

The Subjection of Woman in Motherhood and Survival of Manju Kapur's Protagonists

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is a very keen observer of the vicissitudes in the lives of female characters in the Indian social male dominated pattern and the Western scenario where the older concepts and conceits get minimized. The dilemma whether it is cultural or personal, is mostly an indicator of 'change'. Within the social set up, men and women are merely agents to create or recreate action or reaction elaborating the basic issue, man-woman relationship is conditioned by set values. One more social agenda of motherhood is adored in her works as if motherhood is the only identity granted to her in Indian scenario. Her protagonists are found struggling with this sort of subjugation in her lives and retaliate the things in their own way and move forward towards their goal. The present paper highlights the recognition what women gets after becoming a mother.

Keywords: subjugation, retaliate

Manju Kapur writes about experiences and instances which have angered her and roused her strong feelings. She is a keen observer and tries to inculcate in her writing what she witnesses as a teacher, a wife, a daughter, a mother, and last but not the least, as an enlightened citizen. All her works explore the identity issue and the same issue specifically after attaining motherhood. Her status is clearly expected to be identified as a caring mother. It is exemplified in Manju Kapur's novels where the role of women is judged only through her role play of motherhood. In Indian scenario the woman who gives birth to child is adored and the infertile woman is blamed for not pursuing her role of complete woman.

The efficacy for procreation is given much more priority in patriarchal system to female's mental abilities. Virmati (*Difficult Daughters*) gets some space in Harish's home only when she conceives. Astha (*A Married Woman*) gains attention only after the birth of her son, Himanshu. Motherhood adds valuable significance to one's identity. As Sona (*Home*) is incapable of conceiving, she has to bear sneers and taunts. The moment she conceives and gives birth to a girl and then a boy, she avails herself of honour and

respect. But that respect is only granted to them due to motherhood. Nisha has to leave her business, as her pregnancy does not allow her to continue it.

On the contrary Ishita does not attain motherhood due to infertility meets the same fate that is frustrations generated because of lack of children. Ishita bears trauma and humiliation due to biological malfunctioning. Her identity is questioned by the unjust social codes. Patriarchy directs and controls her thinking when she starts hating her body as: “If only she could tear out her whole reproductive system and throw it on the road. She hated her body, hated it. Everybody in the building must know why she had come back. Return to sender. Receipt for 5 lakhs attached” (Kapur’s *Custody* 127). Negative and hostile treatment towards Ishita brings the narrow thinking of patriarchal society towards the issue of infertility.

Nina’s marriage (*The Immigrant*) becomes a tangled mess because of Ananda’s infertile physical condition. Nina is doubly cursed as first, she is childless, and secondly the share of her husband’s blame comes to her credit. Ishita(*Custody*) is even divorced due to her infertile status. Sona and Ishita have to bear verbal assaults as if absence of motherhood is the sole failure of their lives. Shagun faces a terrible legal battle to maintain her motherhood as if after divorce even her kids are not her own. In Indian scenario, the female’s reproductive system decides the future of the concerned woman after marriage. A woman is counted respectable or unrespectable in terms of her child bearing capability. It means her identity is negated—such are the ways of patriarchal society. Religion also plays an important role here as Vedas also indoctrinate that woman’s role is accomplished only after assuming the duty of child birth that confirms the physical presence of a womb as an organ in female body not her heart or identity. This specific role of motherhood is expected clearly demarcating the presence of gender specific role assigned to women.

