

# Conclusion

The characters of Manju Kapur's novels mimic, if New Criticism of the texts is eluded, the life of Kapur herself. Indirectly, Kapur has evolved the characters on the basis of her experience. Women's experience which has no space in existing knowledge gets a space in the writing through the help of male centered language. The use of male's language gives Kapur's experience an agency to produce the characters who share the authority which always has been seen as a male authority.

The authority is missing in the women's writers writing because suppressed, marginalized and ostracized women class do not have agency, space and voice to frame their experience. By the writing they create their agency and portrays powerful women who assert their space and agency, dismantle the hierarchy and bring the core women issues in the centre of discourse.

It is evident, from the argument in the forgoing chapters and the analysis of the novels, that Kapur does not converse feminism directly. But, it occurs in the action of her women characters. They work as a vehicle or a tool to propagate her ideas. They act like spokespersons to perform a comprehensive assignment of bestowing the original representation of revolution that Kapur has observed in the culture and society that she has lived in. She is keen in exhibiting the inner self, reservations and complications associated with the middle class women in a larger proportion.

In representation of her characters, Kapur has chosen to concentrate on particular age group of women, basically marriageable girls, and the aftermath of their marriages. Young-age girls are marginalized in her novels. Childhood is considered to be the formative years of a character which is given contextually less space in comparison to the young or the adult.

Kapur has penned what she knows well and what is probable. She may have shown her female characters like this because of fear of giving false representation as Jane Austen

did in her novels. She portrays her characters directly from her own experience and observation of the people around her, for instance, in *Difficult Daughters*, character of Kasturi is based on her own mother from whom Kapur has taken a written permission. Her novels are crowded by individuals who just do not represent individuals but types as well.

She has been limited in providing space to man, similarly as Jane Austen does, because she does not describe men without a company of the women: what they do outside the domestic space is absent in her novels because she did not know how men talk outside without the presence of women. Feminist interpretation demonstrates the limiting of the role of men in women's world: not providing the space in sisterhood. It can be perceived as revenge against male writers who have been giving limited space to women or if they give them a space, they put emphasis or celebrate their feminine characteristics.

Jane Austen and Kapur's heroines undergo a journey of self-discovery and overcome various difficulties but there is a basic difference between them. Austen's heroines' journey starts before marriage and ends with marrying the man who is right for them but with Kapur its start after marrying a wrong man and ends with separation. Happy union of romantic age is missing in the work of Kapur.

Another similarity can be drawn on the portrayal of their women characters. Both writers have given their women economic independency. But Kapur differs on certain grounds such as on the level of education, most of her heroines are teachers. It means they are well educated, for example, Nina is a PhD and lecturer at a prestigious institute. On the other hand, Austen's women receive a limited education prescribed for women that consists of basic literacy skills, dexterity and instruction in manner.

Kapur has chosen middle class women to fill the canvas of her writing. Her heroines are not from economically backward class but from a prosperous middle class which forms a

major part of modern India. Characters from economically well off families facilitate the author to portray them in love and marriage of their likings. The idea in which Kapur shows interest, as she has said clearly in many interviews, that she perceives women who need more than bread, butter and physical comfort.

Economic independence of women is one of the most prominent demands from women activists and one of the founding ideas in feminism that provides them liberty to think over hunger and physical comfort. Kapur has deliberately provided her characters economic independence as most of them are working women. In south Asia, women are forced to get married at an early age because they are either depending on their fathers or husbands for financial security. Economic independence could be one of the reasons for the evolution of her heroines as they refuse to marry in hurry or show no interest in marriage at all.

Women characters cannot be categorized as there is no universal category of woman. Woman is the product of culture and history as much as man is. Categorization of women is a stereotypical representation of women that could be easily found in the writing of male writers. Kapur has penned her characters to challenge this tradition but she fails to bar herself from stereotypical representation of women as her protagonists are teachers, as she herself is, that gives an autobiographical angle to her writing but, at the same time, she puts a question on their characterization being stereotypical as it is attached with the femininity.

