



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF MANJUKAPUR'SHOME AND THE IMMIGRANT

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ABSTRACT

ManjuKapur is a well-known Indian novelist in English writing, who was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She graduated from the Miranda House University College, Delhi and completed her Master of Arts at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She worked as English lecturer in Miranda House University College. She is an author of five novels. She wrote *Difficult Daughters*(1998), *A Married Woman*(2003), *Home*(2006), *The Immigrant*(2008), *Custody*(2011). She bagged Common Wealth Prize Award for her first novel *Difficult Daughters* and her fourth novel *The Immigrant* was shortlisted for the DSC prize for South Asian Literature and India Plaza Golden Quill Award.

ManjuKapur novels focuses on female protagonists who struggle to break the shackles of the patriarchy and are in a quest for identity against the dogmas of cultural and social critical thinking. She also deals with the themes of feminism, universal issues, relating to middle-class Indian society. Kapur shows one of the theme of three generations residing in one house, the woman existing within the joint family set-up in the novel *Home*. She focuses on how the life of immigrant wives and pressure to adjust with new country and continuous to be part of new country's life in the novel *The Immigrant*.

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In Post-Independent India, the archetypal image of woman is changing rapidly and now she is trying to lay claims for more space within the familial bonds. The dominant writer ManjuKapur 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. 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 solidarity 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 their own ways of

dealing with the predicament of their women protagonists.

My present paper intends to study the women portrayal in ManjuKapur novels '*Home*' and '*The Immigrant*'. 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.

In her novels, male characters are dominating but they do not come in the definition of a hero. They are affecting the psyche of women to such an extent that all the major women characters whether they are Nisha (*Home*) or Nina (*The Immigrant*), they are on the verge of secluding themselves from the company of man. These major woman characters are searching a place for themselves in the male dominating society. ManjuKapur novel '*Home*' deals with the problems of Indian women, mainly complications of family life in a male-dominant joint family. ManjuKapur skilfully brings out how gender issues are deeply rooted and stem out from social norms and traditions in which women are captives. The novel focuses on three female characters – Sona, Rupa and Nisha who claim their identity in their own ways. The story begins with two sisters: one is good looking and the other merely plain. The beautiful elder Sona is married to the elder son of Banwarilal while the younger one, Rupa is attached to a junior government officer or less value. One of the issues of female characters is the curse of barrenness. When Sona failed to conceive for ten years, her position in her family became miserable. She was oppressed to the level of giving up her individual identity. After ten years she gave birth to Nisha and later Raju. Rupa, sister of Sona is also childless. But being educated, the couple Rupa and Premnath understand their plight and lead their lives with understanding. Rupa has pickle business to busy herself.

ManjuKapur skilfully portrays the character of Nisha from her infancy and how gender plays a

crucial role in her development. Gender discrimination begins very early when her colour was commented upon right at her infancy. She refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and male dominated family structure and tries to make her own individual identity. She spends a congested childhood where she is not allowed to play or go out by her own choice. She is provided with nice dresses and everything else yet,

“Unfortunately her outfits did not match her inclinations. ‘I want to play in the park,’ she whined periodically”. (H. 53)

Manju Kaur has portrayed the confused growing up years of Nisha in a heart rending manner as Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in the early stage of her life. It affects the child psychologically and mentally. She thinks silently that,

“She had done something dirty”. (H. 59)

Rupa understand her and take full care of Nisha. It is through education, sense, and reason that Nisha emerges a new woman in Rupa's home for the first time in her life and enjoys the pleasures of being equal in power or even more than the boys in her home. She silently bears her feelings when Suresh, her love, who has firmly assured her of marrying her against all odds, betrays her at the time of crisis. It is hinted he is pressured by ‘force, money and treats’ by her family. Loneliness compels Nisha to feel that she would go mad sitting inside the house. Like her brothers, she wants to work in shop. She requests her father Yasphal,

“If only you could take with you, Papaji”, She pleaded in a rush, “I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do”. (H.267)

This reveals her inner quest for independent existence and self - identity. It also seeks equality of sex i.e. Nisha and her brothers belong to different genders. She denies the patriarchal system in a very cool, calm and composed manner, with a sane and serene approach. Nisha becomes business woman by establishing Nisha's Creation with help of her father. Being a business woman, Nisha tackles every problem on her own. Nisha sees her mentor in her aunt and wants to lead a life like her. She is also much conscious about the business and future identity. Nisha is a modern girl with traditional views.

It brightens her future and she is married to Arvind. The purpose of this marriage for him was neither love nor any personal intention but rather a compulsion. Ten months after marriage, Nisha gives birth to twins accomplishing the purpose behind the marriage. The power struggle among minor characters like Suneetha, Sona and Puja can be glanced at many places but it is insignificant matter. ManjuKapur has portrayed the character of Nisha as an educated, confident, self-assured, bold and independent new woman.

ManjuKapur novels focus on female protagonist who struggle to break the shackles of the patriarchy and are in a quest for identity against the dogmas of cultures and social critical thinking. Kapur has brought out various problems faced by immigrants in a brilliant manner in her another novel '*The Immigrant*'. '*The Immigrant*' is again the story of Nina, thirty years of English lecturer who is also struggling to make her settled in New Delhi but like Nisha the question of Nina's marriage is a hurdle in peaceful living of her mother. Suddenly a marriage proposal from Ananda, a dentist in Canada comes to her. She also moves in dilemma on the issue of her marriage because she does not wish to leave her long attained career. But in compulsion of her mother and age, she has to marry Ananda. She tries to have a baby but she is not fertilized. After several attempts and appointments with doctors, she moulds herself again to be independent. At one stage her hungry for sex with Ananda grows. Unfortunately, their consumption bears negative results. She compels Ananda to involve in investigation of his sperms. Ananda feels it as an attack on his manhood and she gets more restless. When an anguishing discussion goes on between Ananda and Nina. She firms her feet to be independent and before having a child, she wishes to settle herself and says:

"I miss home – I miss a job – I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?" (1.233)

Nina joined library course to find her identity in foreign country. Ananda took treatment of sexual therapy for the problem of premature ejaculation. But it is surprising that both seem inclined for extra material sex. Nina gets a sex partner in Anton, her classmate in library course and

Ananda gets in Mandy, his secretary. After Nina mother's death Nina thought Ananda only her anchor in her life and as well as in Canada. But extra material relation of Ananda is known by finding a wavy blond hair next to her pillow. Nina decides to be separated from her husband and chooses her independent life and career. She went to appear in an interview at the University of New Brunswick with the hope that she would get a job. ManjuKapur summarizes the whole difference between the two in a single paragraph.

"Life was what you made of it. You could look at a glass and call it half full or half empty. You could look out of the window and see the sky or stare at the mud. How often had he heard his parents make these distinctions between types of people. Well, he knew what manner of person he was. And Nina was definitely his opposite." (1.327)

MajuKapur explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives: the way of a young woman's life, already so pressured in professional reproductive terms, becomes an even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture. The novels of ManjuKapur voice well the sentiments of women and their self-introspections. The female characters quest for self-identity, struggle for economic independent existence, and her equality with men depend upon social ethos. In emergence of New Women in Novels of ManjuKapur, Laxmi Sharma is apt to say: "The emergence of new women in the realm of social, economic, cultural and racial aspects will also be probed... The concept of new women in Indian society varies from the one in the west."

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