

The Creative Launcher

Journal Home URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 7 & Issue 1, (February, 2022)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 28 February 2022

Peer Reviewed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

©The Creative Launcher (2022). This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>, which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact editor on: thecreativelauncher@gmail.com

Licensing:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Article History: Abstract received: 25 January 2022 | Complete article received: 26 January 2022 | Revised article received: 10 February 2022 | Accepted: 24 February 2022 | First Published: 28 February 2022



Delineation of Male Characters and Sensibilities in the Novels of Manju Kapur: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Gajendra Dutt Sharma

Assistant Professor,

Department of English, Bareilly College, Bareilly (UP)

Affiliated to MJP Rohilkhand University, Bareilly, U.P. India

Email Id: gsharma270@gmail.com

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1636-7873>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2022.7.1.09>

Pages: 51-62

Abstract

The research article aims to analyse the delineation of male characters in the novels of Manju Kapur. It tries to highlight the image of male characters from the perspective of a woman writer, who happens to be a feminist. In contemporary Indian English fiction dominated by women writers the primary focus is on the representation of women characters and addressing their sensibilities, their plight and place in patriarchal setting. As such, the male characters have been

presented either with less vigour or as typical chauvinistic individual, responsible for the ordeals of women in society. In very few novels by women novelists in modern scenario do we find the sympathetic treatment given to the male characters. Considering this aspect of modern Indo-Anglian fiction, the article endeavours to examine the portrayal of male characters in women centric novels, by a woman writer. The qualitative method has been used to deduce how much and how sympathetic treatment has been given to the male characters by the novelist. In order to analyse the representation of men, Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), and *The Immigrant* (2008) have been brought under study. A comparison between the representation of men in the novels by men writers and that in the novels by women writers has been taken into consideration in order to draw an objective and unbiased conclusion.

Keywords: Feminism, Male Sensibilities, Patriarchy, Gender Representation, Empathy, Sympathy

Manju Kapur, a feminist by her forte, has given pivotal roles to the female characters in all her novels, and laid considerable stress in their portrayal. Whether it is Virmati of *Difficult Daughters*, Astha of *A Married Woman*, Nisha of *Home* or Nina of *The Immigrant*, all of them have been given a great deal of space to develop their personality, and emerge as bold and emancipated individuals in the rendered patriarchal or chauvinistic setting. But as far as the representation of male characters is concerned she seems to have been be a bit casual sometimes, and preconceived other times. The male characters have not been provided enough canvas to groom. They are almost flat characters who do not show any dynamism in their life. In this connection Shweta Tiwari says:

The male characters of Kapur's novels affect the psychology of women but they do not fit in the mould of a hero. On the other hand, the women characters qualify as heroes because they directly or indirectly transcend the societal restrictions thrust upon them by the agents of patriarchy . . . Men in her novels are represented as chauvinistic and uncompromising who are eternally bewildered by the rebellious attitude of the women. The concern of the protagonists of Kapur's novels is not to seek equality with men but to reflect upon their situation essentially as women. (Tiwari 420 – 421)

However, it will be altogether wrong to say that only female characters have got full treatment in her hands. Protagonists are obviously females, but the probing, the analysis and the peep she has provided to her male characters, is also noteworthy. She has presented the male counterparts of her protagonists as she finds them, or perhaps, she assumes, as they are, or most likely as suits her purpose in the context of her heroines. Whether it is Harish of *Difficult Daughters* or Hemant and Aijaz Akhtar Khan of *A Married Woman* or Yashpal and Vicky of *Home* or even Anand and Anton of *The Immigrant*, all of them have been presented with insight, power of persuasion, sense of analysis, and with a bit of whipping touch.

In her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, Suraj Prakash, Virmati's father and also a father of ten more children has been presented to be a typical homely type of patriarch, who has been burdened by the household responsibilities. A conservative, patronising, anxious and apprehensive to get his daughter married, Suraj Prakash is almost a 'flat' and 'type' character, who knows the value of joint family, and strives to keep it so on his own. But these traits are very common in the family patriarchs. So, Suraj Prakash fails to attract much attention.