Acceptance of motherhood is also person specific, as Sona, being a traditional woman thinks her life can be complete only after the birth of a son whereas, Rupa and Nisha exhibit different perspectives towards their role in home. Rupa finds contentment in innovations with her business, while Nisha urges for freedom throughout her life. Despite individual difference, generally it is seen that priority of a girl is customised to rear patriarchal values—get married and bear children. Kasturi’s deteriorating physical condition has been a result of her continuous child bearing; unknowingly working as a vehicle of patriarchy, she does not attach concern to her health. Patriarchy has deep roots as it enjoys immense socio-religious sanction. Religion also gives supreme power to man and religious books eulogize male’s effort but for woman producing male progeny is taken as an important achievement of her life. Religious scriptures like *The Gita*, *The Ramayana*, *The Bible*, *The Quran* all approve of the hegemony of male Gods and stress on the essential need for woman for producing male heir to the family. The religious rites of marriage, birth and death relegate woman to secondary status as she is not included or

required in performing socio-religious ceremonies especially of last rites. The sound monetary status of Ishita's parents could not save her marriage. It is generally observed that family honour becomes the prime factor to preserve any marriage and this hollow sense of honour leads women from rebellion to oblivion. Virmati becomes the second mother of her own siblings and herself is deprived of maternal care. Her brothers are never given any responsibility regarding the care of siblings. Here Manju Kapur elucidates the facts and also reveals the naked truth that girls are allowed no childhood even in infancy as a girl-child's training of subordination starts right from her childhood, she is beaten into submission in her natal family. Whereas a boy's training prepares him to remain demanding and dominating throughout his life. Astha's initiation towards creative activity and participation in political activities is not welcomed. Hemant tries to circumscribe her activities up to home only and act as mere caretaker his children. Ironically, a man with foreign education does not encourage his wife to enter creative fields. Ananda also tries to tailor Nina's habits of eating, wearing to be in tune with Western style. Hardships at alien soil and domestic slavery is kept reserved only for a woman as her status is not of a living being, she is taken for granted for every change-induced, injected in her, not to seek permission nor have any regard for her disapproval. This forced set of rules of male hegemony ultimately chokes woman; so irked by wounds on ego and soul, she protests and this protest is given by chauvinist male. Cultural conditioning plays a dominant role in enhancing and complicating the tasks for women. Men altering familial traditions are not counted as disappointment while women are trapped in the name of religion, for the sake of their sex and also for the sake of duties forcefully imposed on them. Manju Kapur calls for a change in the attitude of man and society towards woman according to changing roles of woman and situations. The demanding world of patriarchy requires a woman to play various roles simultaneously. It is she who needs to adjust accordingly. Manju Kapur thinks and presents that woman can regain her status not by passive resistance only but by confronting all, developing an aptitude of survival.

Generally, in our society, mother's role and wife's roles are adored and appreciated; simultaneously a woman with a desire to propagate self-identity is neglected and suppressed in an effort to preserve false patriarchal culture. Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina and Shagun all are highly serious about their education and wield it as a cudgel against conventions and traditions but do follow the conventional path of marriage and motherhood. Virmati, bearing all sort of ill treatment, prepares her way to continue her education, and tries to save her daughter from choosing the same path of difficulties opted by her mother. Astha retaliates against patriarchy with her creative self by choosing the creative path of painting and writing. Nisha, in foreign territories, rejects all age-old bonds of marriage and false expectations of forced motherhood, starts her life afresh in a new manner. Shagun fulfils her long craving to live a liberated life by flinging divorce upon Raman. All the protagonists register their rejection towards arranged marriages and

display independent will towards liberty and equality. Patriarchy has no doubt, devised specific rules for women but Manju Kapur's protagonists work beyond set conducts and explore new territories and avenues for transformation. This transformed expression pushes them to wade through prohibited waters and gives them strength to doubt and question the conventional role for them asserting their desires. Astha confronts Hemant when he does not permit her for Ekta yatra. She readily faces his opposition and takes her independent decision to move further, despite his disapproval. Astha significantly remarks her anger: " Well, Astha was a woman, and she was sick of sacrifice she didn't want to be pushed around in the name of family. She was fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail. Excuse me, stop the juggernaut and let me off. I have had enough.(*Kapur's A Married Woman* 168)".