The subjective women characters of Kapur disclose the concealed inner facts of entire convictions, traditions, ceremonies and superstitions. They are dissidents of hindrance, societal abusive desires, joint-family controls and male centric restrictions in the social space. They are not the quieted animals but rather are sufficiently strong to raise their voices for their spaces. Their personality is consistently in polarity between their internal desires and social instruments of reconnaissance. They have reflected hopeless journeys, disillusioned

dreams, longing for a home, demolishing of socially constructed character, and battle for selfhood which exerts tension, embarrassment and inconvenience.

To ameliorate the condition and status of women, Kapur has taken a feminist perspective that has certain limitations too. In the last few decades, feminists' ideas changed so drastically as some other ideas concentrate on other issues and develop into new ideas and address some core issue between men and women. Kapur has tried to materialize some major issues of all three waves and post-wave of feminism. Being a teacher at a leading college, she must have taught feminism and she might have envisaged all the development of the feminist movements and conceptualized and materialized all through her novels. Her very first novel has a sub-theme that is need of education that was the biggest demand in the first wave of feminism that has been capitalized in her novel by the character Virmati, who desires for education above everything.

Being a woman, it was accessible or, in other words, allowed to her to express her experience through novels, as it was suggested by Virginia Woolf that the interrupted nature of women's life provokes her to write novels. She believed that novels were 'the easiest thing for a women to write' since a patriarchal society considers it as 'the least concentrated form of art.' Woolf through, her keen observation, states that women's experience centre on the domestic and private spheres. They are more natural at demonstrating their mind in observational analytical presentation of their characters. Jane Austen was the best example of such kind of novelists and Kapur was following her footsteps and is called India's Jane Austen.

Writing novels is a tranquil tool in expression of one's experience. For Kapur, novel writing is a tool to challenge the patriarchal ways of representation of women in which kitchen talk, gossip and an intricate attention to the detail of food, drink and clothing are

believed to be an integral part of women's lives but these things have not been given so much importance by her. Her women characters are more freely venturing into the fields that are supposed to be those of males and proving themselves along with it justifying the tag of being a 'New Woman'.

Instead of dealing with exterior world that allegedly believed women are surround and framed by them, Kapur has chosen to go into the interior world of women's feelings and emotions, along with relationships of all kinds, between mother and daughter, sisters, women lovers, other family ties, prominently heterosexual relationship. These issues have been explored and given a new touch and presentation from an emotional perspective and aspect. In her very first novel, she compassionately examines the emotional conflicts resulting from the complex relationship between mother and daughter of three generation, which was absorbing as well as restricting, for an educated woman, Virmati, who longed to lead her life on her own will.

Women's movement in India expanded the themes and subjects like relocation of self and pursuit of identity and selfhood to work on. Even given to a vast variety of subject, Kapur opted to write about domestic spaces and relationships like Jane Austen does. She put a restriction on herself, she discloses only those things which she was familiar with. On the other hand, male writers have used universal themes to get acceptability in society. The choice of domesticity in certain cases makes a writer regional because it lacks the universality due to its theme. It is an accusation on women writers that they deal with limited themes and it seems true in the case of Kapur.

Kapur brings out critically new implications, basically women's perspective, in the changed scenario of social conditions that has perceived marital relations, familial duties, women's love and responsibility in a new light that produces a counter narrative against the

established grand-narratives. The images of Indian women portrayed by her are founded on realistic and naturalistic perspective. She brings out on surface the realistic and true image of Indian woman in front of the world with the help of modern education. She revolts against the prejudiced images of women portrayed into mythical and religious books of Indian origin. She depicts the practical women who are suffering from day-to-day reality of their life, which they have gotten from Indian traditional false belief and social taboos.

Kapur fails to release her women characters from the burden of motherhood. Motherhood is a social and culture construct that forces woman only to bear the burden of bearing children and Kapur shows her women characters as a good mother who sacrifices everything for the sake of her children. She does not resist or protest against such prejudices, even submits, to such construct by depicting women as a conventional 'Good Mother'. Male counterparts reject to be the part of mothering; females object on that but they finally accept that they are to bear the burden and no one will come to rescue them, not even the writer who has subconsciously submitted to that idea. It is a limitation of the writer that she fails to come out from the socially constructed myth and reality.

Kapur has a desire to have a break from the "dependence syndrome". Women are always supposed to be depended on men so they never cut away themselves from men even if they part from men but, at the end, they submit themselves to men whom male writers depict as a reunion and feminist critics call it acceptance of male dominance. Character like Nina leaves a secured home of her husband in a foreign land that reflects the break from dependence syndrome.