The important character of note and the male counterpart of Virmati is Harish. He is a professor, a philosopher, Virmati's lover, and later her husband. An Oxford returned professor of English, Harish is an Indian with a British degree, and possesses British sentiments and attributes. Unlike most of other sons Harish is "an only son, his specialness has tinged the milk he drank and the air he breathed from the moment he had been born" (*Difficult Daughters* 36). He loves tea, and always inclines to host tea-loving guests. He is already married and has grown up children, but both his wife Ganga and his married life fail to satiate his instinctive urge for romance. His heart still throbs for youthful romance, and when he sees Virmati in his class for the first time, he instantly falls in love, though this love is outside his marriage. He dots on Virmati so much that the writer says, "The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he numbered it in all its details even when his children had grown up" (*Difficult Daughters* 46).

Harish seems to have compromised with his life with Ganga, with whom he is only a husband, a completely dissatisfied being. However, all his romanticism and lover instinct surface when he meets Virmati. When he gets a nod from Virmati, he professes his love in very asserting manner, which is reflected when he dissuades Virmati from her undesired proposed marriage. The writer presents the intensive moment as, "The grip on her hand tightened, and his fingers, trembling with passion, travelled persuasively up and down her soft arm" (*Difficult*

Daughters 54). Harish is really a typical professor lover, who acknowledges his incapability of rationalizing his role as a teacher in Virmati's presence. It is in his love letters to Virmati that we know the hidden lover coming to the surface. In a letter to Virmati, he writes:

How difficult it is to teach while you are sitting before me! Your face is the fixed point to which my eyes keep returning . . . You are imprinted on my mind, my heart, my soul so firmly that until we can be united in a permanent way I live in a shadowy insubstantial land. (*Difficult Daughters* 56)

There is a marked duality in his character as, on the one hand, he professes his love to Virmati, and continuously tries to dissuade her from marrying another person, on the other hand, he is still attached to his wife. On the one hand he claims to be the truest lover to Virmati, on the other he begets children with Ganga. In this regard Shweta Tiwari says, "Harish confesses his love for Virmati but disagrees to marry her, fearing the criticism it would attract from the society" (Tiwari 421). Though Harish marries Virmati, his plight remains the same; Ganga is still that assertive and protesting as a wife. His situation is still fruitless, the satisfaction is nowhere to be seen. He oscillates between his wife and his beloved; he fails to be true neither to Ganga nor to Virmati, who felt "in her place was a block of wood, whose only response to the world was the passive oozing of tears. Even his most ardent caresses could not arouse her" (*Difficult Daughters* 247). He is entrapped in an awkward middle position between his wife and Virmati, and there is a latent desire in his heart to break the wedlock and to live his life freely, which he cannot do so easily due to the reasons unknown.

He always pines for an educated wife who can complement his intellectual requirements, which his wife Ganga fails to fulfil. Being an educationist, he has no scruple in polygamy, which he justifies even when he says:

If, as something happens, our education leads us to question some of the value systems by which we live, that is not to say that we are destroying tradition. The tradition that refuses to entertain doubts, or remains impervious to new thoughts and ideas, becomes a prison rather than sustaining life force. Even the smallest one of us has a social function, but that function is not to follow blindly beliefs that may not be valid. (*Difficult Daughters* 102)

Harish is also a bit of Keats (a lover of beauty) himself. Even Ganga, an illiterate lady, notices it, and says she has never known anybody as crazy about beauty as her husband. She

feels “his face was absorbed in the beauty of sunset. His glasses, raised upwards, reflected the brilliant colours he was contemplating” (*Difficult Daughters* 76 – 77).

Among all the male characters of Manju Kapur only Harish shares the feministic temperament of the novelist herself, and serves as her mouthpiece. Like the novelist, he also presents a feminist note when he says:

Society which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughters. Society that decides that children — babies really — should be married at the age of two and three as we were. As a result, both of us needlessly suffer for no fault of ours. I cannot be an adherent to stultifying tradition after this. (*Difficult Daughters* 103)

Likewise, he does not shrink from the idea of having co-wives. He himself persuades Virmati for marrying him, and shows his anguish over his existing married life. He puts, “Co-wives are part of our social traditions. If you refuse me, you will be changing nothing. I don’t live with her in any meaningful way” (*Difficult Daughters* 122).

