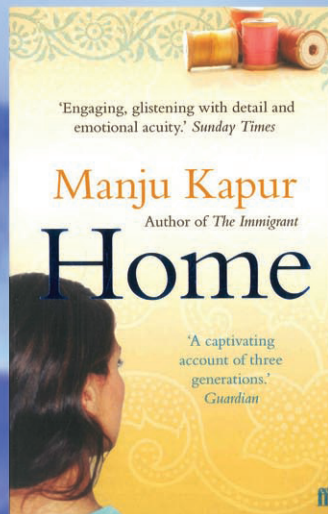
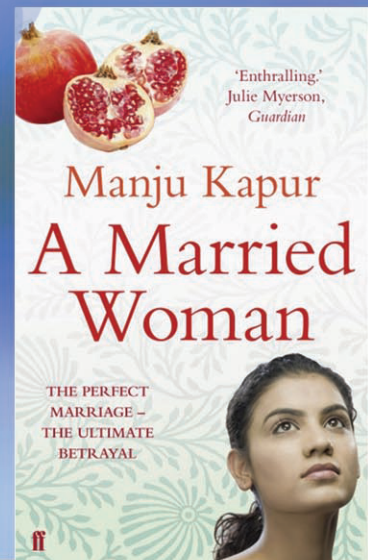
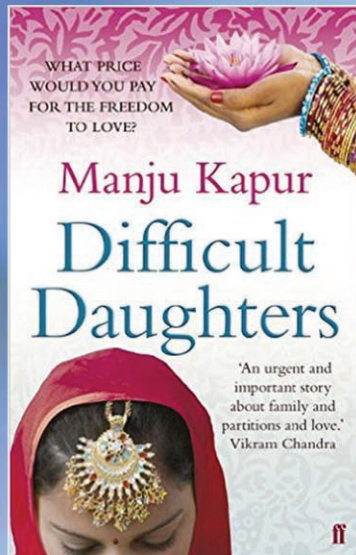
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# CHAPTER - VII

## CONCLUSION



## **CONCLUSION**

Human world is a mosaic of various hues. One must accept and appreciate each other's individualities. The dire need of the hour is to dissolve all separatist "isms". The "New Woman" cannot remain confined to her role as a housewife. They want to remain womanly and retain their feminist yet theirs is the search for dignity and for equality. They have jobs, they have money and power. They are educated women wishing to make their marriages work. One has the image of tolerant women but they fight against injustice. They may have their limitations but they try to tell the right from the wrong and strive for fullness of perception and being.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and they are no longer presented as a passive character.

Thus the images of Indian women presented by Indian novelists prove that, for India, feminism is a reality. It exists everywhere; though in a different form and level. Indian womanhood is on the crossroads. More and more women writers are becoming iconoclasts. They are not satisfied with just "Roti, Kapda and Makaan". They want something more. The need of the hour is to explore the feminine psyche. To understand the female folk, their innermost desires, thought process and their individuality must be considered in the right spirit. Indian men, if they want to create a just society (of humans, of course), must

weigh the importance of the fair sex. It should not be misunderstood that women should be given a higher place than men. The need is to remove the gender bias and to give them equal opportunities and equal rights to survive.

In the Indian context 'representational feminism' is the need of the hour to liberate women from their enclosed space so that they can redefine their secular identity and realize their claims and rights. The ultimate goal of such representational politics is in the preservation of human rights or else, in the long run, such representational feminism could be self-defeating.

Recently, the feminist ideology has crept into political debates in India. Even in politics, it has become a tool for mustering votes and not truly an agenda for equality or gender justice. Very often the questions of empowerment and reservation for women are raised. Even in the Parliament, every time a bill on women's empowerment is put forward, it flops. And this question has evoked a plethora of notoriety in the society. The problem is with the use of such conflicting words as "empowerment" and "reservation" that have connotation of vendetta. The word "empowerment" itself sounds 'feudalistic and schistic' and implies to "reverse sexism, that is, a kind of vengeful militant feminism. Reservation is also a 'controversial term ... a discriminative and segregate term that sectionalizes and disunites the society.

Feminism in India has been much in literature and academics than in social activism. Women who felt strongly about the patriarchal structuring of the society voiced themselves in ink and strove for women's identity and space. Women, who have had access to good education, have been financially secure and have had good exposure of the West and its ways of life, have been more vocal. Post feminism is the phase of transformation. Though many feminists may not yet be ready to accept the defeat of feminism, but it is a fact that feminism is now an ideology without any concrete agenda. It is now in a state of fix. Feminism has been important in enabling women claim their rights. And even in India, it has been quite successful in benefiting women with rights to vote, participate in politics, receive education, work, freedom and equality of opportunity agreeable to men. Today women are on equal footing with men in almost every sector of society. Be it the territory of scholasticism or literature, be it politics or power, be it police or army, be it corporate or management sector, be it administrative or executive field, be it judiciary or legislature, be it journalism or media, be it the municipal and rural governance, be it science or technology, woman's presence can be felt everywhere.