Her heroines demonstrate the bravery to be free to certain extent but finally surrender themselves to male dominance. The lady-characters, however, are not in the direct brutal contest with the male which indicates how gradually yet silently the patriarchal framework is in its impact. Astha understands her own particular personality, and ends up noticeably to

insubordinate her own particular autonomous character. While, Nisha too needs to challenge society for getting married to a lower position man yet in the end when she falls categorically, she builds her personality through her own particular business.

The second chapter *Difficult Daughters* dismantles the powerful mother-daughter image and their stereotyped relationship by the characters like Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. The image was a prevalent notion, as discussed in Radha Kumar's *History of Doing*, during the India's Independence movement. The image is a patriarchal construct, to favour patriarchy and subjugate women that Kapur confronts in this novel.

The image idolizes the relationship and leaves no space for any criticism and human behavioural intervention. That alienates it from the reality and realistic representation. The representation of Virmati and Shakuntala as educated girls, at the time and space when girls were denied the both the education and space. By providing them both Kapur rattles the hierarchal bases that promotes patriarchy. She has questioned the patriarchal authority and control over women education. Education has been a tool of liberation in women's movement, critical thinking and writing as mention and raised as an issue by Mary Wollstonecraft in *The Vindication of Rights of women*.

Another popular image of woman as a housewife is also dismantled in the novel through the character named Shakuntala. Her political engagement in the independence movement reflects the involvement of Indian women in independence movement of India and along with it the growth of feminism in India which shares a close link with the political movement.

Through her writing Kapur has brought the marginalised women in the centre by making them protagonist of the novel and sending men on the periphery. This is a step taken by Kapur to hierarchal structure of Indian society where men are preferred over women.



The third chapter *A Married Woman* is an attempt to craft new concepts and vocabularies to share and express the women's experience. Women characters of the canonical literature are framed according to male gaze and experience that lacks understanding of women's relationship and experience. The characters like Astha and Peepilika attempt to bring that experience of bonding between two women who are not related by blood, to the existing cognizance.

This text tries to generate a new discourse of women's sexual expression which is always portrayed negatively in patriarchal writing. The conversation between Astha and Peepilika of their bodies represents their authority over their body and sexuality as the conversations lack gaps, silences, and short or half sentences and ellipsis. Women writers' writings are blamed to be hysterical but Kapur defies such charges as she has evolved a new knowledge or counter knowledge, following Cixous, by writing of and from the body of Astha and Peepilika.

Kapur has taken a middle path in presentation of women sexuality i.e. somewhere between radical and lesbian feminism to make that socially acceptable and conceptualize that Indian context and to avoid any controversies.

The forth chapter *Home*, thematically, deals with the issue of reproduction, representation and sexual division of labour. Partha Chatterjee postulates Indian society during British regime that was divided into materialistic and spiritual world. To fight against the British, Indian men had to advance themselves in scientific knowledge and materialistic spheres. Women were authorized to take care of spiritual world. The mastery over the spiritual world confined women within the space of home and reinforced the sexual division of labour.

Nisha, the protagonist, in a given space creates her own space through 'transverse tactics' a term given by Michel de Certeau. Opening of her own shop called 'Nisha's Creation' is a move to create her own space in the space of male dominated world. The space gives her an agency through which she asserts an identity and challenges the patriarchal division of labour which favours males. The created space gives her equality in the patriarchal society which is just a demand of feminist movement and criticism over the decades.

The fifth chapter *The Immigrant* focuses on the issue of identity crisis faced by an immigrant, Nina, who has an ascribed identity but aspires for her own existence and identity. When she leaves India for Canada, breaking up with her own country breaks the certain aspects of her identity. The loss of aspects of identity creates a gap which creates an anxiety in her. She has yet to bridge the gap and to create her new identity according to new culture and society.

Nina struggles to protect her given identity and relationship with her husband, Ananda. The resulting circumstances do not allow her to achieve what she desires. Her actions dismantle her ascribed identity as she makes extramarital relationship with Anton who frees her body and it is an expression of her sexual freedom. She ventures out of the marital bond which totally breaks her old identity. She is free, with this new identity, from institutional identity like being married. Now, she represents herself as more of what she is rather than in a relation with a patriarch.

