

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.2., 2018 (April-June)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

EMERGENCE OF A NEW WOMAN FROM INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE IN THE LIGHT
OF FEMINIST STANCE

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a global and revolutionary ideology that is political because it is concerned with the questions of power. A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems. Feminism emerges in the works of Manju Kapur. She, being a novelist, is primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class. She takes into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values in her plots. Her women under patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to physical torture and social ostracism. They are more discriminated and are biased in lieu of their sex. But her heroines do not want to be robber dolls in society rather they continuously strive to assert their identity. The key issues investigated by Kapur in her novels are education, polygamy and female struggle for getting identity in male dominated social structure. *Home* (2006) is the third novel of Manju Kapur. It deals with hopes, aspirations of four generations. It revolves around marriage as the prime factor in every girl's life and that she is born just to marry and her dream should be limited to carry children and shoulder the family responsibilities. The present paper will highlight the trauma and situations of the women characters in this novel *Home*.

Keywords: feminism, portrayal of women, Male dominance, Marriage, Search of identity, Tradition

The term feminism has its origin from the Latin 'femina' meaning 'woman'. It refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of 'equality of sexes'. The term became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women's suffrage in the western countries. It attempts to study and solve the various gender based problems. It questions the pre-conceived assumptions about the roles that men and women should have in life. In literary text, feminism brings to scrutiny the portrayals of gender roles, which tend to impose social norms, customs, conventions, laws and expectations on the grounds of gender discrimination. It throws a challenge on the age- long tradition of gender differentiation and attempts to explore and find a new social order. Feminism played a vital role in studying the construction of masculine and feminine identities and the construction of heterogeneous sexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality and the erotic sexuality.

In the post-colonial era, the portrayal of women in Indian novel in English underwent a radical change. The conventional ideal woman who meekly tolerated, traditional, domestic and sexual oppression and whose mouth was muzzled, voice arrested and movements fettered by patriarchal norms and control was replaced by the 'new woman' who started resisting traditions orthodox concepts and values. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande and many other women writers as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting the individual self. This woman trying to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. Since many social reformer helped the woman to cross the threshold of family life and move out into the outer world of freedom struggle and social reform, the woman is presented with varied opportunities not only today but also yesterday during freedom movement.

Manju Kapur is a world acclaimed writer of great reputation. She has six novels to her credit. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) won her the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for first novel in South Asia. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was published in 2003 and this novel brought much attention for her. Her third novel *Home* was published in 2006. This novel is clear epitome of her deep-rooted understanding of Indian women in the traditional society. Her fourth novel *The Immigrant* was published in 2009. Her fifth novel *Custody* was published in 2012. Her sixth and last novel *Brothers: A novel* was published in 2016. Her works have been translated into many languages both in Indian and abroad. Kapur's novels have a feministic approach. The novels manifest women's struggle for emancipation from economic, political and social bondages.

Manju Kapur is quite brilliant in her study of female characters. Almost all her female characters are the real epitome of feminism and they demand for the empowerment of the women in the modern era. She has created women of strong likes and dislikes. They never stop before their male dominated society. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* goes beyond the traditional norms of those days to marry with married man; Astha in *A Married Woman* does not hesitate to find a substitute for her husband in Pipeelika who is also a woman. Nisha's life in *Home* is the typical example of a growth of a modern girl in the traditional society of a growth of modern girl which imposes curfew and does tolerate any kind of advance made by a girl, especially in the selection of the life pattern. Nina in *The Immigrant* is the typical victim of time and space. Her growing alienation and bewilderment in Canada makes her more mature in handling the odd situations imposed by her husband and other fellows. Shagun in *The Custody* is the typical victim of glamorous life and she does not hesitate to leave her devotional and submissive husband only for the sake of fulfilling her glamorous, artificial and ostensible life style.

Manju Kapur in her novels presents women who try to establish their own identity. The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of Independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat. We see the emergence of new women in her novels 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 protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own.

Manju Kapur's third novel *Home* is a beautiful story of the family of Banwari Lal. But at the same time it is also a story of every home in India. She presents everything-hopes and aspirations, failures and frustrations, conflict between generations etc. She seems to be wonderful in the presentation of various types of human relationship in the novel a critic critically writes in *The Hindu*:

In today kahanni ghar ghar ki age (Home) is infused with bits- and bobs that you find at once so recognizable what begins like a short story, perhaps bringing your neighbors to mind, stretches to as many as 377 pages, with nuances that are at times rather singular and at others, so universal.