In the present age of cyber revolution, when women are as free as men—academically, economically, and professionally—feminism seems to have lost its purport. However, when it comes to secure women from crimes and nuisance, feminism is, of course, alive. But, even in that case, the administration needs to take the responsibility

of ensuring law and order in the society. The problems of crime and atrocity are not related to women alone, there are various other sections of the society that need respite from one or the other kind of repression, suppression or oppression. Now, therefore, the most pertinent issue is of redeeming every suffering human being by providing equality of rights "human rights".

Post feminism, would certainly find out certain constructive, consensual resolves for the various issues raised by feminism. It is hoped the ensuing century (and the millennium) is free from all those conflicts that have been too much stretched out only because of conceited egos and several other complexes. The 'post'- phase of feminism would hopefully fill up the gaps betwixt one human being and the other.

Every real artist depicts the picture of life through arts. Painters with their brushes, Musicians with their instruments, Carpenters with their tools and so the Novelists with their pens. Every writer is the product of the age in which he/she lives and writes and so, Manju Kapur is no way any exception in representing 'Modern Perspectives' of the modern Indian society. In the realm of Indian writing in English literature, she will be always remembered as the most famous of the modern Indian novelists. Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India, like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Shobha De on whom the image of the suffering but

stoic women eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact.

Kapur is a generous, far-seeing writer, who knows there are no answers, no conclusions to be drawn. Maybe that's what one most admires. She thinks and writes in vivid colours, but it's the grey areas—lives queasy compromises—that she furiously yet tenderly exposes.

Kapur is gifted with a fine faculty of artistic perception. The realistic presentation of life in all novels impresses one and all. She plays the role of a natural observer in her works. She does not take side instead she only highlights the drawbacks and the qualities of the existing society. Through her artistic creativity, she conveys the message that people should rise above the petty man-made barriers of caste, religion and culture and should imbibe the spirit of love and fraternity. She attempts to show her concerns at the growing tendency of unrest in our society caused by man's attempt to exploit man for selfish gains and motives. She, in fact, shows her keen interest in the relationship of individual and society and then searches the possibilities and mechanisms of change in the individual resulting in society at large. Her investigation and presentation of the human consciousness are directed towards an objective account of humans are assessing Indian confrontation with reality.

Kapur's presentation for the domestic life of India is wide and varied. It comprises all kinds of domestic chores and cares from the

insignificant to the prominent ones. The novelist presents how men and women fulfil their responsibilities, perform family duties, and enjoy home pleasure. One has ample evidences of Indian customs and tradition such as wives are shown helping their husbands while husbands do not co-operate their wife in domestic duties as per Indian tradition. Whatever the light or heavy work is found within the home is done by women and if they are permitted by their husbands, they go out of home for work. In order to do away with the historical injustice done to women, there is need to bring about a radical change in the society. This change is required in terms of one's mental awareness and inner awakening to one's rights and duties, along with human dignity and respect. "Empowerment", "Reservation", "Law", or any "ism" are no solutions. Human living in contemporary times has already become very complex with so much of laws, rules, sophistications and needless hair-splitting. The very simplicity and grace of man ('human being', to escape the wrath of feminists) is lost in the artifice. Therefore, the need is to simplify the things and not to over-complicate them. The need is to deconstruct all theories and isms, and think afresh in terms of "human being". The truth of nature is that 'men and women' together form the 'humanity'.

By all these novels Kapur's talent comes out as a feminist. Kapur highlighted the female protagonist as prayagya rupa (aware woman) as opposed to just matri-rupa and priya- rupa (mother and lover). Tradition is deep-rooted in India and in the traditional system. Indian



society is organised around gender division giving more space to male for dominance. Right from the marriage, the bride's incorporation into the family begins. She is guided and trained into the lifestyle of her husband's family. But despite her all efforts to devote herself sincerely to the wellbeing of the family she is considered an outsider. Her opinion or voice hardly gathers any moss in spite of her good education and intelligence. She often feels frustrated and alienated. But when the same bride becomes mother-in-law and has a dominating voice, especially over the daughters and daughters in law, she becomes not only an advocate but even the custodian of the same tradition.

The novels of Manju Kapur voice well the sentiments of women and their self-introspections. Virmati, Astha, Nisha Nina and Shagun all are searching for their grounds interestingly from a wrong threshold. All of them fall in love first, and the search for the self-identity becomes the second thought. Among all the female characters Nisha, (exception) Shakuntala and Rupa really win in the end and are contented to a great extent. The facts raised by Manju Kapur are worth research and inquiry and through (Nisha, Shakuntala and Rupa) the exemplary figures, she presents an ideal image of women who amid all thick and thins maintain their chastity and humanity and do not leave anyone destitute.