Considering Manju Kapur’s second novel, *A Married Woman*, two male characters leave considerable impact in the development of the plot. One is Astha’s husband, Hemant and another is Aijaz Akhtar Khan, a street theatre actor.

Hemant has been portrayed as more professional and less a true husband. He is a suitable match for Astha, the only son with two already married sisters, well settled. He works as an assistant manager in a bank, and reflects foreign influence on his bearing. Hemant is dissatisfied and regretful for returning back from America. For him India fails to offer many opportunities for young and talented men like him. He does not like working condition in this country, and holds the view, “This is not satisfying work, it is a clearing division, clear this loan, that loan, deal with union demands and Government meddling, nothing is allowed to become efficient” (*Difficult Daughters* 50). Though he does not like India much; however, he wants to marry an Indian girl who would fit in with his family life, as American women are too demanding, and their whims and fancies have to be catered to always. He shows typical chauvinistic attribute when he reveals his desire of marrying an innocent, unspoiled, simple, and more importantly, a virgin girl.

As a husband he is the lover of Astha’s body, and not a lover of Astha’s soul. He cares for her only when he has to coax her to making love. He is a sex maniac as he is very much conscious of making love, and relishes every detail of it. Astha gets fed up of it, and is compelled to respond, “Then what? Do I have to give it just because you are my husband?”

Unless I feel close to you I can't — I'm not a sex object, you have others for that" (*A Married Woman* 224). He always frowns upon Astha's tantrums, her being an artist, or even her pursuing a job of a teacher. As a wife Astha always pines for his love of a husband, and whenever she expresses her desire of spending some moments of love with him, he always gives a plea of working hard and having no time for courting. He responds her love only in love making; by love he means only copulation and physical gratification. The novelist says in this regard, "This is how he liked her. The looks on his face become focused as he pulled her sari palla away and yanked at the rest of the hooks on her blouse, drawing it down from her shoulders and arms" (*A Married Woman* 67).

Outside this mating he always finds faults in Astha, and accuses her of mismanagement. Similarly, Shweta Tiwari also opines, "Hemant seems to disagree with everything that Astha wishes to undertake further widening the chasm of temperamental incompatibility between the two" (Tiwari 422). He shows no sympathy for Astha's tears over Aijaz's death. When Astha wishes to go for her 'Munch' and 'Yatra' work, he deliberately makes plan to go out so that she is prevented from going there. He suggests:

Anything can happen. All these Yatras have goondas attached to them. You think everybody who is going is so moved by the desire to unite our country? Our country is better united by you staying at home, so that there is one less incident to cope with. (*A Married Woman* 249)

Hemant is dissatisfied with his work, his company's progress, but he vents his frustrations on Astha, who he considers is totally responsible for this state of affairs. Hemant gets irritated and says, "Obviously I am worried. Different unions compete for power over the workers, and we get caught in the middle. Everybody suffers but who sees that?" (*A Married Woman* 213).

Hemant is one of many husbands who care hardly anything for their wives and children until they need them. He is a practical type of fellow, and quite indifferent to the world affairs; protest, revolution and all such things do not influence him. Actually, Hemant is a man of the world, a worshipper of flesh rather than of spirit. Revealing the plight of Astha, the writer says, "When she (Astha) was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that reason it was soothing to be with" (*A Married Woman* 287).

