



Against the Backdrop of Traditions: A Study of Manju Kapur's Heroines

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Abstract:

The current research paper aims to examine Manju Kapur's novels, specifically *Difficult Daughters* (1998), which won her the Commonwealth Prize in the Eurasia Section, *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), and *Custody* (2011), with the goal of examining the role of her heroines against the backdrop of the traditions and

conventions of the male dominated society, in Manju Kapur's novels. The aim of this research paper is to look at how Manju Kapur portrays the difference between traditional and modern values and how her heroines make their independent ways through the adverse conditions laid by conventional Indian societies.

Keywords: *Conflict, Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Indianization And Survival*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian Writing in English developed in various phases: Imitation, Indianization and Experimentation. The pioneers in the field of Indian writing in English were Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, S.K. Ghose, Toru Dutt and Ramesh chandra Dutt. Though fiction was to become the dominant genre in Indian English literature, it was actually the last to make a beginning. It is in this area that the Indian writers in English have made the most significant contributions. Every age witnesses a tussle between tradition and modernity. From R. K. Narayan to the post Indian English Fictionists have felt the upsurge of inner conflict between consciousnesses of tradition with the consciousness of modernism. Most of the female novelists also have graphically presented the conflict of tradition and modernity with the support of their writings.

2. DISCUSSION

The transition of Indian fiction from tradition to modernity is portrayed by Indian woman writers. The research depicts how the portrayal of tradition has undergone a change, the conflict between tradition and modernity, why women writers have moved away from the traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women towards conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and how in contrast to earlier novels, female characters assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. The novels emerging in the last decade furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of modern psyche and bent for revolt. This struggle is evident in so many

women writers in India. This conflict of tradition and modernity is also presented by Manju Kapur in her fictional work. Manju Kapur has well portrayed the irritation, anguish and travails of Indian middle-class women who are at a loss to condemn social convention and traditions. Although they try their best to find place in family and society, reach nowhere because of moral imbalance and unnatural wishes.

Difficult Daughters (1998) located against the backdrop of India in 1940's as a strange story of mother daughter bond. The continuity of conflict between tradition and modernity in the women of three generations from Kasturi to Ida, where Kasturi is presented as traditional symbol who thinks that marriage is the ultimate aim for girls and education is prerequisite for marriage. But Virmati the symbol of conflict has passion for knowledge and yearns for study and she revolts against the traditional symbol. So, she is branded as Difficult Daughter. But her love for married professor dooms her career and her married life is disaster as she has to bear the grunt of second wife, sequestered with mother-in-law, co-wife and stepchildren. She uses advanced education as an escape route. It is true her "Education led to Independence and loose conduct." The modern symbols in this novel are Shakuntala, Swarnlata and Ida.

The novel *A Married Woman* (2003) deals with tradition versus no tradition, factual history versus imaginary history. This novel depicts how the fictional work deals with historical background where the theme of lesbianism has been dealt dexterously. Astha is the uneasy result of traditional upbringing mixed with western education. She is under the voyage struggling to find her identity. Traditional concept of woman is that her place is in home only. Although she marries Hemant –Foreign return, who in the beginning seem to be the man with modern thoughts but gradually he presents a different picture for whom birth of boy is necessary. The Indian discrimination against gender is exposed. The exploitation of woman is depicted where her life is considered only to serve. Astha could not bear this mental pain which results in serious headaches. She joins job to provide escape from humdrum life and financial security also, but no recognition is given to her at home. She finds companionship in Aiyaz who praises her literary attributes but he is killed in riots. This void was filled by his wife and both develop lesbian relation. But ultimately, she has to return back to her roots of home.

In *The Home* (2006), Nisha is considered as the best example of traditional and modern values. She follows traditional path as forced by her mother. But her entrepreneur spirit instigates her to start boutique business, which is a huge success. Nisha is portrayed as an individual woman who tries to occupy her own space at home and society. She is the representative of new woman who tries to assert same status with man and applies her power and capabilities to be known as a successful businesswoman. Her marriage to Arvind and birth of twins completes her life. She feels contented in end. The symbols of tradition and modernity are discussed. The novel *Home* moves forward through the conflicting polarities of tradition and modernity, poverty and prosperity, man woman concerned. It critically examines joint family system and studies the traditional evils like dowry, system of horoscope, the curse of barrenness and rigid caste structure affecting the Indian society.

In her novel *Custody* (2011), she examines how a modern middle-class woman fulfills her individual dreams instead of familial fulfillment. The novel employs the life of a changing woman in a time of increased globalization and how it narrates the various intricacies around the dissolution of marriage and family in modern India. Shagun the modern symbol leaves

family and children to satisfy her dreams not even thinking about her children, Arjun and Roohi. The two children become pawns through which parents lash their fury on each other. The children become plaything, whoever willed took them and as the novel titled Custody, the two children's custody is fought in court, presenting the legal system of our country. The traditional symbol Ishata's marriage is dissolved due to infertility depicting the evil curse, that woman is considered as child bearing instrument otherwise she is not required. Her meeting with Raman leads her to think that their situation is same and the spark of love is ignited in them, with the blessing that her motherhood feeling is satisfied by taking care of Roohi. She presents the epitome of tradition, a true picture of love and sacrifice.

The four women characters Virmati, Astha, Nisha, and Shagun are under psychological journey, searching a place for them in the male dominated society. Social and moral values are like bondage to them. All her protagonists are in the quest for self-definition and self-exploration. The concept of self in the creations of Manju Kapur reveals that the women in her novels seem to be the personification of new women who have been carrying the burden of inhibition since ages and want to be free now. The writer clearly shows the dilemma of women who carry the burden of being. The literary geniuses' who were born and nourished in the invisible shackles of tradition tried later on to break them and voiced their notions in a more liberated and outspoken manner in their literary works under the –influence of modernism. It has, however, been realized that neither tradition nor modernity can survive individually. Manju Kapur has successfully portrayed the conflict of tradition and Modernity in her characters. The specialty is that her female characters are only involved in clash against male dominated traditional world but they have also suffered this conflict. The protagonist in Manju Kapur's novels have imaginative mind, longings, aspirations to soar high and high, the impressionism of new ages and incessant urge to establish identity have been the cause of revolt against traditions and have added the conflict against tradition versus modernity. Her characters from Virmati to Shagun break away the social norms.

3. CONCLUSION:

The paper 'Against The Backdrop of Tradition: A study of Manju Kapur;s Heroines concludes that modernity in India has not replaced tradition largely or decisively. Indian tradition is ancient, long and haloed. Many western and eastern spiritual personalities and institutions have made appreciative interpretations of Indian culture and traditions giving them a new lease of life. The conflict of tradition and modernity is deliberately not settled by Manju Kapur as this is still a debatable and an unanswered question among academics whether who is right or wrong in our society, yet is beyond doubt that one who raises a voice against odds has to suffer and one who surrenders also has to suffer admitting it as their misfortune.

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