



Men In The Select Novels Of Manju Kapur: A Study

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ABSTRACT

From time immemorial it is always been the women that are victimized-be it, sexual, domestic, economic...but of late it has been the other way round. In the modern and globalized world men are also victimized sometimes by the women. This paper focuses on different kinds of men in Manju Kapur's select novels – *A Married Women* (2003) and *Custody* (2011).

Manju Kapur known as the Jane Austen of India, wrote seven novels till date. In her novel, *A Married Women* and *Custody*, we have in all ten men characters. My focus is on these men in these two novels of Manju Kapur. In *A Married Women*, we come across meek, confident and supportive men characters. In *Custody*, we have charismatic, domineering, submissive, exploitative and loyal men characters.

So, the paper centers round the men, which might make the study interesting.

KEY WORDS: Victimization, men, modern and globalized world.

Indian writing in English has become a prominent phenomenon in Indian English literature. Indian writers can be traced back to a century ago, but English writing has only become prominent in the country in the past few decades. Recently, India's most accomplished and remarkable women writers' of postcolonial strand have brought a tremendous change in the trend of portraying women. Women writers such as Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukharjee, Shobha De, Gita Hariharan and the others have intuitively perceived the gender issues which upset women and resent women as individuals who fight against suppression and oppression of patriarchy. They have sometimes presented women as angels and demons. But these women novelists unveil the hidden secrets of the unexplored labyrinths of the male world.

Among the other women writers, Manju Kapur is one of the ongoing Indian novelists, a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi. Her first novel *Difficult Daughter's* received the Common Wealth Award for the Eurasian region. Kapur's works includes *Difficult Daughter* (2007), *A Married Women* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011), *Brothers* (2016) and *Shaping the world: Women writers on Themselves* (2014) are the fictions and non-fiction respectively.

This paper focuses on male characters in the select novels of Manju Kapur - *A Married Women* and *Custody*.

The novel *A Married Women* revolves around Astha, the protagonist and different stages of her life, that is pre and post wedding. After two breakups, Astha is married to a good looking man Hemant. He is a twenty six years old, an MBA from America and serves as an Assistant manager in a bank. Astha's mother complimented about him as: "clearly a good, family minded boy." (*A Married Women*, 34)

Hemant and Astha go for honeymoon. During their love making time, Astha is reminded of her former lover Rohan, a professor in St. Theresa's Convent School. She curses herself for remembering Rohan, who ditched her. Hemant don't want to leave Astha for a second. Astha enjoys their honeymoon. She has the habit of painting and in leisure time, she writes poetry, Hemant encourages her. Astha enjoys the initial days of marriage. After two years of marriage, Astha becomes pregnant. She embraces each and every moment of her pregnancy. Hemant does not ignore Astha during her pregnancy as most of the husbands do to their wives during pregnancy time for multiple reasons. Hemant's love and affection for Astha makes her pregnancy comfortable. Despite everything, she always had the traditional fears in her mind-

"Astha had heard men were revolted by the way women looked when they were pregnant but not Hemant." (*A Married Women*, 57)

Later, Hemant's workload increases. He is apprehensive about many responsibilities at once. Taking care of his industry, his partner, his baby, Astha's mother and his own parents simultaneously is something he has to do. As a result, Astha's mind is being oppressed due to a communication gap between them, resulting in a minor quarrel. The fact is highlighted in the conversation that follows between them:

"Hemant, why is it that we never talk anymore?"

"We talk all the time." (*A Married Women*, 66)

As the days pass by, Hemant and his parents want a baby boy. Astha reaches their expectations and eventually gave birth to a boy baby, Himanshu. Hemant, shares the burdens of looking after his first born and is quite liberal in his views. Hemant proves to be an understanding and responsible husband.

"Between Anuradha's birth and Himanshu's Hemant changed from being an all-American father to being an all-Indian one." (*A Married Women*, 70)

Though Astha is the mother of two, she is not satisfied with her domestic life. She wants her own identity as Hemant had and commented as:

"If there would be a day when she could feel that same right to complaint that Hemant did." (*A Married Women*,)

Hemant is given importance by his parents and mother-in-law too. Astha's mother sells her plot and gives money to Hemant to manage. He even does not like Astha working as a teacher. There comes Aijaz Akhtar Khan, a male friend in her school. He is the founder of The Street Theatre Group. He teaches history and during the holidays he performs in slums, factories, streets, villages and small towns. Though Astha moves close with Aijaz, her male colleague, Hemant never suspects her and is not a jealous husband but on the other hand very broadminded husband. Because of some communal riots, Aijaz is shot dead. Aijaz's murder shocks Astha, whereas Hemant remains calm and quiet at the death of Aijaz.

Hemant is such a meek person that he never complains about his wife Astha's active participation in Sampradayakta Mukti Manch, to protest and decision to build a temple of Lord Ram on the premises of the Masjid outside Rastrapati Bhavan. The communication gap between Hemant and Astha gets wide. One day Astha found a condom in his bag. It means Hemant is betraying his wife. Hemant also never questions about the lesbian relationship between Astha and Pipeelika, a widow, wife of Aijaz. Pipeelika goes abroad to pursue PhD in an American University. After the departure of Pipeelika in Astha's life, Astha again comes back to the role of wife, a dutiful parent and takes care of the household chores. Hemant who was modest, doesn't question anything and leads a happy life. Hemant never exploits Astha, he is a very understanding husband. This proves that Hemant is a responsible and honest husband. Though he knows the lesbian relation between

Astha and Pipeelika, he never points out and he doesn't want the hues and cry in the family, this proves that Astha exploits Hemant's goodness. This demonstrates that Astha is unfaithful to her husband.