Kapur has clearly stated all possible reasons to marry through her protagonists. In *Difficult Daughters*, for Kasturi it is the responsibility,

for Virmati it is to love and attachment, and for Ida it is to carry the line. In *A Married Woman*, Astha's parents want to marry her because they consider it as their duty. In *Home*, Nisha is married with Arvind only to serve his family. In *The Immigrant*, Nina's mother wants to marry her daughter so that she can get security and stability. And in *Custody*, for Shagun and Raman it is the standard line of beauty and brain, for Ishita and Suryakanta to be happy, for Shagun and Ashok to follow the passion, lastly to Raman and Ishita it is the adjustment.

Kapur depicts both, 'the diversity of woman and the diversity within each woman', rather than limiting their lives to one ideal. She is seen in each of her novel as pro-woman and not basically anti-man. Her women characters are conscious-conscious of their rights and respect and even though they are rooted in traditional background, yet they always evolve and emerge as strong personalities at the end of the novel. They are shown to win their battles at the end-no matter how big or small the victory is for them. Her protagonists grow up intellectually and most important of all psychologically. The movement is always shown from imprisonment to liberation – on both mental and spiritual ground.

However, Manju Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. One can see the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's protagonists, who do not want to be rubber dolls for

others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. All the protagonists know that they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own.

Through the character Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* Kapur projects the view that when an Indian woman, in spite of her education, status and intelligence, tries to marry according to her own choice, is likely to spoil her prospects in both the worlds—the one that she revolts against and the other she embraces. Any daring step in this direction is severely condemned and rejected. Such marriage is quite likely to prove disastrous plunging the couple in melancholy, depression and despair.

Women protagonists in these novels do not accept the definition given to them by patriarchy. As their identity, suffers from a male bias due to male dominance, they seek to demolish the existing myths of womanhood as prescribed by the phallocentric ideology. These new women are obsessed with total fulfilment rather than accepting the submissive domesticity,' in their attempt to raise the consciousness of women. Kapur provide a glimpse into the female psyche and deal with the full range of women experiences demolishing the existing Myths,

they have tried to bring in a few social order which, is congenial to the physical, social and psychic well-being of women.

Such a social order will liberate them from subjugation and exploitation and consider them as autonomous authentic "women Selves" rather than imprisoning their "Women thoughts" having a patriarchal frame work. By' that they will be in a position, to lead their lives with dignity, and enjoy the full right: o their free conscience to create their own" values. Such a change will enable women to share power and privilege, equally with men, and man-woman relationship will have significant positive aspects.

From the discussion in the foregoing chapters and the analysis on female protagonists of the novels, Kapur tries to convey that she performs a comprehensive task of presenting the authentic picture of change she witnesses in Indian society. Hers are not propaganda for reforms but they represent the ambivalence of change.

Whether it is Virmati in her maiden novel *Difficult Daughters* or Astha in *A Married Woman* or Nisha in *Home* or Nina in *The Immigrant* or Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* all come up as the spirited women who have learnt to live for themselves. They dauntlessly march towards their liberation and often while fighting for themselves, they challenge the false notions of the conventional middle-class society. They crave for recognition for their work and when society seems apathetic and uninterested toward their work, they do not hesitate in defying the long established traditions of the middle-class Indian society.



Women's emancipation perhaps has its highpoint now but in pre-independence era the fight for autonomy and freedom was a combat in its early stages. Virmati has made an attempt to succeed in her fight to assert herself to be esteemed even though she failed, she has made an attempt. She not only comes to value education and the higher things in life but also about the darker aspects of life. The endless vicissitudes of life makes her a matured woman. She crushes and defies the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment in her life.

Manju Kapur's fictional achievement lies in her being a steady traditionalist while transmuting the different phases of national experience into significant works of art. Her intellectuality and sophistication do not wear her away from the national tradition. As a novelist, Kapur is very much interested in story and social comment rather than psychological characterization, complex technique or a profound vision of life. Her novels give a faithful, account of contemporary Indian reality.

In the novels of Manju Kapur, one can find that feminism is not evident directly; rather it occurs in the journey of her women characters in their life. On certain moments, they speak like the spokeswomen of Manju Kapur. All her female characters like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman*, Sona and Nisha in *Home*, Nina in *The immigrant* and Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* are really such women characters who have explored new path of

feminism. They have boldly shown their presence and raised their voice against male domination. They do not suffer from the sense of inferiority; they have counteracted their male counterparts every moment with reason and logic, boldly and candidly.