Manju Kapur's *Home* may have been old fashioned story but its unique sense of presentation makes it more and more concerning to the contemporary times.. This novel projects deep understanding of human nature. In this context Anupama Chowdhury observes, *Home* reveals a disturbing home truth that joint

families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress. It is a story of every home in India. This novel is also written in women's perspective. She covers the story of daily life of almost four generations-Banwari Lal, his sons, his grandsons and his grand grandsons all living under the roof built by Banwari Lal who came to shift in Karol Bag, New Delhi after partition. She presents hopes and aspirations, failures and frustrations and the concept of generation gap.

Manju Kapur presents the story with feminist outlook and unique sense. A family living under the same roof faces many problems but the members of the family do not forget the basics of home. They share the conflicts and confrontations with delight and pleasure and overcome many problems. This novel tells about cultural conflicts as well as sacrifice and compromise. Mr.Banwari Lal shows his true spirit and he is ready to compromise by not opposing the love marriage of his son which was not in practice in those days .But he does not want his son unhappy. He respects the emotions of his son. He tells his relentless wife:

"It is our son's happiness we have to think about'. 'If he wants a love marriage, he shall have it .He has worked sincerely all these years. He has never had a holiday, never taken one praise. His younger brother travels with me, spends what he can, while the elder one is simple and retiring. Who knows what he might do if he is thwarted in the only one thing he asks for".

On the other hand, Yashpal's mother's notion is something else. She is in favor of big dowry for her son which the bride's family would not offer at all because they are comparatively weak in property. The remarks of Sona's parents are full of feminist stance: "We have nothing but our daughter we are small people" Sona, Yashpal's wife does not have a child for many years. She is hurt by the words of bitterness by other family members for not becoming a mother. Finally her dream becomes true. She becomes pregnant after ten long waiting years. She feels extremely happy and all the family members have the same. Everyone in her family takes a special care of her and a rare kind of satisfaction comes to her. Manju Kapur wants to show how the attitude of the society suddenly changes and full of growing circumstances as far as the existence, identity and status of women are concerned:

Now everything was going to change, Sona would be swallowed into that family, she could see it already. There would be no more hints of barrenness.If they were really keen about a son, with their money they could go on producing till they finally get one.

After the birth of Nisha, Sona feels happy and busy. After the gap of two years, Nisha's son Raju is born. The motherhood of Nisha produces bad impact in the life of Vicky who is the son of BanwariLal's daughter children grow. Nisha is also growing .Vicky shows unwanted and unexpected behavior towards Nisha. He feels good and romantic in the company of Nisha. He pours undue love and affection which Nisha does not wish at all. Vicky's love and affection of Nisha cannot be called a mere act of childish sexual pleasure. He displays his refined behavior many times. He does his best to blackmail her. He is always in search of opportunity to meet Nisha:

Meanwhile Vicky's preoccupation with Nisha increased, his eyes fixed on the small white hand that had caressed him, the hand that had made him come all over the durrie.Just thinking of excitement and the release mad him long for it again.

Nisha would not easily forget these bad things done by Vicky to her. She becomes self possessive. Her health is deteriorating day by day. Nobody understands the real cause. Rupa, the sister of Sona took Nisha to her own home. Here, she feels comfortable and more concerning. Rupa is also childless; therefore, she spends more time to take care of Nisha:

Nisha now found she is an atmosphere very different from the one she had lived in. As the only child she was the centre of interest, concern and attention.

But Sona was not satisfied with the training of Nisha in the company of Rupa and Premnath. Manju Kapur is very clear in her stand by placing Nisha in conflict. Nisha seems to be a modern girl who wants more freedom in her attitude and outlook. On the other hand, her parents always want her to see in the perspective of traditional and conventional womanhood. For Sona, Nisha's training as a good household girl is more important than her study. Sona would like to train her daughter in the traditional way. She tells Rupa: "We are old fashioned People.Tradition is strong with us. So is duty". Sona is aware of the reality of the society. She is not satisfied with the growth of womanhood in Nisha. Nisha does not know proper cooking at all. She wants to

teach her the art of cooking. All these things are not tolerable for Nisha: "Nisha discovered to her horror that her mother's idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time".

