

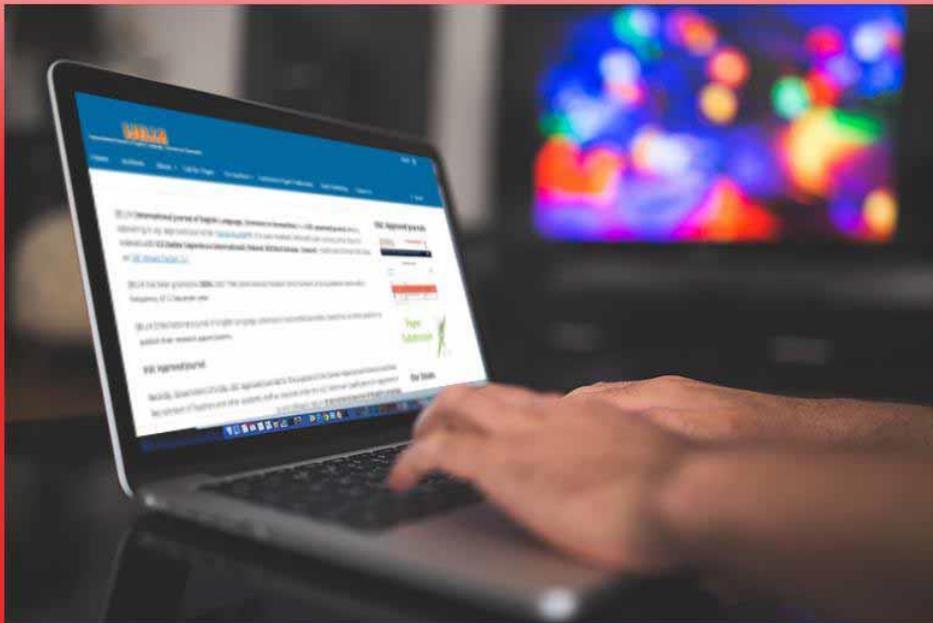
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A Feminist Study of ManjuKapur's A Married Woman

Abstract: Feminism refutes the masculine's approaches to women. It aims to look at things from a women's point of view. Feminism in Indian English Literature is a byproduct of the Western Feminist Movement but it got sustenance from various native sources such as Indian Freedom Movement, Independence, Spread of Western education, employment opportunities and laws for women's rights. The post-colonial Indian English fiction by women upholds the Indian Spirit at large. It depicts the Indian Women's thought effectively. ManjuKapur is one such world acclaimed writer. All her novels observe the continuity with their predecessors in portraying the lives of Indian Middle-Class families. Her women protagonists struggle to break the age old silence against gender based domination in patriarchal Indian Society. Kapur's second novel A Married Woman unfolds the struggle of Astha, the woman protagonist, to lead an independent life liberating herself from the constraints of the man made codes of life. She remains within the framework of the family and achieve greater heights.

Key words: Feminism, Victimization ,Gender , Tradition , Individuality, Libertility, Self-fulfillment.

Introduction

Feminism emerged in the Western World as a movement in support of the same rights and opportunities for women as for men. Feminism means, “both the awareness of women’s position in society as one of the advantage and inequality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages”. (The Bristol Women’s Studies Group. 3).

ManjuKapur has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemma and her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all, as a human being in the tradition bound, male dominated society. Kapur has joined the many contemporary Indian Women writers who write about the plight of a women who is imprisoned in her doll’s house. However exposed to the Western concept of emancipation, she wants to stir herself to shake off the sloth of centuries which thwart her personality, and she is on her journey to transformation from the dump and dependent person to self respecting and self-confident individual. In this context the feminist movement has a greater role to play in influencing the educated middle class Indian women in her attempt to overcome the older ideas about a woman’s role, both in the family and in the society. In the words of Sushila Singh,

The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization. As a Philosophy of life it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep seated causes of women’s oppression. It is a concept of ‘raising a consciousness’ of an entire culture. (Feminism Theory, Criticism, Analysis.33).

Women writing in English in India is essentially a by-product of the Western Movement. During the late 1800’s and the early 1900’s women conquered new heights and won a number

of new heights for them throughout the world. And the Indian Women writers have played a greater role in creating an awareness and effected changes in the status of women in the Indian Society which is essentially a male dominated and patriarchal in its nature. The post-colonial Indian English fiction by women upholds the Indian Spirit at large. It depicts the Indian Woman's thought and emotion effectively. Recent Indian writing depicts the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. Simone de Beauvoir in her classic work 'The Second Sex' has highlighted the position of women and had justly made her conscious of her traditional and conservative bondages. Her concept of "woman as other" is very significant in depicting the women's position in the male dominated society. Beauvoir rightly observes:

"... humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being ... (Woman) is simply what man decrees: thus she is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appeals essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her ; She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed the essential. He is the absolute – She is the other. (The Second Sex . 33).

It is clear that the feminist movement has liberated women world over and has given them the much needed Strength to fight for their individually and self-fulfillment. ManjuKapur's protagonists are no exception to this category of women who are mostly educated and represent the Indian Middle class society. They put up a strong fight to liberate themselves from the stale social customs and traditional codes of life.

