

Broken Marriages and Crumbling Couples in Manju Kapur's Novels

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Abstract:

In the traditional social surroundings in which we live, marriage is supposed to be the ultimate objective and no women can get away from it. As we have witnessed time and again that Manju Kapur has proved her expertise every single time when she portrays our Indian traditional culture at its best. She is a feminist writer and all her novels deal with the problems related to women, be it education or marriage, be it suffering or identity crisis, be it submission or liberation. Kapur's novels are wonderful fusion of tradition and modernity. As a feminist, Kapur's portrayal of women characters in various shades is truly praise worthy. She skillfully makes a study of traditional women who are compelled or sometimes willing to conform to the social patriarchal norms. On the contrary, she has portrayed even those women who are non-conformist and protest against the male domination and unequal treatment towards women. Both types of Kapur's women are presented in the novel as traditional mothers as well as modern daughters. Mothers, who can think of nothing else except their daughter's perfect match at proper time and age. The present paper attempts to explore the concept of marriage and grounds of its failure in Manju Kapur's novels.

Keywords: Marriage, Education, Culture, Suffering, Identity crisis, Submission, Liberation, Patriarchal norms, Traditional, Modern, Unequal treatment.

Introduction:

All the protagonists of Manju Kapur are middle class educated women who have their dreams, hopes and aspirations. They long for a life full of happiness and self-respect. They believe in their existence and expect an equal treatment from the society. We often see them struggling to establish themselves in the patriarchal set up. They are the women of strong will power to soar high in search of their self-identity. These aspirations make them bold enough to revolt against traditions and break away the social norms. Kapur has portrayed them as her 'new women' who are not ready to be toyed in the name of so-called tradition, culture and patriarchy. They believe that education, career and self-identity are more important than marriage and having children.

Nevertheless, the heart of a mother will always be the same whether she is traditional or modern. She is always seen anxious about her young daughter's marriage. In the very first novel of Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, we have seen Kasturi (Virmati's mother) remarking, "Still, it is the duty of every girl to get married" (15). In *A Married Woman* too, we find the same kind of mother's concern. Astha's mother convinces her to marry as she believes that marriage of a daughter is a sacred duty of the parents. She says:

When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastras say, if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth? (1)

In her third novel *Home* also, Ms. Kapur portrays the character of Sona who believes that to fast and please Gods and Goddesses for achieving a god husband is more important than studies for Nisha. This clearly shows the typical Indian traditional mother's mentality. The concept of marriage continues with the same anxiety of a mother in Kapur's fourth novel *The Immigrant*, whose thirty-year-old daughter Nina is still unmarried. The widowed mother of Nina craves day and night to see her well settled. She worships Gods and Goddesses, does fast on Tuesday and frequently visits the astrologers to know her daughter's fate and conditions of stars. Moreover, in Kapur's fifth novel *Custody* also, we

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see, how much Ishita's mother is eager to get her divorced daughter remarry Raman, the same fated man.

The study of marriages in the aforesaid novels of Manju Kapur is very much evident in B.S. Jadhav's note in his article "Matrimonial Discourse in Manju Kapur":

In *Difficult Daughters*, for Kasturi it is the responsibility, for Virmati it is to love and attachment, and for Ida it is to carry the line. In *A Married Woman*, Astha's parents want to marry her because they consider it as their duty. In *Home*, Nisha is married with Arvind only to serve his family. In the immigrant, Nina's mother wants to marry her daughter so that she can get security and stability. And in *Custody*, for Shagun and Raman it is the standard line of beauty and brain, for Ishita and Suryakanta to be happy, for Shagun and Ashok to follow the passion, lastly to Raman and Ishita it is the adjustment.

