



ASSESSING MANJU KAPUR'S FEMINISTIC EXPRESSIONS THROUGH THE READINGS OF PATRIARCHAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

In spite of heralding a globalized era of emancipation, still the complete freedom of women is yet to taste in the traditional Indian social milieu. The patriarchal societies have a great influence on families especially on women who continuously strive for their independence in the modern era. The globalization and technology preaches women to be superior rather than to be inferior beings. But age old traditions and aeons of suppression don't allow them to come out of male domination and at the same time cannot agree to accept their oppression. Women suffering from this kind of repressions come out with various problems. It's rather difficult for them to revolt against traditional methods as they will be contradicted by the society. If they accept it their life becomes disastrous. It's the duty of the modern writers to focus on the feministic points of view. This paper deals Manju Kapur's feministic avenues taking *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* and *Home* into discussions.

Keywords: *Feminism, Patriarch society, Women Emancipation, Male Dominance*

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INTRODUCTION

There is naturally a difference between women of the past and today. Women of the present generations are more frustrated and independent than the women of the past. Education has brought about many changes in their thinking, attitudes and life style. They are not much interested to be the part of the suffocated joint family systems where the power lies in the hands of the head of the family. Betty Freidan asserts: "Many young women-certainly not all – whose education plunged them into a world of ideas feel stifled in their homes.

They find their routine lives out of joint with their training. Like 'Shut-ins' they feel left out'. The

image of modern Indian women has changed making them autonomous beings where sex is no more a taboo. As the movement of feminism started in the West demanding equal status with men to women in all the socio cultural fields, women opposed malist ideas. P.M.Nayak makes an apt statement: 'From Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollenstonecraft, from Simone de Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, women have been demanding their rights in a male centric world.' Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande protagonists are self-confident and assertive, challenging the emerging feminism and rejecting the traditional methods. Sushila Singh



expressed her clear view on raise of feministic voices: "Feminism as a philosophy of life, seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep-seated causes of women's oppression.... Feminism as philosophy of reform envisages profound changes in traditional social structures such as in the family."

THE CONCEPT 'PATRIARCHY': AT A GLANCE

'Patriarchy' is often used term in everyday conversation. The question here is "what is patriarchy?" In casual conversation, whether in English or any other language the term implies "male domination", "male prejudice (against women)", or more simply "male power". Put simply, the term means "the absolute rule of the father or the eldest male member over his family". Patriarchy is thus the rule of the father over all women in the family and also over younger socially and economically subordinate males. Literally, patriarchy means rule by the male head of a social unit (like family, tribe). The patriarch is typically a societal elder who has legitimate power over others in the social unit. However, since the early twentieth century, feminist writers have used the term patriarchy as a concept to refer to the social system of masculine domination over women. Patriarchy has been a fundamentally important concept in gender studies. Feminist writers have developed a number of theories that aim to understand the bases of women's subordination to men. The term patriarchy is not only a descriptive term that explains how different societies construct male authority and power, but also become an analytical category. These changes of the use of the term patriarchy from a descriptive to an analytical category took place in the 1970s, in a specific global historical context of feminist political and intellectual culture. In the course of time this later led to the development of the discipline of women's studies or gender studies, when women agitated for their rights. At the universities women demanded that their experiences and points of view be taken seriously that patriarchy emerged as a way of both describing and explaining the world. Since this time, patriarchy has been used critically to explain the main components of authority and power in any social system.

Patriarchy automatically privileges men over women such that women have little or no claims to material, sexual and intellectual resources of the society. That is, in a patriarchal society women have to struggle to be educated, to have property or to make choices regarding marriage and other aspects of life. For men, these resources are a matter of right and can make choices that affect their lives. Let us take some examples to clarify the way in which Patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and comes from the Greek Word, "father of a race" or "chief of a race, patriarch", which is a compound of (*patria*), "lineage, descent" ("father") and (*arkhō*), "I rule". Patriarchy is the male domination suppressing the female identity. As sociologist Sylvia Walby points out rightly the position of women in the patriarchal society in all the various forms of cultures. Women are completely denied from their powers where men exercise their powers as the head of the families.

Men are not subjected to any work of bringing up the children or doing the household work, where the society ponders the duty on women. Women are not equally paid to men, though the working hours and the works are same. Women are treated negatively, abused and represented oddly by the media and the society. It's not only related to one concept, in all the fields like business, politics, education men are more dominant than women. The idea that men can only succeeded in business or politics has crept into the minds of the people that they are not in a position to accept the female portrait in the place of male. Matriarchal society is quite opposite to patriarchal society where the power resides in the hands of the women.

