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### WOMEN, EDUCATION AND THE INDIAN SCENARIO : A STUDY OF MANJU KAPUR'S NOVELS



**Rama Bhikaji Dongre**

Research Student, Department of English,  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad (MS)

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Manju Kapur is one of the most renowned women writers of the contemporary era in India. She not only portrays the vulnerable Condition of women in the Indian society but also delineates how they are being kept ignorant about education and emancipation. In her novels she gives vent to the gender discrimination still overtly prevalent in the field of education. A study of few feminist theorists has also been included to expose how patriarchy creates havoc in the lives of women by denying proper education. With the British invasion, Indian men became*

*aware of women education but the enthusiasm died out half way. So even after 65 years of Indian Independence, the condition of women has barely changed. Manju Kapur's novels circumscribe the condition of women education since Independence till the present era.*

#### **KEYWORDS**

*Education, Feminism, Indian Women Novelists, Discrimination, Emancipation.*

## RESEARCH PAPER

### INTRODUCTION

The son is free to aspire for higher education, or even foreign education. But when it comes to the daughter, she is educated largely as a concession to a superficial social change, or no education at all. With the independence of the country, the in raid of westernized education system swept the social heads. Thus the melodrama of educating the daughter/s of the family came in vogue. However, the western philosophy of individualism was never allowed to be nurtured during the course of education. This shocking state of education for a daughter has been reflected in the writings of the contemporary writers and Manju Kapur is one of them. Manju Kapur, in her novels, has tried to divulge the various ways in which patriarchy relegates woman to the periphery. In all her writings she has portrayed the numerous schemes developed by the patriachs to curb female freedom and independence. The discriminating patterns of education proffered before the sons and the daughters|| baffle us. Education for a daughter is seen as an alternate option of marriage. A daughter is educated not to go out and take up a job. On the contrary, her education is a trap to hunt down a good husband and become a perfect wife and daughter-in-law representing Indian womanhood. Thus, marriage is the ultimate institution where all women should enter after the successful completion of education. In *Difficult Daughters* (1998) Virmati is found boasting before Ganga about the family trend of educating the girls:

*My mother, my masi, all studied. It is the rivaz in our family, ' said Virmati proudly. Even now my father keeps getting my mother books and magazines to read. (Difficult Daughters, 36)*

The limitation of such education is divulged when Virmati herself tries to go for higher studies. Her mother Kasturi regrets sending her to school which she feels has robbed Virmati of her reasons altogether. During Kasturi's time (in pre-Independence India), going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one's parents. This same fear was felt by Kasturi's mother too when she found Kasturi praying before the picture of Christ, something the nice Bengali teacher of the mission school said she herself did. In a family, the patriarch has given the authority to the mother to tug the rope of independence whenever the daughter is found transgressing the laws of the threshold.

Thus, Kasturi was protected from the missionary influences of the British by being sent to a school meant to part education following the conventions of the Samaj. Kasturi's uncle told her that soon she would soar like the kites, but his uncle didn't think it necessary to inform that no matter what she would be bound to the earth and any sign of transgression from her part would result her downfall. Kasturi was allured with other things of life and told that once she gained a Women, Education and the Indian Scenario: a Study of Manju Kapur's Novels 17 proper education she would be on her way to becoming one of the finest flower of Hindu womanhood. Kasturi became the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by a tentative assault on learning. Her father, uncle and teacher made sure that this step into modernity was prudent and innocuous. Kasturi's head remained modestly bent over her work. No questions, no assertions||. She learned to read, write and balance household accounts and sew. Above all, the school ground the rituals of Arya Samaj havan, sandhya and meditations

so deeply within her that for the rest of her life she had to start and end the day with them. After five years of this rigorous and disciplined education, it was considered that Kasturi had acquired all that it was ever going to be useful for her to know. She appeared for her first and last outside exam, performed creditably, and graduated at the age of twelve, to stay at home until she married. Kasturi's education testifies Millett's remarks in *Sexual Politics*: The education of women was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold level of learning, a genteel polish its major achievement. And in most cases it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon virtue a sugared word which meant obedience, servility, and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity. During Kasturi's formal education it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued in the home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter's qualification. Kasturi was going to please her in-laws. In all these Kasturi trusted her mother completely.

