

The Changing Dimensions of Feminism in Manju Kapur's Home and A Married Woman

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is a well-known name in Indian English Fiction. She is an author of modern era of feminism and given a new air to feminism in her writings. While the delineation of suffering, silence and pain has been prevalent in the life of women characters in earlier women novelists, the protagonists of Manju Kapur have a spark of revolt in themselves, and they allow that spark to come out before the patriarchal society in various forms. Here, two novels of Manju Kapur, 'Home' and 'A Married Woman' have been taken into consideration to highlight the changing dimensions of feminism in her novels. The protagonists of these two novels, Nisha and Astha, struggle in their lives just because of the rules set for the women in the closed Indian society but still they make their own way through the odds and evens of their lives and achieve their dreams. The notable things about these two characters are that they struggle within their relations, but they understand their responsibilities as well and get a respectable place among their relations just through their struggle and never dying spirit of dynamism.

Key words: Modern Feminism, Patriarchy, Closed Society, Protagonists, Dynamism

Feminism is a concept which has been popular in the modern literature in past few decades. However, the history and struggle of feminism is an age-old reality. Feminism has seen various phases including the three waves of feminism. In the first wave, the struggle was about the right to vote and to shape the destiny of women by themselves. The second wave talks about the spontaneous, enriched, loyal and sisterly world, while calling male society as wise, aggressive, destructive and disdainful. The third wave feminism categorized women's rights facilitated by the terrains of culture and multi-ethnic coalitions, more willingly than age. This third wave explored not the connections amid race, status, group, beliefs and sexuality, but also the politics and its diversity. With these different phases, Feminism and feminist criticism turned out to be the most essential and popular terms which have been exerted in literary pieces for ages. After such a long journey, feminism has reached the stage where it can be called a full-fledged movement with some achievements.

Though in modern time, it is moving from being just feminism to gender unbiased, still there are some challenges for women which they have to face on the name of family, children and other responsibilities. Though, these responsibilities work as hindrances in the way of their success and achievements, yet the modern woman always try to make their own way through all the odds and evens of her life, enjoying her womanhood. In the modern era of feminism, some space is given to woman by the society and the rest she gets by her struggle.

The author Manju Kapur, whose novels *A Married Woman* and *Home* have been taken into consideration in this paper, deals with this modern form of feminism in her novels. She is the author who has tried to give a new air to feminism in her works. Manju Kapur's female protagonists suffer a lot in their lives, they bear the mental angst, physical exploitation, social discrimination, gender biasness in their relations, but these characters still maintain their dynamic spirit to move ahead always, without stopping at any point of their struggle. In this regard, K R S Iyenger states in *The Women Novelists in Indian Writings in English* in the following lines:

Manju Kapur along with the contemporary writers such as Kamala Markandeya, Shobha De, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharti Mukherjee captures the Indian ethos very successfully and skilfully. At the same time, they show their deep insight into human nature and their understanding of day-to-day problems. Love, war, politics, economics and social tension, legendary, history and even spirituality are popular themes with the contemporary novelists.

Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar, Punjab, in 1948. She did her graduation from Miranda House, college for women and later received her M.A. degree from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada and an M.Phil at Delhi University. At present, she is working as a Professor of English Literature at Miranda House in Delhi University. Her debut novel- *Difficult Daughters*, won the Commonwealth Prize in 1999 and gained Manju Kapur the immense popularity in the field of literature. Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* came in 2003 and *Home* came in 2006. Astha and Nisha, the respective protagonists of these two novels exhibit the traits of modern feminism that is never ending spirit and thirst for success in life. Astha and Nisha are so much dynamic in their souls and spirits that they are determined to make their own space in the society, in the world and on the sky. Like the other protagonists of Manju Kapur, these two protagonists also do not believe only in sulking, blaming others, cursing themselves or getting frustrated in their lives. Astha and Nisha want to change their lives as per their choices and conditions but at the same time they do not want to violate the circumference of their responsibilities also. In order to understand the delineation of the characters of these two protagonists, a critical analysis has been attempted in this paper.

The novel *A Married Woman* revolves around a middle-class Hindu family which belongs to Delhi. Hemant is a business tycoon based in Delhi and has returned from the United States, and gets married with Astha, a well-educated middle class Hindu girl. At first, the couple's marriage life goes very smooth without any problem. But the norms of the male-dominated culture make Hemant go by his own desires and demands whether it is about his personal life or professional life.. At the same time, his wife Astha is not respectfully treated by Hemant. As a result, Astha, who does not feel satisfied in her life, just as a wife and a Daughter-in-law, starts searching for a job, and very soon she gets a teaching job in one of the local schools. The traditional married life of Hemant and Astha appears good, as Hemant is never questioned by Astha about anything. An

upheaval comes in Astha's life when she meets Aijaz Khan, a Muslim who does not have much faith in religion. The budding relationship of Astha and Aijaz abruptly comes to an end when Aijaz is killed along with other members of his street theatre group in a communal violence in Ayodhya. Thereafter, Astha happens to meet Pipeelika, the widow of Aijaz. Later, Astha and Pipeelika both develop a lesbian relationship with each other. Their secret love story comes to an end when Pipeelika decides to go for her PhD in United States and Astha regains her emotional bond with her family. Though, Astha is much satisfied in her relationship with Pipeelika, yet she understands very well the shallowness of this relation, as Pipeelika always pressurizes Astha to leave her family which is impossible to her.