Primitive cultures come under matriarchal and Christian societies serve as a best example for patriarchal societies. Matriarchal societies are harmless and provide security to women. Women of today are not less in any event when compared to women. For example when politics is taken into consideration woman had ruled the country as a Prime Minister, Chief Minister and President successfully contributing their worth to the society. In the field of business there are women who are successfully managing their business and are able to make crores of turn over equal to men. Being a girl or



a boy doesn't matter much, but what matters more is the efficiency and potentiality of an individual that builds up a strong nation. We respect our traditions, cultures, *purnas*, but what about women? The recent atrocities against women are making us to think over the protection of women irrespective of the patriarchal or matriarchal society they live in. Being a girl or a boy doesn't matter much, but what matters more is the efficiency and potentiality of an individual that builds up a strong nation. We respect our traditions, cultures, *purnas*, but what about women? The recent atrocities against women are making us to think over the protection of women irrespective of the patriarchal or matriarchal society they live in.

Manju Kapur, a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi, has emerged as the most powerful feminist writer in Indian English Fiction. Her novels deal with feminine sensibility, women's suppression and their challenges for their space in the male dominated society. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* published in 1998 received the Commonwealth Award for the Eurasian region. The novel clearly demonstrates the conditions of patriarchal families during 1940s when the country was trying to liberate from the clutches of English people. She shows a parallel relation of her Protagonist Virmati who was at the same time trying to free herself from the constraints of the patriarchal family traditions. Virmati, born and brought up as the eldest daughter in a conservative family naturally should imbibe the rules of female oppression, like her mother Kasturi expects her to be a good daughter, wife and a mother. The only aim of an Indian mother is the female child should only learn to manage the household as she is not fit to do other things. Kasturi learns how to cook and manage the household work, but Virmati turns her attention towards education. Virmati becomes a rebel character in her house as she falls in love with the professor, who was already married and had a child too. The entire family feels as an offense and tries to bring her out of it. But naturally fate cannot be changed and Virmati eventually marries the professor. She was not treated as the member of the

house when she comes to see her father's dead body.

Virmati was influenced by her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntla leads an independent life of her own, struggling for the country's independence, but Virmati brings a father as the son-in-law of the family, ruining the independence of her status as a single wife. Though the professor loves her he never gets ready to marry her. He has his own apprehensions about traditions of marrying but not loving. Poor Virmati was caught in a web between the professor and the family. Kasturi whose job was only to give birth to children absorbed herself in the patriarchal family system spoiling her health and transferring her responsibilities to her eldest daughter. Virmati could not receive any kind of attention or affection from her mother. Her mother's only concern was Virmati's care towards her children but not Virmati's education. "At times Virmati yearned for affection for some sign that she was special" (6). Lala Diwan Chand was a true patriarch who insisted his family members to act upon his wish. Only Lajwanti, his eldest daughter-in-law dared to speak to him and pressurized him to construct separate houses at Lepel Griffin Road, which in one way ruined the reputation of the family. Her mother always wants to be secured near her father-in-law Lala Diwan Chand. She says to Virmati to be grateful to her grandfather and father, who permitted her to study further. "They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you" (54).

Though Lala Diwan Chand could digest his granddaughter's suicide attempt, as the head of the family he didn't take any kind of violent action against her. But they couldn't grasp Virmati's independent decision of marrying the Professor and son and father both left the world unable to bear the black mark on their family. Professor's mother, who was the head of her family in one way, can be considered as matriarchy tried to prevent the professor from marrying Virmati as he was married and was also the father of two children. But her matriarchal powers couldn't work out near the son, but only to exercise her powers near her first daughter-in-law Ganga. The matriarchal power continues in the life of Ida, Virmati's only daughter.



She says "The only thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (1). She was naturally more dependent than her mother. What Kasturi expected Virmati to be, Virmati expected the same for her daughter. She was worried about Ida's future. Her only hope was again a good husband, children for Ida. Ida complains about Virmati saying "My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she said it was for my own good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes.' (279).

Unfortunately Ida had no daughter; if she has she will continue the same in future expecting like Kasturi's mother, Kasturi and Virmati about their daughters. Otherwise the girl could have been one more injured party under patriarchal society. Virmati got under the skin of her family members after rejecting her match. But none in the family tried to pacify her, especially her mother's patriarchal influence, on whom the patriarchal influence was more on her. She didn't try to put forward the realities of family systems into her daughter's mind. Unfortunately Virmati, the surrogated mother of ten siblings couldn't taste the pampering of parents, which a child of her age naturally expects. Her father or grandfather none tried to find out the reason for her refusal of the match after a close shave of suicidal attempt. The lack of attachment and love, made her to turn towards the professor, who could pour out the love she was craving for. A good traditional and patriarchal family couldn't save their suffocating daughter from the evils of her life. She was trapped in it and ended her life in misery.

