

# The Womanly Observation By Manju Kapur

Dr. Honey Sethi

Seema Dhillon

Abstract-Indian writing in English is a relatively-recent phenomena, as far as literature goes. Though one can trace such writers in India to a century back, Indian writing in English has come into force only in the last couple of decades or so. Some of these writers have achieved worldwide fame, some national, and others perhaps have to be content with a more constricted circle. The very definition of the adjective Indian here is hazy. Many of these writers neither live in India, nor are Indian citizens. To get around this haziness, I will cast my net as wide as possible and include all those writers who are related to India be it by origin, or the subject of their writings—whether they admit it or not, whether they like it or not! Indian women novelists have been portraying women in various manifestations. But recently, the remarkable range of India's most accomplished women writers of post colonial strand has brought a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters. Women writers as Kamala Markendaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Manju Kapur, Gita Hariharan and the others have intuitively perceived the gender issues upsetting women and presented women as an individual who fights against suppression and oppression of the patriarchy. The present paper analyses the patriarchal norms confronted by the women characters in Manju Kapur's novels. Kapur has presented the women of the 1940s, when women had no voice to assert their rights, most importantly the voice of the protagonist. She raises the voice against male chauvinism to claim the rights of economic independence. Kapur makes the woman a cult figure that fights against taboos, social and joint family restrictions and constraints laid by patriarchy in the tradition. A major preoccupation in recent Indian Women's writings has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship. In Indian culture and heritage, individualism, quest for identity, protests and concepts of rebelliousness have often remained alien ideas, as far as women were concerned. Women were not supposed to raise voices for their rights, protest against injustice or question the already existing beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. They have to merely exist subjected to the patriarchal system. Women have to be obedient, quiet, submissive, and passive not claiming any of their rights neither as women nor as human beings. Even the earlier Indian women novelists have been portraying woman as the silent sufferers, the upholder of traditional values and ethics, a strict observer of social taboos, an essence of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their successors, a being with no space for herself, a woman without an identity (rather identified as subordinates to men), a worshipper of their counterparts, unfortunate and ignorant about their rights as human and so on. Recently, fortunately there is a tremendous change in this trend, with the advent of feminism. Indian women writers have brought incredible transformation to conform a specific genre to explore the unexplored array of maladies; to reveal the explicit reality of the society and the plights of Indian women in the society. Women are no longer characterized to surrender, submit and suffer to martyrdom. Women novelists unveil the hidden secrets and enfold the deliberate denials that are refutable in today's context. A whole band of women novelists beginning with Ruth Prasad, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya and many others have highlighted significance of portraying woman as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the shackles of exploitation and oppression, awakening with a sense of identity, to assert their individuality. Their novels speak about women's frustrations, refusals, retaliations, and their breach of conventional expectations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**Manju Kapur** has joined the growing number of modern Indian Women writers who have significantly contributed to the progression of Indian fiction. Kapur is a post colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Her novels present the longing struggle of women to establish an identity. She has tried to make a space that women have to occupy in domestic relationships. Kapur remarks "the mother-daughter nexus is only one of the many manifestations of the Indian women's roles. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, ... in fact there are many aspects of a woman's life." Manju Kapur has presented a vivid portrayal of the women of 1940s and the events revolve around the backdrop of Indian Independence. Women's emancipation perhaps has its highpoint now but in pre-independence era the fight for autonomy and freedom was a combat in its early

stages. So, woman attempt to succeed in her fight to assert herself is to be esteemed for though she failed, she has made an attempt. She not only comes to value education and the higher things in life but also about the darker aspects of life. The endless vicissitudes of life makes her a matured woman. She crushes and defies the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life.

## II. BIOGRAPHY

**ManjuKapur** is an Indian novelist. ManjuKapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She graduated from the Miranda House University College for women and went on to take an MA at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and an M.Phil. at Delhi University. ManjuKapur is a professor of English where she is a teacher of English literature at her alma mater Miranda House College, Delhi. She has three daughters. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won the **1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize**, best first book, Europe and South Asia. ManjuKapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* earned her substantial success, both commercially and critically, in India as well as abroad. She teaches English at Delhi University under the name **ManjulKapurDalmia**. She studied and received an M.A. in 1972 from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, and an M. Phil from Delhi University. A **Feminist** tradition is strongly apparent in her novels. The search for control over one's destiny is the key theme. ManjuKapur speaks for the middle-class and even has been earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp-eyed, finely turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations.

## III. WORKS

ManjuKapur is the author of four novels. Her first, *Difficult Daughters*, won the **Commonwealth Prize** for First Novels (Eurasia Section) and was a number one bestseller in India. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was called 'fluent and witty' in the Independent, while her third, *Home*, was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in *The Sunday Times*. Her most recent novel, *The Immigrant*, has been long listed for the **DSC Prize** for South Asian Literature. She lives in New Delhi.

