

A Space of Her Own: Indian Jane Austen Feminist Voice of the Subcontinent

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Abstract

Indian Writing in English is a fundamental part of and a symbolic supplement to post-colonial literature. There are many noted post-colonial writers such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. Among them joins Manju Kapur and she also deals with post-colonialism in her most of her novels. Feminism speaks in her books though entirely not a post-colonial writer. Her characters mostly revolt against the age-old traditions, they struggle for their survival though they were well educated, and they thoroughly search for their individuality and the problems that are ingrained in any middle-class Indian society. They also struggle to hit hard a balance between tradition and modernity to chisel out a particular identity for them.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Feminism, Individuality, Identity, Tradition, Modernity etc.

Introduction:

There is no stopping for seventy-year-old Manju Kapur, a well-known writer of Indian novels. Noted as an exceptional assertive woman she had gained a significant impact among the other contemporary writers of her period namely Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and Anita Nair. Kapur chooses literature and fiction as her genre. Won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1999, for "Difficult Daughters" as the best first book and DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2011 for her novel "The Immigrant", she was an M.Phil. from Delhi University. Kapur was also one of the growing numbers of women writers' like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Shobha De in India. The current day women authors convey their thoughts and ideas more bravely and fearlessly

based on a medley of stuff regarding female psyche and the nuances of a woman's mind. The critical cultural thinking was the new significant idea conceived by the readers of her novels. Her novels speak about the entrée of the tradition, culture and the patriarchal society. The struggle for independence and existence remained amateurish warfare. Women were inflicted to more violence and pressure and also boycotting. "Women are one half of the sky" quotes a feminist writer, and most of the feminist theories were audacious.

Kapur's female central characters struggle a lot when they face a difficult situation and have their responsibility and importance. She presents her heroine's as highly qualified, individualistic characters. They try their best to elevate the status of women in their society. These aspiring women individuals were imprisoned within the boundaries of a moderate traditionalistic society. They fight between wisdom and uniqueness. 1940's women had to struggle for their rights, and this idea sketched Kapur's female characters. They raise their voice against the male-dominated society. Her women should follow the tradition, culture and they were restricted by the constraints laid by the patriarchal society. As far as women were tied up in knots, their singularity, the search for person's individuality, the concept of disobedience had remained foreign ideas. Women should be respectful, serene, obsequious and lifeless; they should claim their rights neither as women nor as a human being. Kapur writes about post-colonialism. She instinctively speaks about the women's problems in the parental society.

"The day will come when men will recognise woman as he peers, not only at the fireside but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will be there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race." Susan B. Anthony (Anthony: 1897,4).

For Kapur, the home was a place where women could be satisfied by fulfilling their needs and desires in the role of a mother, daughter, wife, sister and daughter-in-law. Since ages women seem to be the embodiment of humiliation, shame, suffering and they wanted them to be free of commitment now. In olden days, marriage was considered to be the final curtain and wheel of fortune for every woman from which no one could escape. Manju Kapur successfully brought out the ideal women's picture in the male chauvinistic society. In the "Image of Women," Mary Ann Fergusson says; "One peculiarly of the images of women throughout history is that archetypes have reinforced social stereotypes." (Fergusson: 1993,p.4).

Manju Kapur's first novel "Difficult Daughters" deals with the story of three generation women-Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. The story focuses these women who struggle alone with their family, and her case is less characteristic but is still allegorical; Kapur also writes about

the difference between the careers of Shakuntala and Swarna, although the gauge for judgement needs to be fulfilled. They meet each other, but their opinions do not tie in. Manju Kapur narrates that:

"She chooses her path which leads to the professor whereas Swarna does not tread on the path led by Virmati, with whom she finally compelled to break off her contacts: 'And Swarna dropped out of her life'." (Kapur: 1998, p.252).