*Once married, Kasturi felt grateful to her mother for those long hours she had spent in the kitchen, cutting, peeling, chopping, slicing, pounding, wrapping, mixing, kneading, baking, roasting, stirring and frying (deep plus shallow). (Difficult Daughters 188-189).*

Her duty towards her in-laws did not pause here, once ushered into her husband's room, began her long years of child bearing ; and she had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted, even at the cost of her life. Kasturi was so imbibed with these notions of education for a girl, that she resented Shakuntala's (her niece) life style of rejecting marriage and staying away from home for the sake of a job. For Kasturi A woman's shaan is in her home. But when these streaks of becoming independent showed up in her elder daughter, Virmati, Kasturi became furious. With the birth of Parvati aka Paro, Kasturi was accompanied by Virmati to Dalhousie to regain her depleting health with years of childbearing. Virmati was already of marriageable age and studying for her FA exams. But since the tail end of her education was in sight, it was decided that missing a little of it to help her mother wouldn't matter much. After all, in a year or so, Virmati would be married. When Virmati passed her FA exams she wished to study further. But her parents thought she had studied enough. Her fiancé's parents thought that she was qualified enough to be their daughter-in-law and they didn't want too much education in her. Virmati's wishes were fulfilled though under a grieving incidence. Her would-be father-in-law died, there was to be a mourning period, the marriage was postponed. Instead of sitting back at home Virmati entered AS college as an alternative choice to marriage. This sudden change in the attitude of her family to let her study further only exposes the real intentions of the boastful patriarchs who claim to impart education to their daughters of the family. When marriage failed to work, only then the daughters were allowed to pursue their higher studies. Ganga, like Kasturi, was taught to internalize the vows of womanhood from a very tender age. Her mother was not educated and she had neither read, nor felt the need. She had taught Ganga everything she knew. By the time Ganga was ready to leave for her husband's house at the age of twelve, she had mastered the basic items of a pure vegetarian diet. She was adept and inventive with the embroidery and knitting needle, as well as with the sewing-machine. After her marriage, her mother-in-law made sure that she learned the ways of in-laws' household from the moment of her arrival. All 18 Arpita Ghosh this was part of her growing up. But unlike Kasturi, Ganga had the realisation that the kinds of knowledge she had made her ill-equipped even in a garden. Though Ganga played the perfect role of being a woman skilled to do all housework, but she had the feeling of inadequacy and defenselessness into a union with a man so unlike the others she

knew; who was much more educated and cultured than those she found around her. Unlike any other woman her hope lay in her daughter, that someday Chhotti would be as educated as her father, Harish. Manju Kapur explores a totally different aspect of educating a girl in her next novel, *A Married Woman*). Like any other woman of her age Sita, Astha's mother, believed in the old, traditional ways. She regularly prayed to God to marry off Astha to a good husband. But Astha's father believed in the new. He felt that his daughter's future lay in her own hands, and these hands were to be strengthened by the number of books that passed through them. He always kept himself updated about Astha's studies. He didn't want his daughter to be dissatisfied and wasted like him. He always encouraged her about her potentials, her flair for painting and her way with the words;

*He insisted that with a bit of practice in Mathematics, her weak point, she could sit for the competitive exams. With a good job comes independence" (A Married Woman 4)*

Her father feels. But this manipulative way of his is another way of finding a good match for his daughter. He consoled his wife in private that if Astha did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS and find a good husband there. Thus, the final destination fixed for their daughter is marriage, only their perspective differed. This patriarch, being a bureaucrat himself, shrewdly camouflages his real intentions, while encouraging his daughter to study hard. He too never thinks beyond the boundary of marriage. In *Home*) another angle is portrayed about the education of the daughters. Sona and Rupa are two sisters. They belonged to a middle-class family based in Meerut. When a marriage proposal came for Sona, from the Banwari Lal Cloth Shop in Karol Bagh, her parents became apprehensive of the rich alliance. They dreaded marrying off their daughter to a business family. But Sona's attitude awes her parents as well as the readers.

*Will Sona, from an educated family, be happy with shopkeepers? The boy is only high-school pass, but Sona now says she does not want to study any more, she wants to remain on the same level as her husband. (Home 8)*

The final destination of a daughter whether educated or not lies in marriage. This concept has been so much imbibed in the daughter right from her birth that she easily gives up her education the moment she gets a marriage proposal. Letting education to mar the marriage is a strict no. Even before her parents could say anything, Sona herself steps out of the educational system. When it came to Rupa, she finished her BA undisturbed. No marriage proposal had forced her to give up her education. After her completion of education her father arranged her marriage to the son of a retired colleague, based in Karol Bagh. The location of the groom in Sona's neighborhood was one of the reasons the alliance was deemed suitable.