*Difficult Daughters*, Penguin India, 1998; Faber and Faber, 1998, ISBN 978-0-571-19289-2---The book is set during India's independence struggle and is partially based on the life of Kapur's own mother, Virmati (whose photograph, along with Kapur's father, is on the cover of the book). Virmati enters into a scandalous relationship with her married neighbour, the Professor. The relationship parallels India's battle for freedom, and eventually Virmati becomes the Professor's second wife. The book is set mostly in Amritsar and Lahore. The story, set during partition, revolves around Virmati who is caught in an illicit relationship with her married English professor. She gets pregnant with his baby and so the professor has to marry her and bring her home to stay with her first wife and children. This is a poignant tale of a lady who has to sacrifice her freedom for her love.

*A Married Woman*, India Ink, 2003; Faber and Faber, 2003, ISBN 978-0-571-21568-3---Asth, an educated, middle-class Delhi woman has everything she could ask for - children, a dutiful loving husband, and comfortable surroundings. But she ends up having a physical relationship with a much younger woman, Pipee, the widow of a political activist. Astha finally throws off the fear instilled in her by her parents and her husband.

*Home*, Random House India, 2006, ISBN 978-81-8400-000-9; Faber and Faber, 2006, ISBN 978-0-571-22841-6---ManjuKapur's third novel is an engrossing story of family life amid the bustle and commerce of the BanwariLal Cloth Shop. When their traditional Delhi business - selling saris - being threatened by advent of jeans and pre-stitched salwarkameezes, the whole family knows it's time for change. So begins a series of struggles - to have children, to find education, to find peace.

*The Immigrant*, Random House, India, 2008, ISBN 978-81-8400-048-1; Faber And Faber, 2009, ISBN 978-0-571-24407-2---A girl is married to a loner and moves to Canada to be with him. But she finds that her marriage is not what she thought it would be. Her husband suffers from sexual inadequacy and the distances come between them and cause distress in their marriage.

*Custody*, Faber & Faber, 2011, ISBN 978-0-571-27402-4---When Shagun leaves her husband Raman for another man, a bitter legal battle begins. The custody of their two children is at stake - and Shagun must

decide how much she wants to pay for freedom. Raman's new wife is unable to conceive and finds happiness by being a step mother. But when the courts threaten the security of her new family, she decides she has to fight for it.

#### IV. AWARDS AND HONORS

2011: DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, short-list, *The Immigrant*

1999: Commonwealth Writers' Prize, best first book, Europe and South Asia, *Difficult Daughters*

**ManjuKapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India, like ShashiDespande, Arundhati Roy, GithaHariharan, Shoba De** on whom the image of the suffering but stoic women eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had, a significant impact. They invigorated the English language to suit representations and narration of what they felt about their women and their lives in post modern India. In a culture where individualism and prated have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus. These modern-day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes without adopting feminist postures. **ManjuKapur's novels acquire a significant new meaning** when read in the point of view of crisscross dogmas of cultural critical thinking. ManjuKapur's novels furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the importation of tradition. However, Mrs. Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of Independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains unfinished battle. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more brunt's and social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased in lien of their sex. The life women Lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of ManjuKapur. Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, despite basic harmony needs to be tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian Society varies from the one in the west. ManjuKapur has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists. The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent suffer and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. Kamala Markandaya, NayantaraSehgal, Anita Desai, ShashiDespande and many women 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 is trying to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. Since Gandhiji helped the women 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. Yet writing in 1998, ManjuKapur, 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.

**Her novel *A Married Woman*** is beautifully, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious disorder. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a description of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas, and marital bliss and the woman's role at home is a central focus, it is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. ManjuKapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, was set against the historical background of India's partition. It is the story of a young woman who falls in love with a married man, a hitherto condemned passion in her narrow social circle. Kapur's preoccupation with the female revolt against deep-rooted family values and the institution of marriage is followed through to her second novel, *A Married Woman*.

In depicting the inner subtlety of a woman's mind, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Most of all, Kapur manages to blend the personal with the external. She speaks as some-one who has lived through the unrest of the communal riots, which in some way affected the lives of all Indians.

They were a major historical event and Kapur has knotted them with simplicity and understanding into the lives of Astha and Pipeelika (characters in *Married Woman*). She shows India which is relevant both to those who stayed in their country to face the aggression of Western influences and heightened competition, and also those who opted to view the country from Western climates.

The novels are a kind of narrative on a woman's incompatible marriage and resultant frustration and the contemporary political turmoil in its historical context. Her novels explore the complex terrain of the Indian family and reveals many issues that are deep rooted within the family the revolt against the age-old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage; and lastly the women's struggle for her survival.