Her second novel "A Married Woman" talk seriously about the disturbance which comes after the Hindu-Muslim riots over destroying the Babri-Masjid in Ayodhya. Here she also deals with the taboo issues of homosexuality between two young women Astha and Peeplika. Astha, though, she had everything in her life, she needs to get comfortable in the hands of a young widow Peeplika. Both feel for each other and finally start with a lesbian relationship. But in India, the government does not agree with the homosexual relationship. Under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, it was punishable by law. In her own life, she considers herself secondary in her husbands' house. Manju Kapur writes: "Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, faking off his shoes, pulling off his socks, feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet." (Kapur:2006,p.68). The author's novel "Home" is about an enthralling family about a cloth shop owner Banwarilal. This novel was a subgenre in Indian English Literature. This novel attracts the readers with its comic sense. The characters speak the Delhi common slang throughout the novel and the refined hackneyed phrase of the north Indian family life. In the character of Nisha, Kapur speaks about the gender inequity. Nisha is a rebellious girl against religious rituals and traditional parental values. She balances both modern and traditional views, and Nisha ruins the age-old superstitious beliefs and finds a new path which makes the feminine characteristics amiable to the natural, public and psychic well-being of women. Shobana Bhattacharji claims that:

"There is no hard wringing over the status of women issues; simply a cool- therefore powerful- marshalling of how people talk what they, allow a girl to do or not to do, the social and economic area she is permitted and how these need not imprison her, yet she can take no compassion for granted nor presume that it will be translated into practical help." (Bhattacharji:2006,p.19).

Manju Kapur's fourth novel "The Immigrants" talks about the global integration in India. The protagonist Nina, a financially independent girl, got a marriage proposal from an NRI. After getting married to Ananda, she was shocked to know that her husband suffers from sexual dysfunction. Ananda was a good doctor in his clinic in Canada, but when it comes to Nina, he doesn't have much interest in her. Though she carves from isolation and alienation, Ananda treats her like a normal wife in Indian traditional culture. Kapur writes as such: "He loved his

wife, but he did not want to feel that she was the only one in the world he could have sex with her. What kind of man would make him, with his masculinity so limited?"(Kapur:2010,p.151).Nina was enjoying reading fictions, and she was lost in the world of literature. Her secret relationship with Anton got satisfied when she had her sexual relationship with him. Moreover:

"Her life was her own; she did not owe anybody any explanation. If Anton gave her pleasure, if his easy acceptance of her gilded her studies, did not she owe it to herself to sleep with him?" (Kapur: 2010, p.273).

Thus we can trace the other secret marital relationship with both the characters Nina and Ananda. Harmony in relationship expires, and sex becomes the factor here, which comes over the subconscious and intellectual culture. Manju Kapur's "Custody" is a novel that deals with both native and worldwide. The typical example of the image of a woman in history has come out in the picture of a woman who searches for their identity. Kapur narrates two female characters who suffer from pity and consolation. Shagun, the first main character has bold thoughts, and she chooses a luxurious lifestyle without bothering about her family-husband and her two little children- Arjun and Roohi.

The clandestine relationship between Ashok Khanna and Shagun depicts the mindset of modern women who go against the curb of patriarchal fiction and values. Shagun says that she perceives her desire, inclination, lust as she delves into and accepts herself in Ashok. As he states: "Tradition versus modern values, individual versus society" (Kapur, 2011,p.81). "..... He knew he had been destined for. In her colouring, her greenish eyes and demeanour, she was a perfect blend of east and west." (Kapur: 2011,p.4). Ishita, the second main character through a victim of wrong marriage, she re-marries Raman, the ex-husband of Shagun, and takes good care of his daughter, Roohi. Because of her infertility, she was considered unworthy by the in-laws, of her first marriage. Kapur quotes, "Already clouds were entering her soul and shedding heavy drops of unworthiness, and such was the weight she couldn't even hold his hand and tell him that she loved him more than life itself".(Kapur: 2011,p.35). It represents the Modern Indian Woman, who paved a new path in the external world.