Kapur's second novel A Married Woman depicts the life of Astha, a married woman, who is not only an M.A.,(Honours) in English, but also a talented poet and artist. Though she was "brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplement of fear (1), she was not

interested in arranged marriage. Even as a school girl she involves herself in friendly relationship with a boy, who was pursuing a course in Defence Academy. But that friendship could not continue for long and blossom into love, due to the interference of her mother. And once again she falls in love with a senior college student Rohan, who leaves her for his higher studies abroad. After such disappointments, she finally settles for an arranged marriage with Hemant a son of fortune, who had come back to India after taking his M.B.A., in America to marry an Indian girl and to carry out his duties to his parents as a devoted son. Initially she enjoys and rejoice her married life as her husband was very much devoted to her and did everything to enhance the married pleasure. And Astha being educated and liberated woman she enjoys the company of her husband and fulfilled her duties in sharing the sexual pleasure. She did everything to please her husband and presented herself to his taste.

She locked the door and looked at herself in the mirror, clad from throat to ankle, neck to wrist. Diaphanous, lacy, and a soft pink she had all along thought nightie made her look quite attractive. Slowly she took it and looked at her body. She was in her hairless condition, the way Hemant liked her, with legs, arms and underarms, freshly waxed, shining smooth, with not an unsightly blackstump in sight, only a series of pink bumps where wax had pulled too hard and left its protest. She raised her arms and anxiously sniffed the wet place underneath. Hemant didn't like smell of sweat or vaginal fluids, he was a little squeamish in that respect, and she now washed and dusted herself with powder before turning her attention back to the thing. Single piece, lace and satin, slinky with holes and slits, she could crumple it in one fist, it's only stiffness the wires in the cups (45).

Astha and Hemant find themselves equally happy and fulfilled in their married life. They shows their mutual interest in enhancing their sexual pleasure :

‘Sit on me’, he said hoarsely pulling her on to him, twisting the little bit of lace aside. Astha sat on him, her breasts tight and forward, falling over him, over my husband, she thought, as they rocked together, while sensation took over, drowning thoughts even of husband’s (46).

She felt herself fully liberated to be totally absolved in the sexual pleasure, very much in the same way, her husband, Hemant did. Astha was very much happy in getting her marital aspirations both, emotionally and physically fulfilled. But in the days to come, Hemant kept busy with his T.V. manufacturing business and Astha was left to loneliness and boredom. He could not spare time for Astha and she has to take up a job to keep herself engaged. Though she wanted to take a career in journalism, she has to accept a teaching job as preferred by her husband and not much to her taste,”wondering whether all women were destined to be teachers or nothing”(47). In the course of time, she develops some interest for teaching and enjoyed the pleasure of interacting with the minds. She was happy to see herself economically independent. “She too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence” (72).

As an independent and self thinking woman Astha shows her annoyance when her mother hands over her share of the money that she made through the sale of the plot to her husband Hemant. She detests the social and traditional codes that kept women out of financial matters. She broods over the ills of the society that destined a subordinate position to women:

Her mother had delivered her into Hemant’s hands. If her mother was at fault, so was her father, for managing the money, and teaching his wife that this was normal behavior. So was her mother-in-law for bringing up Hemant to never regard women as beings to be consulted in their own lives, so was the Swamiji for teaching that only in detachment lies happiness, which lesson can be read in as many different ways as there are people and attachments(98).

Her growing dissatisfaction is played against a background of Indian political and social unrest. Her sinking spirit suddenly bubbles up when Aijaz, a theatre activist takes interest in her and asks her to write the script of the play to be staged in the school. Her Script on Babri Masjid gets immense appreciation from Aijaz, but her husband could not accept her involvement and interest in such highly sensitive political issue like that of the Babri Masjid. He registers his displeasure : “Please keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching. All doesn’t suit you” (116). Astha could not keep herself away from the social ills. She could not digest the loss of innocent lives to the communal violence. She involves herself in the protest rally on the brutal killing of Aijaz and his fellow theatre group. She could not keep herself within home as expected by her husband. She took part in all the social activities of Sampradayakta Mukti Munch as its active member. She proves herself to be a socially committed citizen and responsible humanbeing by travelling all alone to Ajodhya amidst communal violence to create awareness against the politically motivated issues which leads only to violence and suffering of innocent people, women and children. She emerges to the occasion and raise her voice firmly in a clear tone to give up violence, which could bring them only unnecessary suffering:

‘Brothers and Sisters’, she started, ‘In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brothers, and children. In history many things are not clear, the same thing that is right for one person is wrong for another, and it is difficult to decide our path of action. We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering, unnecessary and continuous suffering. When we look to fighting wrongs committed hundreds of years ago, we look to the past. But the past cannot feed us, clothe us, or give us security. History cannot be righted easily, but lives are lost easily, pain and trauma to woman and children come

easily. Tomorrow your sacrifice will have been forgotten because the duty of life is towards living'. (197-198),

As that of Astha, Pipeelika another major character in the novel also proves to be a liberal and independent woman. Though she is a Hindu woman, she marries Aijaz, a Muslim theatre activist much against the ideologies of her mother, who is a Staunch Hindu woman and convinces her mother that a man cannot simply be judged good or bad by his religion. Her marriage amidst Hindu-Muslim conflict, her NGO activities, her lesbian relationship with Astha, her participation in EktaYatra, and finally her moving abroad for Ph.D., with full scholarship, all shows her as a 'New Woman' who has all the potentials to lead an independent life.

Conclusion

Kapur's women protagonists Astha and Pipeelika appear in their new form. It seems that Manju Kapur defies the definition of Simone de Beauvoir about the woman that "woman is a womb, an ovary, she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her" (33). Astha fulfills her primary responsibilities of a married woman and also moves one step toward to play a active role in social activities through her inherent talent as an artist and activist. Pipeelika on the other hand proves herself in her own way. Though she is a widow, she never look for any sympathy from others. She manages to win for herself, the Ph.D., admission in a foreign university with full scholar ship, with her NGO works and projects. In short Kapur's *A Married Woman has all the characters to be called a feminist novel*

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