In the **first phase**, the women's question emerged essentially in the context of the identity crisis of the new educated middle class. ManjuKapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunged into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds. The novelist has portrayed her protagonists as a woman caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. The writer addresses many issues that are related to the middle class women. Whether or not a girl has the right to make her own choices in life is an issue dragged this way and that, for a long time in our country. Facing equal assault from the chauvinists who declare that woman's place is inside the house, and the feminists who condemn the idea of taking the husband's surname after marriage, the idea finds a middle path here. There is after all a difference between possessing and protecting. The book deals with the idea of education for a girl for her sake, not just to enable her to land a suitable match. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and many others 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 is trying to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. Since many social reformer helped the women 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. Yet writing in 1998, ManjuKapur, 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.

The novels are a sincere confession of a woman about her personality cult in the personal allegory of a bad marriage. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. As a writer of new generation in an atmosphere of the nation's socio-political flux, Kapur has recorded the truth in her fictive narrative. With zeal to change the Indian male perception, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph.

**Her novels** deal with women's issues in the present context. It is an honest and seductive story of love, passion and attachment set at the time of political and religious turmoil in India. Driven by a powerful physical relationship with a much younger woman, the main character of the novel risks losing the acquisitions of her conventional marriage and safe family. The novels raise the controversial issue of homosexual relationship in a challenging way. After all gay and lesbian relationships are not mere fancies. This is getting more and more visible in modern societies though we may or may not accept it. In *A Married Woman* (2002), her second novel, ManjuKapur frankly depicts the love affair between two women, but less attention has been paid to the historical and political context in which that relationship develops. The tale that thus unfolds powerfully explores how, in a still-traditionalist India entering the age of globalization, evolving personal relations on the micro social level are shaped by wider historical forces, yet can in their turn reshape that same history in an adumbration, potentially utopian even if partial and temporary, of new and more diverse forms of human relationship. In her interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur says, **"it is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man."**<sup>1</sup>

ManjuKapur, being a novelist primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class —The female protagonists of her 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 database and enslave her mind.<sup>2</sup>

A woman is a woman, and a woman she must remain but not man's shadow self, an appendage, an auxiliary and the unwanted and neglected other. A woman is held to represent the otherness of man, his negative. ManjuKapur supported this idea that a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position in our society. **Man can think of himself without woman. She can not think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees.....she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex.....absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential.**<sup>3</sup>

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. However, Mrs. Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. We see the emergence of new women in ManjuKapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber doll 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. The protagonists know she can not depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on her own. In spite of getting education and freedom the woman protagonist of ManjuKapur's novel does not blossom into new woman in the real sense. Though she dare to cross one patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are curbed and all they do is adjust, compromise and adapt.<sup>4</sup>

More than half of the population of the world is made of woman but she is not treated on par with man despite innumerable evolutions and revolutions. She has the same mental and moral power, yet she is not recognized as his equal. In such conditions, the question of searching her identity is justified. Actually in this male dominated society, she is wife, mother, sister and home maker. She is expected to serve, sacrifice, submit and tolerate each ill against her peacefully. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. The illustration of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari are always expected to be followed by her. But the noticeable point is that these ideal women existed only in epics, they were princesses and queens and much far from the pains and sufferings in modern world in which modern woman has no identity of her own. She lives for others and breathe for others. And the situation becomes more deadly when we take it in Indian context where women must defer to her husband and make the marital home pleasant for him.

In this context, Indian women novelists are gaining grounds worldwide and winning critical appraisal and international recognition. Now their work is no more considered as something derogatory, melodramatic or sub-stuff. The glaring cause of their success as novelist lies in the fact that they are born story-teller and they are endowed with the gift of delving deep into the workings of human mind and heart with sympathy, sensitivity and understanding. But there is also the common element of conflict of values and fighting between different ways of life. Although, the quest for self, especially in the life of woman has become a much debatable phenomena, as long as this term is growing old, it is losing its authenticity. It is occasionally misinterpreted by literati of the world. No one can deny the fact that women are treated as no entity several times in their life, their sentiments and emotions are mostly ignored but as far as their honesty to themselves is concerned they must be vigilant for their chastity and responsibilities.

The novels of ManjuKapur voice well the sentiments of women and their self-introspections. **Virmati**, (*Difficult Daughters*) **Astha**(*A Married Woman*), **Nisha**(*Home*) and **Nina**(*Custody*), all are searching for their grounds interestingly from a wrong threshold. All of them fall in love first, and the search for the self-identity becomes the second thought. The facts raised by ManjuKapur are worth research and inquiry and through (Nisha, Shakuntala and Rupa) the exemplary figures, she presents an ideal image of women who amid all thick and thins maintain their chastity and humanity and do not leave anyone destitute.