Kapur's recent novel is "Brothers" again highlights the lives of women in rural, urban, social, political and modern view of the on-going world. Here, she narrates the story of three generation Joint family in Lalbanga, Ajmer. The novel starts from the World War II, and it gradually moves towards the first decade of the 21st century. "Brothers" is about the two brothers of the 1940's and also the brothers of the 21st century. Dhanapal Singh and Kirpal Singh belong to the 1940's whereas Himmat Singh and Mangal Singh belong to the current

century. The novel starts with the present situation and slowly moves back. All these characters were born in Lalbanga, Ajmer. Manju Kapur writes about the village as such:

"Braided twig fences divide the properties; the huts are made of mud and cow dung. Cows share their living space. The earth is their mother, animals their benefactors. Caste lines divide the village. There are Jats, Rajputs, Bhils, Yadavs, Gujjars, Malis who largely live as rivals doing their duty to god by preserving the distinctions he had created with all the vigour at their disposal."(Kapur: 2016,p.58)

When the English men come and urge the Indian men to join the armed forces, Virpal escapes and goes to the city leaving behind his childhood wife, Mithari. Kapur writes as such: "He is bewildered by the view of the city from this height, the number of buildings, the rows of shops, the many tongas, the people. He sinks to the pavement and, not knowing what to do, shuts his eyes, his chador around him."(Kapur: 2016,p.60).

In the city, Virpal became an excellent businessman- 'If not quite a big man, he was a self-sufficient one'. Mithari who was left in the village had her sister -in- law, Gulabi as her only comfort. These two women shared their thoughts when they were in the kitchen. This scene depicts the power of men and the humility of women in the patriarchal society. Dhanpal Singh, brother of Virpal, was selected by the British agents to fight for the safety and independence of the country. He leaves from his hometown to Bombay, from there on the ship to someplace in Africa.

After fifteen years, Dhanpal returns from his army troupe – 'a man looking blankly around the station, one arm hanging by his side, his walk slow and stiff, a face gaunt from years of combat, sallow skin and weary eyes'. Kapur sketches the first set of Brothers as the foundation for the next generation. Next, she writes about Himmat Singh and Mangal Singh. Himmat Singh leads the city life in Virpal's house by replacing Kishen Singh, son of Virpal. Unlike his uncle Virpal, he is very ambitious about his political life and reaches the top. He marries the daughter of a political mentor and lives an epicurean lifestyle. Himmat brings his brother Mangal also to the city. Mangal got married to Tapti Gaina, a bold girl with individualistic thoughts. Life goes on for Himmat being a prominent politician and Mangal still yearning to become a politician like his brother. The scene now shifts to the 21st century. Soon Himmat Singh became the Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

The news alarmed that his brother Mangal shorted Himmat. Mangal was put to jail, and Himmat present condition was in the ICU. Media flees from everywhere to snatch the tastiest news of the family. Tapti, the female character in the novel, breaks the moral codes and had a secret relationship with Himmat. Her family members aggressively abused her except her

brother Ram Pratap. Thus the book concludes with all the characters carrying a heavy broken heart and the story did not so much influence the readers. Kapur did not answer any questions that hang around in the reader's mind regarding the novel 'Brothers'.

Conclusion:

I, personally think, that Kapur cites about the 2006 incident of former Minister Shri.Pramod Mahajan was with some additional inclusive narrative of the seven-decade generation of people. Kapur depicts the character of brothers through the new or the old as swinging between the country to the town and in the city to the state. For example, Himmat is afraid "of being sucked back into the earth from which he had emerged". Her vision of women was more appropriate and candid. She presents her female characters in such a way that they attained self- discovery, self-acceptance, self-introspection which we relate to Kapur's. 'Women are not subjugated to men' was her main idea in most of her novels she is compared to one of the classic writers Jane Austen, who was modern in her ideas, aspirations. All six Jane Austen's novels are the representation of pattern and parody appropriate to the 21st century, India. Like the six novels of Austen, Kapur's novels also thematically represent the convention and caricature significant to the 21st century, India.

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