Thus in case of marriage much introspection is done so as to make it suitable enough. This suitability varied from family to family. When Sushila was married to Pyare Lal, she was in the first year of college. But marriage provided enough reason to discontinue her education. Her family members did not feel the need to ask her opinion either marriage or continuation of education. She didn't resist the arrangements either. Sushila married and played the role of a wife and daughter-in-law perfectly by delivering two sons in the consecutive years of her marriage.

Thus she passed her trials successfully as an emblem of womanhood. When it came to Nisha, Sona's daughter, her educational system was speculated upon very carefully. She belonged to the next generation and everyone was cautious enough to ensure the passing on the traditional things to her to carry forward. The patriarch in the form of her uncle (Prem Nath, who was relatively better educated than Yashpal or Pyare Lal) considered every pros and cons in choosing the school. Distance was a consideration in choosing a school. Prem Nath didn't want the child travelling long hours in a bus. And of course gender was a consideration, he didn't need the Women, Education and the Indian Scenario: a Study of Manju Kapur's Novels 19 father to tell him that.

*"A girls' school would provide a traditional upbringing, and after her probable experience it was best there be no exposure to boys. The school had to have labs, the girl should be able to do science if she wanted"* (Home 73).

Once Nisha joined her school she started coming off with flying colour in all her exams. It turned out that Nisha had a flair for studies. Prem Nath and Rupa were determined and made every arrangement to ensure her brilliant performance in school. When Prem Nath was busy teaching Nisha about books and all, Rupa didn't feel it necessary to initiate the little girl to the lessons of upcoming womanhood. Neither did Rupa train her to keep fast for some elusive future husband, nor did she tell her about menstruation, since such taboos were not so strict in her house. Sooner or later all these things caught Sona's eyes and she started conditioning her daughter at home.

Thus Nisha stayed home from school to learn how to be a good wife. At an age of ten she was forced to keep fast for karva chauth for the prosperity of her would be husband. Try to be independent and be prepared to bear the consequences was how Sona tried to curb Nisha's nonchalant attitude towards the age old traditions. At an age when Nisha should be thinking of studies, her mother was forcing her to think of husbands. Sona even discouraged Nisha's performances in studies. She laid down the responsibility of Raju on Nisha and pointed out that her studies are not worthy if she is not able to help her brother perform well. Sona's harping on the patent theme that she belonged to an old-fashioned family and carry the tradition strong within stood as a barrier to Nisha's well-being. For her, education for a girl from a trader family was of no use, since her ultimate destination was to marry and produce children. To take things up in her control, Sona brought Nisha back home from Rupa's house. Back home, there was less interest in her school, no pampering and long hours expected in the kitchen. Sona discovered to her horror that at sixteen Nisha's cooking skills were negligible; while Nisha realised that her mother's idea of a daughter was one who could help her every time anybody ate. Mother and daughter retorted each other now-and-then:

*You take half an hour to peel ten potatoes. How will you manage in your future home? ' Masi said there is always time to learn cooking, but only one time to study. ' Nisha tried defending herself, her aunt, and her upbringing. That Masi of yours has ruined your head. What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful her entire life. (Home 125)*

Sona and the entire family never looked through Nisha's school diary, notebooks, or test papers. They didn't care if she failed; they cared if she could cut ginger like —matchstick. Sona

tried to inculcate in Nisha the life of a woman. To look after her home, her husband, her children, her in-laws and serve them food she has cooked with her own hands ought to be ultimate aim in her life. Nisha's beauty would not make up for her ineptness in the kitchen when it came to marriage. Hence every woman must know how to cook and Nisha was no exceptional. Sona berated her own daughter as a sub-standard female just because Nisha was not adept in her culinary skills.