Sona always shows a sense of dissatisfaction with Nisha's religious knowledge of various fasting associated with womanhood in India. She wants to tell her the stories of Karwanchouth, Savitri-Katha, etc. She likes to train her daughter in traditional way. Being a mother she is aware with the role of women in the family.

Sona was making up for negligent upbringing. Nisha needed to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. The art of service and domesticity showed sign in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative karma to be a beacon in her married home.

Sona tells Nisha the story of Sathyawan and Savitri. Savitri brought back her husband Satyawan from death such was the power of wifely devotion. It is quite ironical that every woman in India is considered as the representative of Savitri and Sita. Their main virtues are sacrifice and devotion. They have to sacrifice 'Everything for others' life and happiness. It is beyond feminist stance in the modern age. Sona is aware of duty, devotion and sacrifice of women in the traditional society and that is why she wants to guide her daughter in her own way:

Sona closed the katha book with tears in her eyes. She too, like Savitri, has scarified for her family,"see" she says to her lessoning daughter, "that is what you must be like".

Love between two young people has nothing to do with tradition and convention. A girl like Nisha who belongs to the traditional family is not aware of the limitations of her belongings. She feels extremely happy in the company Suresh. She shares everything with him. 'But she is also aware with the limitations of love and romance'. In home Nisha's parents are worried about her security. When they come to know about her love affairs, they are surprised and opposed it. They are in shame. But Nisha tries to defend her decisions by telling them that they had a love marriage thirty years back Yashpal told her:

Beti, there is no comparison between the life of your elders and their own. Our marriage was full of blessings of your grandfather. Who is this boy? How has he turned your head so much that he tells me what you will do?

Sona also follows her husband's manner. She cannot believe in act of her own daughter. What face she would show in society, if her daughter would be married like this with street boy. She broods:

The girl will be our death. My child, born after ten years, tortures me like this. Thank god your grandfather is not alive. What face will I show upstairs? Vijay gets his wife from Fancy Furnishing while my daughter goes to the street for her.

It seems that Nisha committed a heinous crime by loving someone. Even her parents do not allow her to choose her own life partner according to her own wish. Even after sixty years of independence, women have no freedom to choose their life partners. According to them, if someone dare, the whole society run after her and pronounce severe degree of punishment, Here, Manju Kapur shows her feminine stance by making Nisha a perfect spokesman in this direction. The result is inevitable and she has been confined only to the walls of her home. They disconnect the phone facility and only the incoming calls are allowed. Nisha's parents are conscious of her marriage. They are in favor of immediate wedding. They do not care for the emotional breakdown of Nisha:

All day she remained in the house, a prisoner of her deed, a prisoner of their words. She was distrusted too much to be allowed to put a foot outside. A padlock was put on the phone, only incoming calls could be allowed to receive without the key

After the episode of Suresh, Nisha wants to establish her own business. She got success in it..Her business is growing day by day. On the other side, the family is curious about her marriage.Arvind is chosen as a bridegroom of Nisha. Finally they marry. She has to start a new life with Arvind. Suresh was her past while Arvind is her present. She accepts the bitter truth as beautiful face was a past and spotted face is her present. She wants to merge her life in the new direction. She has to look after her new home, her husband and her mother-in-law; she realizes the changes and transformations in her new life. She arrives in the new home of her husband:

The house in which Nisha now found was very different from the homes she had known. In Karol Bagh, the little park they faced had offered trees, birdsong, and a few scraggy flowering shrubs and a semblance of openness.....All its commotion from within. In India the exploitation of women is different from the second world and the Western civilization.

Here women have been exploited by women in majority. Daughter-in-laws have to suffer because of the ill behavior of mother-in-laws and sister-in-laws. The role of mother-in-laws is extremely important. They do not understand the transformation and change. They want to implement such conditions and circumstances in which they had spent their life. The real problem is a sense of coordination gap and communication gap. For instance, Nisha has own business and she wants to continue it, but she has to look after her mother-in-law. It is enough to hurt the emotions of Nisha. Nisha's life has been presented in order to show a journey of a girl from innocence to experience in the light of feminist stance.

Manju Kapur's handling of the questions of feminism and the upliftment of women differ from the Western ideology and existing setup and she would like to discover the role of woman in the typical traditional Indian society which has a sense of respect for women right from the beginning of its cultural setup. She is of view that Indian women must not be confused between modernism and westernism.

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