Aijaz, another character in the novel, founder of The Street Theatre Group, is courageous enough to perform on the issue of Babri Masjid. His thoughts are very high. His talks motivate Astha. He is honest friend of Astha and encourages her to read books. Both Astha and Aijaz have a good relations. Though Aijaz moves close with Astha, he never exploits her and remains only a good friend. Aijaz is a Muslim, he married a Hindu woman named Pipeelika.

"Your mother hates me because I am Muslim, your friends love me because I am Muslim, I don't know which is worse." (*A Married Women*, 125)

Aijaz had a relationship with Reshana, who is a group member. She is very close to Aijaz. She takes care of the Mukti Manch activities after the death of Aijaz, who along with his group are killed in the communal riots.

Unlike the other, Astha's father, whose name is not mentioned in the novel, is a mathematician. He is very supportive. Though he knows the teenage silly affairs of Astha, he only encourages her to study further, after completion of her M.A he arranges marriage with Hemant. Because of health issues, he dies and after his death, his books are donated.

Jyothin Trivedi- father of Pipeelika, accepts the love marriage of his daughter with a muslim and allowed them to stay along with them at Shiksha Kenrda. He proves himself to be a liberal minded father.

Ajay, Pipeelika's brother, is a man of determination, from a very early age: "A boy with competition in his blood, he stood first all his life, in school, in IIT, making straight to the US as soon as he possibly could with a wondering scholarship to MIT." (*A Married Women*, 119) He never returns to India. He always suggests Pipeelika to do PhD in foreign after her completion of her M.A. Ajay is an affectionate brother and encourages his sister to study abroad instead of feeling jealous.

Swamiji, preaches lessons related to spirituality and peace to Sita, Astha's mother after the death of her husband, she sells her plot and goes to Rishikesh to attain peace. Swamiji is a good and pious spiritual preacher.

Another male character is Bahadur, a servant in Hemant's home. He is very dutiful towards his work. He takes care of the two children and proves himself to be an honest and loyal servant

Manju Kapur craftily presents the male world and their emotions, attitudes in her novel *Custody*. She presents men as supportive, responsible, loving, doting and loyal persons.

The upper middle class colonies of mid 1990s of Delhi is the setting of this novel *Custody*. Raman Kaushik is the husband of Shagun and father of two children. He works as a sales manager in *The Brand*, a company that invest chiefly in the manufacture of soft drinks. Within the one year of the marriage life, Shagun becomes pregnant, and Raman comments on himself as:

"Their first child had been born within a year. On learning of his young wife's pregnancy, Raman had blamed himself. He should have been more careful, he wasn't sure he was ready to be a father." (*Custody*, 14)

Raman loves his wife very much. It is described in the following line:

"Raman knew himself to be an ordinary man, ordinary-looking, ordinarily talented though hard-working. The extraordinary thing in his life was his wife, and his love for her, as strong as steel, as pliant as a spider's web." (*Custody*, 44)

Both Raman and Shagun lead marriage life successfully for 11 years, but there comes the uncertainties in Raman's life after marriage. Raman found that Shagun has an illegitimate relationship with someone. He doesn't accept the gap between them. It can be seen in the following conversation:

"You are everything to me. And so is your mother – you know that." And "I sense some distance between us, and that makes me unhappy." (*Custody*, 47)

Raman is roasted not only in the hands of Shagun, but also by his boss, Ashok Khanna, with whom Shagun elopes. Shagun and takes the children into her custody. Raman is depressed because of the loneliness. With the help of his brother Nandan Kaushik, Raman files a case and had the children as custody only on Sundays. Ashok, who was a cunning man, always tortured Raman in work place and in marriage life also.

Raman wants to take care of the studies of children, but Shagun didn't allow him. Later circumstances made Raman to marry Ishita, a divorcee and whose womb is unable to produce children. After the so many petitions, the court at last share the children to Raman and Shagun. The girl baby is given to Raman and the boy child to Shagun. Raman marries Ishita not because he wants a wife but to care his little princess. Raman is portrayed as the ball in the hands of Shagun and Ashok Khanna. But he is a good man succumbs to the bad circumstances, created by his unfaithful and vile wife, Shagun. Raman is meek and submissive husband, being exploited by his wife Shagun and deceived by his boss Ashok Khanna.

Another important male character is Ashok Khanna, who studied in foreign, knows the business strategies and is the boss of the company The Brand, where Raman is working as a sales manager. In a business meeting, Raman accompanied with his beautiful wife Shagun, the stunning beauty of Shagun attracts Ashok and vice-versa. After several meetings with Shagun, both Shagun and Ashok rush to foreign by leaving Shagun's kids in India. Ashok with the help of his school friend Madan Singh, a lawyer, craftily makes the arrangements to send children of Shagun for vacation on summer to New York. Ashok takes care of children, though the children not his own. He makes arrangements of the children studies in a reputed school in India. Ashok also sends them costly clothes and toys. His exploitative nature towards Raman and love for shagun and her children can be seen clearly in the novel.

Nandan Kaushik, is a doting son and a loyal husband to Rohini. They have twins namely Aditya and Abhilasha. Apart from the above mentioned, he is a successful lawyer and helps to Raman in his case. He doesn't expect money from Raman.

Another major character is Suryakanta, who doesn't care about the emotions of woman. He is the ex-husband of Ishita. As Ishita is sterile, he divorces Ishita and marries another woman. He proves himself to be a selfish husband.

There are some other minor men characters, who are loyal and supportive to Raman and shower love and affection on him.

Everyone hears about the struggles experienced by women in the male dominated society, but there are unexplored struggles and oppression experienced by men in the hands of women too. In the search of an identity, to fulfill their goals these new women exploit men and harass them. Men also makes use of the worse condition of men and use every opportunity to suppress the men. Manju Kapur sketches the men characters clearly and shows their situations cleverly.

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