The second novel *A Married Woman* is another set of example of women's suffering in the male dominated society. Astha, the protagonist born in a bureaucratic family, in Delhi was also brought up under the view of marriage was her only destiny. Astha's mother filled her mind with too much suspicion of bringing up a female daughter. Her conscious of getting her daughter married to a well settled person was more than her daughter's own happiness. Her father Astha to excel in studies and was strict about her academics. Though they were good parents their only concern was Astha's marriage. Astha's mother's patriarchal power was shown clearly when she searched Astha's diaries,

letters and went to Bunny's house to warn them against communicating to Astha. Not knowing the fact and not able to understand her daughter's teenage problems she turned the heat on Astha making her life miserable. This is the stage mother has a good chance to understand and explain the natural tendencies that arise in the teenage and be a support to her daughter. Astha was a good painter and a writer. If her talents were recognized at the early stage may be she could have become a good professional instead of wasting her time on teenage problems. That is what parents fail, they think they can rule their kids but should never forget the way to guide them.

Astha completed her B.A and was married to Hemant, a Bank employee who later turned into a business man. The beginning days of her married life were happy for Astha proving Hemant a good husband. Astha enters into a patriarchal family where Hemant parents stay on the upstairs and Astha downstairs. After the birth of her daughter, they suddenly change after she conceives for the second time hoping for a son. Astha was past her prime, feeling the tension of having a female child for the second time. Hemant and his mother called a priest to perform pooja for their male lineage. Poor Astha, it is not surely her fault if she cannot give a male child to the family. The society makes only women responsible knowing the biological science involved behind it. Poor woman are blamed for everything that happens in the family. Astha was relieved after the birth of Himanshu. Hemant was too occupied in his business and Astha's loneliness made her attracted to Aijaz a social activist and a stage performer. His death turned her life and she involved in the issues of Babri Masjid by painting her pictures to the Manch. She won recognition and she developed a lesbian relation with Pipee, Aijaz's wife. Hemant couldn't doubt the relation between her Pipee as both were women. But he always tried to stop her from her activities involving the manch. Hemant reminds her duties "You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the streets. You also forget this New Year's Eve and we are going out." (172).



Astha had to always get permission from her husband to participate in any events in the man's. Astha's profession as a teacher for the plus two students was a small job in Hemant's view. When Astha wanted to build a room on the terrace for her painting she was not allowed to do so from her in-laws. Naturally Hemant cannot do anything against the wish of his parents in the patriarchal society. At last Astha returns to her conventional family realizing the importance of her family responsibility, and Pipee plans to move abroad to continue her Ph. D. Thus the story ends with a notable element that women should bow their heads before the patriarchal societies.

The third novel *Home* clearly shows the patriarchal and matriarchal elements in the lives of Nisha and Sona. The protagonist Nisha was born in a family that migrated from Pakistan to Delhi at the time of partition. The head of the patriarchal family was Lala Banwari Lal, who settled in Delhi with his wife, two sons and a daughter. Yashpal loved Sona who came as a customer to their shop. Lala Banwari Lal couldn't accept Sona as their eldest daughter-in-law as the family wanted to have a girl from their own community. But as a wise patriarch he could understand his feelings and appeased his wife who was ready to die if her son marries Sona. The matriarchal element starts between the mother-in-law suppressing Sona. Sunita, the only daughter was married to Murli who never takes care of his wife or son Vicky. Sunita after long sufferings leaves her soul and Vicky was left over to the mercy of his grandparents. When the headship is transferred from Banwari Lal to Yashpal and Pyarelal, Vicky was totally ignored from the family segment. Sona could not conceive for a long time and was forced to look after motherless Vicky. She couldn't accept Vicky as her son as he was not her own blood and she had no other option as the entire family was looking upon her, as Sushila was occupied with her own sons.

Nisha, the only daughter of the family was born under the patriarchal and matriarchal systems. Her mother Sona was one who did not try to understand the sexual abuse of her daughter at a tenderly age. She grew in her aunt Rupa's house where her life was like a princess. But unfortunately she had to return to

her house and her mother's matriarchal powers restricted her future by confining her life to kitchen. But her break up from Suresh's love made her to develop eczema and totally she was isolated from the normal woman's work. Unable to sit alone at home, she tried her career as a teacher and later became a good business woman creating Nisha Creations without any knowledge in the relevant field. But she was not recognized by her mother. The humiliations she had undergone with Pooja, his brother's wife being not allowed to touch her baby and Sona supporting her daughter-in-law make the readers feel the pressure of Patriarchal and matriarchal societies.

CONCLUSION

Manju Kapur rightly focuses on the domination of men in the society. Whether the sex is male or female everyone try for their individual identity. Identification is a must for an entity to survive in the world. A small mole is used as an identification mark by the government. Can't a women be recognized for her services as a mother, as a wife as a daughter? The sympathy is even the working women who plays a dual role is not recognized. Be it a patriarchal society or matriarchal society, women should be honored and identified as equal to men. The atrocities against women should be stopped. Feminism should be wide spread to address the problems of women promising them a bright insight into the vision of forth coming years.

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