Shagun bravely encounters Raman for divorce issues, puts forward her views on free life frankly and takes her initiative. She rejects the popular prejudice against woman of being tied to only one relation with one man that may be satisfactory or not. Shagun asserts her ambitions and leaves behind the false morals imposed by the society. She indulges in relation with Ashok and structures new ideology of women's choice. Infidelity stigmatizes a woman in Indian culture but empowers her. Gender inequalities in the families keep the woman and children as a possession. Shagun alters her identity as a possession and rejects the false pattern of Indian society. As an outcome of globalisation, Shagun's modern views do not entertain Raman's stereotyped views towards his wife. She does not accept the domestic ideology that delimits her role as a woman and a mother. Shagun walks out of an oppressive marriage and discards the socio cultural norms by denying exemplary role of wife and mother. Shagun starts her life with Ashok expecting to lead a democratic and cooperative life where she can satisfy her interests. Virmati's struggle against patriarchal set up gives her courage to fight for her rights by means of education, for her marriage of her choice and for her rightful existence in the Professor's house after marriage. The turbulences of her life make her brave enough to encounter all the hostile conditions, especially the conditions rendering women down trodden in her own home of pre-independence era. Her acute struggle in that period which recommended minimum rights for women makes her more confident and also more rebellious. Nina's suppressed emotions unfurl her inner rebellion that burst out when she gets the revelation about Ananda's infidelity. Nina searches for her grounds on her own and leaves her ugly past behind. Her struggle is a bit more complicated from other protagonists as she has none with whom she can share her agonies or confide. But she makes this double isolation, her strength and moves forward to new life, veneer of patriarchy cracks down, with strong gesture. Though their role roles of being a mother choke their path of self identity for some time but ultimately they come out successfully. They make their children habitual about their journey towards self and move ahead with their dreams.

Manju Kapur deals with the emancipation that every woman aspires i.e. to take her decision herself, live her life by her own standards, not by some imposition on her. All her protagonists emancipate themselves from turbulent currents and tossy waves of life. It is unthinkable that in an independent nation sanctimonious hypocrisy of social values makes them slaves of destiny; in contradictory vein. Kapur presents her protagonists as rebels who aspire for some independence which is their right—yearning for freedom. The novelist deals with variety of frustrations of a woman which she undergoes and suffers as compulsions are imposed on her in name of destiny or because of secondary status of her gender in social perspective. It is established that in the Indian scenario woman's role is defined as a thing of possession and honour. All the concepts of honour, ignominy, responsibilities and familial values are associated with particularly women only in the Indian system. Custom, honour and hollow, misinterpreted values collaborate to ruin woman's liberty. All this become much more complicated after becoming a mother where she is expected to live as an ideal mother but not from father's side to indulge in child nurturing.

Manju Kapur emphasizes on the parochial nature of men over their wives as they subside their demands and keep them confined to domestic tasks. They imposed restrictions on them to circumscribe the scope of outdoor activities for them and in a way hurl hardship on them without expecting them to make any complaint. The most fascinating factor is not to remain categorized only in motherhood wherever she wants to continue her identity as a human being. She is being treated as a matter of maternal care only. Her wishes and dreams are oscillating between her duties and her desires. Subsiding her desires motherhood is hurled on her and she has to cope with her emotional stress individually. Manju Kapur suggests self healing for her protagonists to come out from her present status of over burdened social expectations. In Indian scenario this false motherhood is forced on her for the sake of customs and culture. Rather her dreams are pushed aside by giving her the brand name of holy mother who takes care of all demands of her children without complaining. Those women, who give more attention to their career and pay less attention to baby care, are entitled as cruel mothers. Ganga, Astha Nisha and Virmati are expected to give priority to their role of motherhood while Nina is expected to conceive child soon. Kapur unveils the harsh and double standard of society courageously where pleasure and control becomes necessary for man and simultaneously for a woman's desire for pleasure and control over her life becomes a sin.

Conclusion

Manju Kapur presents women breaking the old shackles of infidelity, infertility and subjugation of woman in motherhood, issue for women in general and empowers them by exploring new vistas. Asha Saharan observes: "The construction of 'female sexuality' and motherhood are discursive sites in which power fluctuates constantly and is appropriated and negotiated. The discourses surrounding motherhood and women's

sexuality remain deeply engaged with patriarchal-dominant economic and political interest” (66).

References

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