Another significant character of the novel is Aijaz Akhtar Khan, a man of wisdom, ideas, understanding, perception and of knowledge of man and manners. He seems to be

presented by the novelist with favour. He is a history lecturer and a theatre activist. From his college life he encourages drama, and is always mover and shaker of the street theatre Group. His physical features have been delineated by Kapur with delicate realism:

Of medium height, his body compact. His face was clear delicate luminous brown of freshly rained-on earth. His lips were a darker brown than his skin, and his eyes were black and narrow . . . He must be vain of his hair, knowing how attractive the grey made a young face look. (*A Married Woman* 112-113)

Peelilika, his beloved and wife, persuades her mother to accept him as her son-in-law. According to her he is intelligent, sensitive, socially committed, and as such will prove a very good husband. Both as a lover and a husband he proves to be very sympathetic, comprehensive, and perceptive of values of relationship. Though initially Peepilika's mother is against him for his being a Muslim, yet as he comes in her contact she is liable to like him. Peepilika thinks at that time:

Besides, Aijaz had been so sweet to her mother, coaxing her from her prejudices, never seeming to mind her oblique reference to Muslims, four wives, large families, instant divorce, inter-community marriage, the religion of babies from such unions. (*A Married Woman* 132)

His education played a vital role in broadening his view of the world. As a theatre activist he is very committed. On being implored and dissuaded from going to enact in the flaming atmosphere over Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir dispute, he simply satisfies his wife saying, "what is the use of confining oneself to the middle classes where it is safe-safe and cowardly" (*A Married Woman* 137), and gets martyred in the dispute without any fault.

He has been presented by the novelist with sympathy and fondness. Unlike Hemant who remains self-conceited and indifferent to Astha, Aijaz always understands, and cares Peepilika. However, despite being a very enormous personality his role in the development in the plot of the novel seems to be meagre. The novelist has portrayed his character with delicacy and sophistication, but he fails to centralize the theme of the novel, and shares the fate of all the male characters who merely serve as the male complement to female protagonists in the novels by female novelists.

Manju Kapur's third novel, *Home*, portrays no dominant male character of any significance. All the characters are almost 'types', representing one or other whim and fancy related to 'Ghar Ghar ki Kahani'. All of them lack individuality; however, one or two characters

like Yashpal and Vicky succeed in leaving considerable impact in the novel. Nevertheless, their delineation by the novelist belies any possibility of protagonist-seeming stature.

Yashpal is the eldest and responsible son of the family, who really cares for other members, and wants to keep the family integrated. He always toils hard for its welfare, looks after his own wife, and executes all the household responsibilities with utmost sincerity. At an early age Yashpal realises very well that his future lies in joining the family business, and likewise, he sees ‘no reason to postpone its realization for the dreary memorizing that passed for studies’.

Initially, he has been presented as an ardent lover at first sight, who wants to marry the girl he sees for the first time at any cost. He even warns his father, and wants “nothing to do with greater introspection. If the girl’s parents did not agree, he would devote himself to the life of an ascetic” (*Home* 8).

Yashpal reflects large-heartedness, and is always sympathetic not only to the members of his family but also to his nephew Vicky, and persuades his wife to adopt him saying, “The boy is orphaned. He needs a mother’s special attention. Let him be your child” (*Home* 22). As a father Yashpal is very much conscious of his daughter’s progress as a business woman. He “turned his thoughts to his daughter’s business, where lay uncomplicated pride and pleasure” (*Home* 295).

Though Yashpal showcases all the attributes of good man, his role is predictable. He is the father that every household in Indian society possesses. He is an embodiment of a flat character who exists in the story, but does not move its plot decisively.

On the contrary Vicky is the black sheep that is found in every family. Vicky is Yashpal’s orphan nephew whom he shelters in his house when his mother dies. Ingratitude, selfishness, roguish instinct, and callousness are his special attributes. He is certainly an unruly character, and has been portrayed with bitter sensibilities. He does not realize that his maternal uncle is painstakingly trying to get him educated; rather, he condemns school, and even blames them for sending him in bad school. He says, “I don’t know. School is good for nothing. You can’t make money with it, I don’t know why I even have to go. May be because all of you do, but my school is bad, and yours is good” (*Home* 54).

Though he is given a place in shop but here also he feels chained and bowed, almost a slave, a servant. In his view his freedom and future lie only in owning a shop of his own; looking and handing customers himself and feeling pleased in the game of persuasion and

seduction. In this regard the novelist writes, “One day, one day, he dreamt, one day he would be the one showing, he would be the one seducing, he would be the one looking sideways at pretty girls” (*Home* 55).