Thus started Nisha's training in the kitchen under her mother's strict supervision. Her hands, altered from spotless to nicked and burnt, reflected the change in her situation. Along with attention to her culinary skills, her mother took special care to include Nisha in all her pujas. Sona took it as a compensation for her daughter's negligent upbringing at Rupa's place. She justified herself by thinking that Nisha needed to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative karma to be a beacon in her married home. 20 Arpita Ghosh Irrespective of all odds at home Nisha completed her board exams with an emerging seventy percent in Humanities. With no prospective bridegroom at hand, the entire family pondered over Nisha's next step to future. With much speculation it was decided to let her privilege of education a bit more. Thus

*Nisha was admitted to Durga Bai College, an all girls' college, with English Honours. The family felt that it would do nicely for a girl waiting to get married. (Home 140).*

Nisha was diffident since she was very much aware of the real intentions of her family. Higher studies were just a time pass. She was not going to or be allowed to use her education. Working was out of the question and marriage was around the corner. Nisha's flair for studies was very cautiously trimmed and kept under control. Nina in *The Immigrant* (2008) metes out the same fate with a little variation. She is an established lecturer of English in a respective college affiliated to Delhi University. She lives with her widowed mother in Jangpura Extension in a rented flat. In spite of penury, she is leading an independent life. But with the addition of one more year to her age, she increases her mother's apprehension as well. Her mother, Shanti, like any other Indian mother, with a marriageable daughter is always looking out for ways to find and fix a match for Nina. Thus in spite of being educated and independent, the prospect of marriage looms large on Nina and her mother. Nina is equally speculative of her approaching age and apprehends turning out to be a bitter old spinster like her colleagues Miss Kapoor, Miss Rao, Miss Hingorani, Miss Lal, Miss Krishnamurthy and so on. Yet, education was a gift and Nisha was not ready to exchange the life of the mind for any humdrum marriage. On the same scale, Alka, Nina's sister-in-law, doesn't feel like Nina. In spite of being educated, Alka makes it clear that marriage is the ultimate destiny in the life of a girl. When Nina suggests for higher education in Canada for both Ila and Ishaan, Alka declined the offer for Ila. Alka felt that Ila of course would have to stay in India, there was the question of her marriage, but Ishaan, yes for him Dalhousie could be an option. In *Custody* Ishita's pending job applications were brushed aside to reply to the good offer in the marriage front. Ishita's aspirations with her BA and B.Ed degrees were at stake with the lucrative offers of a husband looming large and overshadowing her in totality. Even her parents felt that marriage is more important than any meagre job. For them, educational degrees and job prospects are an alternative when marriage failed to work which seemed to be a quiet auspicious thought to be nurtured. Ishita too followed the footsteps of any ordinary Indian woman. Shagun's was not extraordinary either. Mrs Sabharwal, Shagun's mother

had raised her only daughter single-handedly after the decease of her husband. Shagun's out-of-the-box career option of becoming a model was met with a cold reproach from her mother. She was strongly opposed to a career that would allow all kinds of lechery near her lovely daughter. Thus once out of the college Shagun was married off to Raman. With all her degrees shut, the claims of husband, family and friends made a career hard to justify, especially since money was not an issue.

## CONCLUSIONS

The double-standard patriarchy ploys in the educational system can be summed up in Millett's observations: As patriarchy enforces a temperamental imbalance of personality traits between the sexes, its educational institutions, segregated or co-educational, accept a cultural programming toward the generally operative division between masculine and feminine subject matter, assigning the humanities and certain social sciences to the female—and science and technology, the professions, business and engineering to the male. Of the course the balance of employment, prestige and reward at present lie with the latter. Control of these fields is very eminently a matter of political power. One might also point out how the exclusive dominance of males in the more prestigious fields directly

Women, Education and the Indian Scenario: a Study of Manju Kapur's Novels 21 serves the interests of patriarchal power in industry, government, and the military. And since patriarchy encourages an imbalance in human temperament along sex lines, both divisions of learning (science and the humanities) reflect this imbalance. ... In keeping with the inferior sphere of culture to which women in patriarchy have always been restricted, the present encouragement of their artistic interests through study of the humanities is hardly more than an extension of the accomplishments they once cultivated in preparation for the marriage market.) In all her novels Manju Kapur highlights on how women in the Indian society are bereft of proper education in the name of tradition. Lack of education makes them dependable and vulnerable to both the inner world of the zenana and the outer world. Through her novels Kapur raises the seminal issues of women in a very befitting manner and delineates the grim and pathetic reality of Indian women. She advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. Hence progress and development of a society depends on the emancipation and empowerment of both the sexes.

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