In fact, they are so restless and impatient that they have no consideration wrestling with their own set of ordeals, trying to struggle out of the constructions imposed upon them by their circumstances. Locked into their stereotypical expectations, they yearn for a release from their shadow-like existence. The issue raised in the first novel continues in all the novels and one often has a feeling that, had Manju Kapur written only *'The Difficult Daughters'*, she would still have been a great novelist.

Her protagonists grow either to the understanding of love and devotion in the spirit of self-sacrifice and compassion such as Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala, Sona, Rupa, Nisha; Astha, Nina, Shagun and Ishita are to the true meaning of love as creative relatedness to the other and also to the true spirit of work as devoted creation in the spirit of duty like their counterparts.

Kapur's literary sensibility projects itself in her novels as cute, unresolved perceptions of the different and distinct forms of national consciousness which propel the individual's progress in the modern world. It is possible to trace out in her novels an intelligible pattern of ideas that reveals her aesthetic assimilation of long established tradition under the disturbing impact of modernity.

Kapur highlights the factors which curbs the freedom of the female to live, grow and actualize herself the way men do. The manner in which religion, tradition and myth are misused to condition women into an acceptance of their secondary status causing them to lead claustrophobic and circumscribed lives. The female protagonist resist and overcome the ideological suppression and reshape ideals and existing value systems to re-invent themselves in a meaningful way. In this sense, her novels are a significant contribution towards the realm of Indian English fiction and feminist psychoanalysis in India.

Manju Kapur's description of society is graphic and clear. Social values and sanctions, as they are different from class to class and from society to society, present a panoramic view of Indian society. She is concerned with the giving account of social life in each novel highlighting some significant aspect of Indian social life as birth, marriage, festivals, feast, social gathering, etc., and their impact on society. It is interesting to note that the old and the new, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged are bound in the relationship that are sanctioned by the structure of society. Both vice and virtue have their own power and place in the prevailing society.

An important part of the feminist's case was the need to free girls from a forced marriage. Economic independence, through educational and employment opportunities and changes in the law of property, was, in effect, the passport that enabled a woman not only to choose not to

marry at all but even, under certain circumstances, to leave her husband. The feminists were therefore by no means traditional in their attitude to marriage and divorce. Nor did they expect women to submit in a docile way to the view of marriage that denies them the rights to a legal identity and placed them in peripheral subordination to their husbands. Right into the twentieth century, the organized feminists were respectable, even puritan, in their attitude to marriage. In so far as they wished to equalize the legal position of women and men in divorce, it was simply to free wives from dissolute husbands and not in any sense to win more sexual freedom for them. The concept of 'free love' was therefore used by these feminists as a personal and individual response to the social and legal constraints that a conventional marriage laid upon them.

By remaining free, they hoped to retain not only their independence but those rights that in spite of some changes in the law, they had lost on marriage including rights over the custody of their children. Indeed, easier and cheaper divorce was seen by some feminists as against the interests of women. This was largely due to the belief that easier divorce would allow men, in particular, to treat marriage more lightly. The issue of divorce has always reflected some of the ambiguities that the feminists have felt about marriage, seeing it sometimes as heaven, sometimes as trap\_ It is not surprising, therefore, if divorce has been seen by the feminists as largely an issue of equal rights, whether in the custody of children or the transfer of



property. It is only with the modern movement that some of the deeper questions raise not only by divorce but by marriage itself have become central issues of feminism as a whole.

The characters created by Kapur are characterized by the adoption of a critical and reflexive attitude that question their position and as a consequence attempt to redefine cultural and social stereotypes and values in order to create a space of their own, which brings a redefinition of their identity as well as a controversy and confrontation to the social context and a prevalent and powerful patriarchal ideology.

Manju Kapur explores the inner vents of her protagonists' mind in every novel. Violence against woman has become a part and parcel of life. Whether in marriage or in a steady relationship, woman becomes a victim of physical abuse. Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun and Ishita all are victims of physical abuse. Consequently it affects the family and especially children. Because family is a small unit of society, it naturally affects the social environment. Thus to check the chain of disadvantages of violence against women feminists law makers, sociologists and literary artists all turn such negative forces into the construction of something positive. Just as to move the boat, boatman uses his force into opposite direction; similarly feminists used this negative term violence to enforce the new spirit in the women. The main outcome of all these violence against women ultimately will lead women to raise their voices and fight against

violence. It is also necessary to develop a humanistic approach to the victims of violence against women. There should be changes in attitudes and values of judicial officials, the establishment of family courts, and a change in police attitude. The circumstantial evidence should be given importance in the court of law. The crimes against women deserve a scientific and psychological study. The victims of crimes require an objective approach in an individual's reactions and a more humanistic response in the dealings. Now Women have to wake up and look around and start doing things for themselves. Preaching the feminist philosophy will not solve their problems. The change must come from within.