The sixth chapter concentrates on the life of Shagun, the protagonist of *Custody*, to show the impact of globalization and liberalization on women and marriage in the Indian society. It has been seen that globalization has affected the moral principles like the sacredness of marriage, motherhood and the family that has been found, to certain extent, true

as shown in *Custody*. But it cannot be denied that Globalization has broken the moral principles that had been built up to favour men only. In *Custody*, the family is broken because of it but that family was built against the will of Shagun who could not resist at that time as she was weak. But once she gets the economic power, she ventures out of the family and makes a new family with her lover and that is on her own will. This is the positive impact of globalization that Kapur has presented in her novel.

There are certain areas and issues which are left untouched in Kapur's work or she couldn't articulate well. The issues, which work as pertinent themes in the works of her contemporary women novelists, are neglected in her works. Some significant questions regarding her works are -

Does she justify her women characters? Does she succeed in portraying a nuanced the understanding of social realities like, female infanticide, child marriage, *purdah* and restrictions on female education? Kapur's women are well educated but, in reality, they are not free to acquire education in the patriarchal society of India. She does not tackle the above mentioned issues but Nayantara Shegal has cogently addressed such issues in her work *Mistaken Identity* which are the central thematic concerns of her book.

Kapur remains silent on issues of violence against women like rape, domestic abuse, deaths due to dowry, sexual violence. Such issues are major themes in Markandaya's novel *Two Virgins* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. Sexual violence is also a major thematic concern in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Manju Kapur presents the characters who are suffering in outer space whereas Anita Desai's psychological novels portray the image of suffering women preoccupied with their inner space, their sulking frustration and mental storm within their bodies, basically leads to an existential of journey. Her novels do not focus on the characters' daily life for example,

women use various beauty products to enhance their looks and a number of women are obsessed with such products in order to fit into the mainstream patriarchal standards of beauty. This charge may be trivialized by the argument that Kapur does not depict doll-like women, but strong women who can burst the myth of beauty.

Kapur's presentation of middle class is lacking in comparison to Austen's swiping, intricate, and minute capture of rural life in her works. One reason for this may be that both Austen and Kapur rarely bothered to depict lower classes. A common criticism of Austen's and Kapur's work is that they depict a sanitised world which ignores unpleasant matters related to poverty and crime. Being a post liberal writer, Kapur has managed to escape the aura of Austen, who is a colossal in women's writing. Kapur plots her novels within a concrete historical and political context. Austen on the other hand did not directly depict or comment on contemporary political affairs and events and included them only in terms of the effect they had on the provincial domestic lives of her characters.

Kapur also fails to emphasise caste-based characters - a harsh reality of Indian society. In comparison to Austen she miserably failed in giving a proper representation of women of all classes. Her limitations does not end here. She, to some extent, totally ignores the caste system and its impact on women. The effects of caste system on the lives of women, even modern women, is undeniable ignoring such a glaring issue of the Indian society detracts from her work. Caste system is a sad reality of contemporary era of Indian continent in which Kapur writes. It becomes difficult for readers to attach themselves with the characters and to have any real empathy or sympathy for the suffering and pitiable conditions of these characters. Again this charge can be undercut by the argument that, being a post-liberal writer, she has dismissed the caste politics which only suppresses the women from the lower castes and class. This is a way to bring marginalised class, basically women, on equal ground not by emphasizing their castes

In her novels, Kapur has missed an opportunity to explore various aspects of the lives of women who are economically weak. . In this aspect she may be equated with Jane Austen, as both of them have concentrated their efforts on the depiction of middle classes. Both the authors engaged with the lives of higher or economically well settled families. Economic deprivation or poverty is a harsh reality of the developing countries, it is indeed absurd and limiting to ignore this and focussing on the upper classes. This again is an indication of the limited horizon in the depiction of the picture of life in her works.

## **Scope for further Research**

- As the influence of literature on literary characters has always been a subject of literary criticism, there is scope to understand how Kapur's characters are influenced by it and to what extent.
- Analysis of the authour's language, to figure out whether she has been able to develop feminine sentences.
- Influence of male writers on Kapur's writing.