Amid this restlessness and ambiguity of her life, Astha chooses painting as career and gives expressions to her feelings through the paintings. Astha becomes a very good painter and before Pipeelika's leaving for United States, she puts her paintings in an exhibition which places Astha as a successful painter. Her success in career, gets Astha respect in Hemant's eyes along with her in-laws and children. Dr Ram Sharma observes in his *Feministic Voices in Manju Kapoor's A Married Woman*,

The female protagonists of Kapur's novels protest against male domination and the marginalization of woman. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification but never has he desired to elevate her to her genuine rank. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind.

Astha overcomes all these oddities of her life by her struggling spirit. Manju Kapur believes that an educated Indian lady has the capability to define and identify the main concern of her life. The novel *A Married Woman* deals with convention *versus* no convention, perpetual *versus* transitory, normal sex *versus* abnormal sex, realistic life *versus* fantasy life. Life, in this particular story, deals with illogicalities, inconsistencies, delusions and imaginations. These instances could be viewed in different relationships and atmospheres that take place in the plot. *A Married Woman* depicts the subject of lack of respect and cordiality in marital relations, and the demand to love and to be loved, to be recognized and to be appreciated.

The next novel of Manju Kapur's *Home* came in 2006. *Home* explores the complex terrain of Indian family, especially joint families about which Anupama Chawdhury observes in her *Manju Kapur's Home: A Feminist Reading* in the following words:

Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress.

This novel reveals many issues that are deep rooted with the first unit of our social structure that is family. These issues are the revolt against the age-old traditions, the problems of marriage, women's struggle for survival, the complexities of mutual relationship, and the compulsion of lifelong adjustments with the whole family. All these issues are discussed in the novel.

Along with all these problems the novel also deals with the illusion of fulfilment which is provided by the home, and which is shattered even by the home, and which is disillusioned with acquiring a 'home in true sense'. This journey of 'disillusionment from illusion' is presented through the character of Nisha,

the chief protagonist of this novel. Nisha is the symbol of a 'New Woman' in its perfect sense, self-confident, self-dependent, extrovert, dynamic and realistic. Nisha is more assertive and self-assured one in her family than any other women and she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner. Nisha is physically exploited by Vicky two times during the early childhood phase of her life. After this exploitation Nisha is badly disturbed and mentally shattered. Lastly it is decided to send her to her aunt Rupa's house. In Rupa's home, Nisha recovers from her trauma and concentrates on her studies. Nisha shows much better in her studies than any of her brothers and shines like a star under the guidance of her uncle Premnath. Till now eleven years have passed since Nisha has been staying with her uncle and aunt. But after Lala Banwarilal's death, Nisha is brought back to her parents' house to give emotional support to her grandmother. This proves to be a big change in Nisha's life which she is not prepared for. The atmosphere of her own home and Rupa's home is quite different. Here nobody cares about her studies and Nisha is always supposed to help her mother in household works and share the responsibilities of kitchen. However, she continues her education in college. In college, Nisha gets attracted towards a boy, Suresh, belonging to a lower caste. On the name of family honour, Nisha is not allowed to marry her. Then she has to wait for a long time to get married because of the Mangli factor of her horoscope. Even her younger brother Raju gets married and becomes the father of a son. Now the situation has become worse for Nisha within the four walls of the house. Dr Baby Ritu Fukan also starts her article *Negotiating the Notion of Identity and Space in Manju Kapur's Home* with the well-known quote of Simone De Beauvoir from *The Second Sex*,

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Even today, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is denied, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution.

As a whole, *Home* reflects the patriarchal form of society in a much more effective manner. Since her childhood, Nisha is supposed to develop the traits of an ideal daughter, and in her later life a perfect home maker rather than getting good education. Now her life is confined within the four walls of her house which proves to be traumatic for her. However, because of her never dying spirit, Nisha never sits inactive, and she starts her business of stitching garments by the name Nisha's Creations, with the help of her father and uncle and becomes a successful businesswoman. Because of her dynamism, she has reached to a position where she finds herself standing on her feet. Eventually, Nisha gets married with Arvind, and gives birth to the twins. Although, she suffers a lot in her life, her sufferings could not diminish her invincible spirit, and as a result, she moves forward, and achieves success in her life. Nisha recovers from her trauma, then studies, establishes her business and later enjoys her married life.

Conclusion:

In general, Kapur's novels depict the efforts of women to find out their individuality. The female protagonists in her novels stand out as a role model to contemporary modern Indian women, and they describe the male-controlled limits and prospects to affirm their uniqueness and accomplish self-righteousness and self-actualization in their life. The novelist always prefers for realism in her novels and a feminist's belief is strikingly present in her novels. Manju Kapur has convincingly depicted female protagonists in her novel to show how they make efforts for determining their individuality, and to endure in this patriarchal Indian society.

They break the rules, customs and relationships, and stay strong by making their education and self-dependence as a tool. Her female protagonists are not of the type who just hides behind customs and traditions, but they are of the kind who take a decision and strive for a better result. Dr Kanwar Singh also observes in his paper *Feminism and Post-feminism*.

The modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her. The new woman dares to pronounce her volitions and convictions.

The detailed study of the aforementioned two novels of Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman and Home* 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. This modern woman knows very well to assert for herself along with maintaining the balance between her aspirations and responsibilities, trying to live a happy and satisfied life.

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