His ingratitude and selfishness reach beyond limit when he makes it quite clear to his uncle saying, “Don’t talk to me of my own blood. In this world you can trust nobody. One day I will run away from their house and shop. I will show them” (*Home* 55).

His callousness surfaces when he sexually exploits Nisha against her will, makes her masturbate him forcefully, and even threatens her not to tell the family members anything of it. He commits this bestial act many times, without feeling for the emotional wreckage Nisha undergoes. Though Vicky lives merely upon the mercy of the family, he is so demanding that he claims a share in the house. Yashpal and other members of the family have been considerate to him for many years, but he blames them shamelessly. His unjustified demands even infuriate the so far sympathetic Yashpal, who is compelled to say, “How can he be so independent in our house? Let him go somewhere else, we are not stopping him. Who keeps their sister’s child their whole life?” (*Home* 108). His ingratitude comes to the fore when he vents his grudge against them, and claims his right to be a tenant. All the members just can’t help thinking, “he had struck like a leech to this family, and was going to draw a bucket of blood he left . . . He had bitten the hand that fed him” (*Home* 179). The whole family get rid of him only when he departs. They feel, “Vicky took his disgraceful self, his possessions, his wife and son, and moved out. He was paid six lakhs in black and four in white by the builder – not one of his relatives could bear to actually hand him the money” (*Home* 180)

Vicky does not remain kind and considerate even to his wife who is with him in all the facets of life, and remains uncomplaining all the time whether she has to undergo any suffering only because of being with him, and he in returns questions, “Why was his wife like this? First she made him feel he was not a man, then when he asserted himself like the man he was, she started objecting. Truly women were a curse” (*Home* 112).

Vicky’s portrayal by Manju Kapur manifests her keen observation of real-life characters who are commonly found in the families. However, his villainy and callous temperament represent the flat characters of fictional literature. He remains utter villain throughout the story and is not given any scope by the novelist to develop his personality in any way. It seems he has been created like this to introduce a negative character in the story, rather than giving a character some space to assert his persona.

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* presents Anand and Anton as two dominant male characters. The former is the husband of Nina, the protagonist, and the latter is her post-marital lover. Like all her other male characters, they have also not been depicted with glowing colours. One typical aspect of Anand's life is his doing any labour for achieving his goal as he "had been dyed in a lifetime of study, and such habits were not difficult to return to. The dental course was rigorous, but he welcomed hard work" (*The Immigrant* 26). In Ananda, Kapur has tried to present the life of an NRI and his view point of India after he emigrates to Canada. He doesn't mind leaving his native country without giving a thought to brain drain, and without feeling obligation to the nation. In his opinion "India does not value its minds—unlike here. (Canada)" (*The Immigrant* 18).

Anand is the first character in all her novels to reflect diasporic sensibilities. After he moves to Canada he cannot help feeling the surge of patriotism, and a sense of vacuum in his life. He feels alienated, and misses his dear and near ones. The writer can't just help expressing:

The truth was that the whole long summer Ananda was very lonely. Weekends were the worst, and he had much time in which to relive his parents' death. His isolation pressed upon him and numbed his capacity to break his solitude. (*The Immigrant* 35)

Throughout the story, Anand remains puzzled by the complication of his situation in life. His sexual dysfunction does not let him be at ease in relationship with other persons attached to him. The frustration is just simply visible in whenever he tries to build his relationship with people in his life. The intricacies of his life loom large before him, and leave him completely confounded. He hated Nandita, his former girlfriend, because she directly alluded to his problem. His encounter with Sue, his new girlfriend in Canada, simply aggravated his self-reproach and his overpowering inferiority in that matter. The novelist says in this connection:

In his more despairing moments he liked to imagine he was indelibly marked by a tragedy that had imperceptibly seeped into his blood, bones, and muscle. He who had never failed at anything was now failing in this most fundamental act, an act which even the poorest, meanest, most deprived peasant in India performed with ease. (*The Immigrant* 40)