Through all her novels, every single time Kapur proves her craftsmanship in consummate relationship. She understands very well the inner psyche of human characters, All the marriages in her novels take place in different circumstances. It is noticeable that marriage plays an essential role in Kapur's novels. Marriage – a very serious issue for a girl in our Indian society. Murli Manohar has rightly observed, "One of the main problems for educated women is marriage. Most of their problems are related to marriage". These above lines are quite accurate for Kapur's novels because we have already witnessed that though the marriages take place, they do not succeed. For one reason or another, they result into suffering and exploitation of the female characters. Generally, marriage is supposed to be a strong bond that joins two people forever. It is a sacred bond that gives strength to each other. Marriage requires love, respect, trust and mutual understanding to be successful. In Kapur's novels nothing is there to make the marriage complete. We observe that Kapur's female protagonists are always honest and sincere in their role as a lover or a wife. They are never seen irresponsible or careless and always perform their duty flawlessly. In return, they expect nothing but only the love and care what they deserve. But unfortunately, their partners intoxicated with their male ego do not understand even the genuine feelings of their better halves. All the more, they never estimate them equal. This is the reason, Kapur's women turn out to be rebellious. The marriage is a multidimensional thing. Jasbir Jain rightly remarks in this context:

Marriage is a bond to many a woman, but it is not necessarily the same kind of bond. Some are protected by it, some create their own space, others are irked by the dependence and the bondages it imposes on them. Yet marriage is valued by society because widowhood circumscribes a woman's life port and is considered inauspicious. (2003 :82)

Manju Kapur succeeds in presenting the real picture of woman in the male dominated society. Kapur's female protagonists are educated aspiring individuals. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant towards them. The same thing happens with Virmati, the protagonist of Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters*. She is well educated and well settled in life still she marries the professor and becomes his second wife. She revolts against her family and social norms, yet she is not satisfied with her marital life till her last breath. She never gets value and place in the family that she expects and deserves. Eventually, she succumbs to the situation. But the most surprising thing is that she herself teaches her daughter Ida to follow the same patriarchal norms. However, Ida is portrayed as a 'new woman' of Kapur, never ready to bow down in front of the age-old norms of male dominated society. Similarly, in Kapur's second novel *A Married Woman* we find Astha, the protagonist, fighting against the same male ego of her husband Hemant. Consequently, she involves herself in politics as well as indulges in a lesbian

relationship with Pipeelika. It is almost like a revenge on Hemant from Astha's side. But, soon Astha realizes and withdraws herself. After all she is Kapur's real woman - wants freedom and self-identity but living in society not away from society. In Kapur's fourth novel the immigrant, the protagonist Nina, a thirty-year-old English professor marries a Canadian NRI Ananda and moves Canada leaving her job and her widow mother alone in Delhi. From the very moment she arrives in the new country, she has to fight a long battle to prove herself as an individual, to stand on her own feet in a new country. Moreover, she feels deceived when she knows about her husband's sexual weakness wrapped in hypocritical male ego. Further, entangled in an extramarital affair she feels liberated as well as avenged of Ananda's disloyalty. Eventually, she leaves Ananda, to search her individual identity by her own self. Where will she go, is not clear but Kapur says:

When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. (the immigrant, P. 330)

The fifth novel of Manju Kapur *Custody* reveals "the unimagined uncertainties of matrimony". Shagun the protagonist, after eleven years of her marriage with Raman feels dissatisfied with her life and therefore asks Raman for divorce. In the book Manju Kapur presents her own modern definition of marriage:

Marriage is when two people decide to live together forever. Should they change their minds they go to court and get their marriage cancelled. Finished. Divorced. They become strangers; sometime they never see each other again (*Custody*, 326)

Hence, we see that in all the novels, reasons of the failure of marriages are all the same but its consequences are varied from one another. The roots of suffering are the same with diverse nature. All Kapur's women are in search of self-identity. Through the concept of self-exploration in her novels Manju Kapur discloses that her protagonists are 'new women' who want to be free from age old traditional cage. However, one most significant thing is worth mentioning here that though Kapur's women dream of soaring high, ultimately, they come back on their own land, that is family. After all, they are Kapur's women. They realize that modernity and liberty do not mean adulteration.

Conclusion:

Thus, Kapur's novels deal with the complexities of man – woman relationship in the contexts of marriage. Her protagonists expect that the marriage would give them respect, security and status in the society. But the scenario was quite different. Here, Manju Kapur succeeds in presenting the real picture of women in the male dominated society who tries to emerge as a 'new woman'. In the context of women's liberation, Shubha Tiwari rightly holds the view:

Indian women novelists can be said to be highly conscious of the women's liberation movement. By and large they have portrayed women and their stories and consciousness of the injustice being meted out to women by society. These novels have a feminist undercurrent. Usually these novels have a woman as the central character. They discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. (Indian Women Writer, P.20)

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