## V. CRITICAL RECEPTION AND CONCLUSION

When we conclude the study, we find that ManjuKapur is one of the brightest stars of Indian Women Writers of English, joining **Githa Hariharan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Mridula Garg**, etc. a very important and old critic of Indian writing in English remarks about the use of the English language, "The fascination of Indian writing in English language, "The fascination of Indian writing in English lies...in the phenomenon... of literary creativity in a language other than the surrounding mother tongue." Manjukapur has left her own mark on English novels. All these novelists have tried and been successful to portray today's woman who has turned and thrown the mantle of tradition, culture, patriarchy and social customs. The novel presents Manjukapur's understanding of human characters and her maturity as a novelist.

Manjukapur's novel reveals the life of women, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival. With education they become aware of their self reliance which is proved in concern with new women."Assimone de Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as feminine "Allen and Barbara in their essay, ***Why Men Don't Listen & Women Can't Read Maps*** say: All things are not equal, men and women are different. Not better or worse - different (Allan & Barbara,2001:pp3.5). So, women were suffering from economic and socio-cultural disadvantages in the male governed society. The society was patronized by patriarchy. The women were silent and remained only as rubber dolls for others to move as they wanted. They had been deprived of their basic rights, their aspirations to their individuality and self-reliance. ManjuKapur is quite happy to be dubbed a 'chronicler of Indian families,' but do feel free to choose any label that will float your boat. **"My own feeling is, describe me any way you like, as long as I am relevant, as long as I am read, I don't really care... ..Families reflect all of society – social mores, cultural trends, gender relations, class equations – all of them are seen brilliantly in the novel,"** says **Manju**. The novels appeal to her not only as a writer, but as a teacher as well.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Feministic Voices in ManjuKapoor's A Married Woman By. Dr.Ram Sharma,
- [2] Simone de Beauvoir, Selden, 1988, p.534.
- [3] Beauvaur, Simone, The Second Sex Tran H.M. ParshleyHarmondsworth 1971-London Pan Books 1988.Carbyn Heiburn : Marriage and Contemporary Fiction, Critical Inquiry 5 No.2 (Winter 197)
- [4] Kapur, Manju. Difficult Daughters.Penguin Books. New Delhi.1998 and 1999
- [5] Verma, M.R and A.K.Sharma . Reflections on Indian English Fiction.New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors . New Delhi,2004.
- [6] Prasad, Amar Nath. Indian Women Novelists in English. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors . New Delhi ,2001.
- [7] Roy, Anuradha. Patterns of Feminist Consciousness.Prestige Books. New Delhi,1999.
- [8] 5.jaidevProblematizing Feminism, Gender and Literature, ed., IqbalKaur, Delhi : B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1992.
- [9] 6. Kumar, Gajendra. Indian English Literature: A New Perspective. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2001.
- [10] Vandita Mishra comments in The Pioneer: The Pioneer. New Delhi: 1 August, 1998.
- [11] Rollason, Christopher. Women On The Margins: Reflections On ManjuKapur's Difficult Daughters. January 2004. 26 June 2010.
- [12] Feministic Voices in ManjuKapoor's A Married Woman By. Dr.Ram Sharma,
- [13] ManjuKapur : A Married Women New Delhi : India Ink, 2002.
- [14] Kapur, Manju. 2006. Home, Random House India.Lapis Lazuli –An International Literary Journal / Vol.II/ Issue I /SPRING 2012 ISSN 2249-4529
- [15] <http://www.pintersociety.com>
- [16] A Married Woman by ManjuKapurFaber , pp272
- [17] Isabel Owen, 29.01.04
- [18] Dr. SheebaAzhar& Dr. Syed AbidAli,AssistantProfessor,Department of English,University of Dammam,Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Email: atif254@gmail.comSunday, June 6, 2010
- [19] Ashok, Kumar. Social Web and Cry of the Self: A Critical Analysis of ManjuKapur's A Married Women.
- [20] Poojatolani. 10 Aug. 2004. 25 January 2009.

- [21] Rollason, Christopher. [http://rollason.seilkilos.com.ar/DifficultDaughters\\_en.pdf](http://rollason.seilkilos.com.ar/DifficultDaughters_en.pdf). Monday January 2009.
- [22] Shrivastava, Shilpi Rishi. Feminist Consciousness in ManjuKapur's Novels
- [23] Singh, Jai Arjun. "<http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2008/08/meeting-with-manju-kapur.html>." August 2008. Monday January 2009.
- [24] Home, ManjuKapur, ISBN-10:0571228437, ISBN-13 : 978-05712284302. <http://Literaryindia.com3>.
- [25] In Academics, Series:ManjuKapur: Keeping it in the Family What They Read, Writers on December 7, 2011 at 2:48 am