In his marriage with Nina the same sexual dysfunction looms large. In every other respect he supports her, assists her, co-operates her in her work, still he felt detached and bereaved only because of his problem. As a husband the nagging sense of failure ruins his

married life. When he notices Nina getting somewhat dispassionate towards him, he feels that the hutment of his marriage is on the verge of collapse, just because of the problem. He thinks, “The green numbers on the clock changed steadily. The arranged marriage had not, after all, been the perfect solution. The canker of failure had entered the house and forced his back to the wall” (*The Immigrant* 184). The words of Shweta Tiwari are also noteworthy in this connection:

Ananda only focuses on the act of sex with Nina in order to establish himself as a virile man which makes it a mechanical and futile exercise resulting in Nina feeling even more forlorn . . . On the other hand, in order to satiate his male ego and overcome the distress of his physical inadequacies, Ananda seeks pleasure with many women. (Tiwari 424)

This results in his developing an affair cum physical relationship with his receptionist; however, he remains conscience stricken. The comparison between Mandy and Nina surfaces his thoughts frequently, and he falls:

Mandy encouraged him to be wild, free, uninhibited, playful. With Nina he was his mother’s son, his sister’s brother, the good husband, playing out a role he had been trained for since childhood. (*The Immigrant* 242)

Eventually, he is separated from Nina, and in her absence, it only makes him understand that he is more comfortable with a Canadian. He is only liable to think, “maybe he could have sex with white women once his older self was housed, safe and secure” (*The Immigrant* 297). In the end he is able to cure his problem, but the marital bliss and a sense of belonging are nowhere to be had in his life. He turns out to be an example of a failed husband. The story remains focussed only on Nina, and he fails to emerge as a dominant character in the story.

Anton, supposed lover, and a substitute of Ananda for Nina has, been portrayed by Kapur with whip in her hand. His characterization shows that he is a typical non-Asian who likes Asian women finding them ‘warm, intelligent and empathic’. He is a Canadian-like of Vicky, an opportunist, who knows no other feeling except lust. From the very start he targets Nina for having sex, and poor Nina is misled by him seeking a lover in him. Cunning by his very instincts, he knows how to woo a woman for his purpose. Nina, a love-deprived woman is easily enthralled by his cunning and subtle pretensions of love. He is literally a utilitarian type of person, who plays with Nina’s emotions. Even Nina later realizes that their sex encounter was “purely a meeting of bodies, a healthy give and take . . . He hadn’t wanted this

to develop into anything serious” (*The Immigrant* 273). His bestial nature surfaces when he even rapes her without realizing how she would deal with this emotional fraud. After having raped Nina, no sign of repentance or any tinge of sorrow for doing anything wrong is manifest from his behavior. The novelist writes in this connection, “His pants were up and he was ready to face the world, having raped a woman he had slept with for six months” (*The Immigrant* 312). Mate or rape is his motto, especially where Indians are concerned. His role in the story is to simply provide a cameo pleasure to Nina’s parched-up soul and her frustrated sexual life. He fails to realise both Nina’s feelings and the significance of his existence in the story. Without developing the plot in any considerable manner, he is gone.

To conclude it can be said that Manju Kapur has presented all her male characters with identical attitude. They are types, and exist in the story for complementing or affecting the life of the female protagonists. They are as necessary in the stories as the male members are important to balance the equation of the family. Barring one or two characters, majority of them represent various chauvinistic characteristics of the society. From the perspective of a woman Kapur has observed them, studied them, peered into their souls, and finally presented them as they really are, without glorifying them or rendering some individualistic attributes in their characterization.

Works Cited

Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. Faber and Faber Limited, 2003.

---. *Difficult Daughters*. Faber and Faber Limited, 1998.

---. *Home*. Random House India, Ltd, 2007.

---. *The Immigrant*. Random House India Ltd, 2008.

Tiwari, Shweta. “Redefining Man-Woman relationship: A Study of the novels of Manju Kapur.” *IJELR*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 2015, 1.<http://ijelr.in/2.3.15/419-425> SHWETA TIWARI.pdf