

Home a Saga or Pastiche of Every Household by Manju Kapur

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Abstract

Feminism is one of the emerging trends these days in literature. We witness scores of writers who have addressed the issues related to women. Most of the writers belong to third wave feminism and incorporate the issues that are prevalent in this phase of feminism. Some of the feminist writers having the commonality are Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan and Manju Kapur. They write during the same period, they focus on changing the stereotype image of women. The present paper aims to focus on one of the works of Manju Kapur.

Keywords- Postcolonial, Ambiguity, Chronotope, Patriarchal

A novel although a fictional representation of life and its deeds and misdeeds, its follies and weaknesses it is a mirror reflecting the society in which man live and work. A novelist is not a banal creature, but a rhapsodic (passionate) writer who operates upon the wounds inflicted on a society by choosing characters who work as scissors. The choice of the characters and the art to employ them for varied survey is one of the main concerns of a novelist. A novelist never fears the outer circumstances. He is a cameraman always ready to reach every nook and corner of society to portray it unbiased. In the postcolonial world, the novel has become an obtuse (slow to understand) object and a challenge for the reader. The narrative has become turgid (congested) and ambiguous. Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic, popular for his '*the dialogic imagination*' has spoofed the term, '*Heteroglossia*' to describe the novel's organization of socially diverse and competing discourses. Bakhtin studies the novel as '*chronotope*', another term coined by him. He defines chronotope as the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.

In the post-independence India, identity crisis has been a prominent theme in the novels. Females often are seen bearing the brunt of patriarchy. Daniel Defoe's heroine, Moll Flanders uses her physical appetite to maintain grip over patriarchal society. In order to escape from the recompense, a female is seen rising like Lazarus, albeit some fall and perish.

Samuel Richardson's Clarissais such a victim who is mercilessly cajoled to die because she tries to guard her body from the lustful Richard Lovelace.

Clarissa like Manju Kapur's heroine Nishain her third novel '*Home*' lives among spiteful family members, hectoring (bullying) uncles, and in the background the father egotistically insistent on his parental rights. But the two heroines differ in their determination and will. Clarissa is ruined by this rake (promiscuous) as Lovelace dies before an audience of new found admirers. She is punished by the society for no crime as Thomas Hardy's Tess of D'Urbervilles is punished. Manju Kapur's unbiased approach is evident in the end of the novel when Nisha valiantly breaks all the brutal chains of patriarchy and unlike Clarissa trounces all the family restrictions. She fights and fights well against a malicious society reigned by obnoxious rakes like Lovelace - a society which is inherently evil as shown by William Golding in his novels particularly in '*The Lord of Flies*'. Manju Kapur's novel '*Home*', a pastiche of various issues like, femininity, societal compulsions, joint family etc. also contains diverse elements as earlier stated by Mikhail Bakhtin. The emergence of women writers in the last quarter of the 19th century carried with it a double significance. It bore testimony to the birth of a new era of emancipation for the Indian women, an era of increased opportunities and a more dynamic participation in the social intellectual life of a country ushered in by the great social reorientations which came at the turn of the century. Manju Kapur's *Home* particularly focuses on female struggle for firm footing and made her heroine realize that the clock is struck thirteen, though it never strikes thirteen. It overtures that the 'time is out of the joints' now; they should stop suffering in muteness. The muteness of woman in the postcolonial world is broadly explained by Gyatri Spivak in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Caryl Churchill, a famous contemporary English dramatist whose dramas are replete with the themes of sexual politics and corruption makes her characters comment on the marriage:

Harry: I supposed getting married wouldn't be any worse than killing myself.

Maud: Young women are never happy.

Betty: Mother, what a thing to say!

Maud: When they are older, they look back and see that comparatively speaking, they were ecstatic.

Manju Kapur's *Home* is the same indictment of the double consequences of marriage. It can be beneficial but at the same time can prove pernicious. The novel *Home* is a microcosm in which diverse elements meet and are tested with surplus mawkishness (emotional) and dexterity. The novel can be seen a true saga of Indian family. The novel has overtones of feminism. Banwari Lal, the patriarchis of the opinion that living in a joint family is a bliss. Banwari Lal is a sari seller living in Carol Bagh who has full faith in a joint family, an Eden comprised of men and women of different tastes, devoid of nefarious apartheid tendencies, all living in harmony, until the society around in the guise of Satan conspires and destroys the peace and prosperity of home. The novel *Home* begins with two different stories

and it is here that the readers come to know the narrative adeptness of Manju Kapur. The novel like Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* contains double plot. The novel begins with two sisters, a son, beautiful and shrewd, the modern Becky Sharp of William Makepeace Thackeray is married to Banwari's elder son Yeshpal and the other Rupa, an echo of Amilia Sidley of the novel *Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray is married to a junior government officer of less esteem. Rupa has just a spouse and a father-in-law in her family while as Sona lives in a joint family. It is here that the novel attains a marked pace. Without contraries there is no progression stated by prophetic William Blake in *'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'*. The two sisters live under an illusion that one has abysmal (terrible) difficulties than the other. The state of 'opposition' is very elemental to the suspense and taste in the novel. Sona's parents deprive her of dowry and thus she becomes a target of ridicule and despise in the family. She is further subjected to bear the taunts of in-laws for having no child. Her mother-in law often admonishes her but sarcastically: "what can you know of others feelings." As the novel progresses, Banwari's younger son Pyarelal gets married to Sushila, another character in the novel, who brings huge dowry and is thus respected and honored to the skies by her in-laws. Here Manju Kapur's art of lampoon (satire) is at acme. The avaricious nature of human race is lashed out callously by her. Sona however finally gives birth to a baby child, seen as 'Lakshmi' while Sushila conceives a boy child taken as "kul-ka-deepak". The satire is evident. Manju Kapur has very adeptly exposed the pomp and craze of family relations by creating hierarchy like white and black. As the plot moves forward we see Nisha, the baby child of Sona attain puberty and become a cynosure of everyone. She is the main protagonist in the novel, who fully echoes Moll Flanders of Daniel Defoe or Shanta of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Szechwan* who work and strive fiercely in order to achieve an identity in a patriarchal society. She while living in a joint family surpasses all the bondages and slay (slaughter) the fatal rule that woman is the 'other'. She becomes a victim of sexual abuse but never surrenders till she achieve a firm identity. She becomes a successful business woman. She is tagged as 'Manglik' yet she wins the contest and achieves true selfhood petrifies everyone in the family. She strives to explore space for herself. It is through Nisha that Manju Kapur succeeds in whipping the haughty family rules that woman is meant for the hearth and needle not books. She is not the Tennyson's 'Princess' but more than that.

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it, and we ride them down.
Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.

She (Nisha) is not the one to obey like a maiden; she defeats the cruel norms of the family and takes the home as a battle field in which she is victorious. The main target of the novelist revolves around the idea that love marriages are preferred as a social sin and worthy of shame while arranged marriages are viewed with eyes of respect and hope for dowry negotiations. The end product of Nisha's plight cannot be seen in attainment of victory or defeat but she satisfies her inner urge in her own home, "All mine, she thought all mine". Nisha's emancipation for her individuality and independent identity become nothing of use as she is found in rehabilitation as she finds her peace of mind in getting her home, her own.

I can make an un-hyperbolized comment on Manju Kapur's art of novel writing. Her employment of characters and their language has given birth to the "willing suspension of disbelief", a true survey of Indian families and the denouement of the novel as Nisha, after a long span of travails in her home finds an identity in the same home and thus epitomizes what George Eliot asserts, "God Almighty has made woman to match men."

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