



Critical Analysis of Manju Kapur's “Custody” and “Home”

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Received: 19 Mar 2021; Received in revised form: 15 Apr 2021; Accepted: 22 Apr 2021; Available online: 30 Apr 2021
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Abstract— It is a well-known fact that Indian Literature is rich and diverse and it covers literature written in multiple languages of India. With the diversity in the Indian regional languages, the literature in India also becomes diverse and rich. From Sanskrit to Hindi to Bengali to Gujarati, to Punjabi to Marathi literature have given several gems to the world. But with the ever growing globalization English language and its literature also became and integral part of the Indian literary consciousness and it mingled with the richness of Indian Literature in general. The most prominent use of English can be seen in the writings of Indian English writers. Fiction is one the most essential genre of Indian Writing in English. This paper analyzes a special section of Indian writing in English that is Indian fiction writing in English. It deeply analyzes two prominent novels written by Indian novelist Manju Kapur, how these novels portray their heroines as the strong minded individuals who find their in the male dominated world.

Keywords— Indian Literature, British Literature, Diasporic Writers, Indian Writing in Translation, Indian Consciousness, English language, Female concerns, Patriarchy, Freedom, Indian Fiction Writing.

As it is widely known that India was once a British Colony and due to this colonization, English never left India and it has strong roots in India. This was the foremost reason why Indian writers pre and post independence chose to write in English along with their native languages. Indian English literature can be studied in four major sections which are - Poetry, Drama, Fiction and Criticism. Poetry and Drama are one of the earliest genres of Indian literature in English as well as other languages. Then fiction also came under Indian writing in English whereas criticism is the newest in the field.

Fiction is the genre that came from England but soon it also acquired a very prominent place in the Indian writing in English. This paper in particular will focus on a particular genre of Indian writing in English which is Indian fiction writing in English that too fiction written by women writers. Indian literature is enriched with empowering stories of women and their surroundings. Fiction is a powerful tool to portray the reality of the society. Though it is a comparatively new form of writing than Drama and Poetry but has gained equal importance and place in the discipline if not more than them. It started with Bankim Chandra

Chattopadhyay's "Rajmohan's Wife" but it got its full hype many years later when the trinity of Indian Fiction writing in English came. This trinity included R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. They gave Indian fiction a new outlook, All of them were unique and discussed really important issues related to Indian sensibility. But Indian Fiction is not only about male writers but female writers also contributed significantly in this field. Whether it be diasporic women writers of Indian origin or the native Indian women writers, their portrayal of the woman of their times, her concerns, her perspective and her journey towards her independence.

The diasporic women writers of Indian origin had the experience of the both the worlds, that is the eastern and the western worlds. Indian diasporic writers like Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak etc. gave the combination of these two worlds in their works. They wrote about postcolonialism, mythology, east-west comparison, feminism and what not. The most striking feature of the feminists among them was,

"Most of the writings of Indian diasporic women attempt neither to fight male domination nor to compromise themselves. But they portray the reality of what we call "femaleness" - marriage, sex, children, culture and the socially acceptable position of being a woman." 1.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a specimen of this. She tried to show the reality of the life of women irrespective of class, race, nationality, culture. Through her writing she depicted that how a woman who is suppressed by the patriarchal force has no say in the decisions of her life and at each and every point she has to prove her innocence. In regard to her work she says,

" 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' was given as a speech exactly 20 years ago, in the summer of 1983. The central concept in the speech was that once a woman performs an act of resistance without an infrastructure that would make us recognize resistance, her resistance is in vain. That was the entire argument of the speech and I think to ignore the fact that this is the case with women even when they are higher up in terms of class status does not solve this social problem. The subaltern is someone who has no access to social mobility. The case is comparable with men on a much lower class scale than women." 2.

Along with these legends the native women writers of India together paved the way for many aspiring writers to come and they became a great source of inspiration. The modern age of Indian fiction in English bought with it some real gems. Male writers were always there but this was the time of female writers too. Novelists like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Amrita Pritam, Kiran Desai, Chitra Divakurni Banerjee, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They not only talked about women but showed how true feminism works, its not always about condemning one's culture or defaming the other gender but asking for one's equal rights. Feminism was not a new concept to them but the difficult thing for them was to make it acceptable to the general public. These women writers tried to voice out those unsaid issues that never become the highlight. Manju Kapur is one such writer who not only understood the women of her time but also mirrored their perspective through her writing.

This paper deeply analyzes Manju Kapur's two most famous and widely read novels that are "Custody" and "Home". Both the novels trace the struggles, sacrifices and rebellion of their heroines in this patriarchal world. The heroines in these novels have the courage to stand for themselves but inside their strong heart lied a kind, soft and gentle heart that longed for love, respect and understanding.

"Custody" is a novel by Manju Kapur about two women Ishita and Shagun who find their way in this patriarchal tradition. Raman and Shagun get divorced and fight for the

custody of their daughter Ruhi. Shagun is a modern woman who wanted to get away from the tradition-bound family of Raman and has an affair with Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss. Ishita who is a woman bounded to tradition and culture fits as Ruhi's (Raman's daughter) mother. However, Ishita's infertility makes her feel incomplete but Ruhi fills that void. Through this novel Manju Kapur highlights that how a woman in Indian families is seen if she doesn't have a child.

" Eighteen months into the marriage the boy's family began to make noises. 'They are beginning to ask, what haven't you conceived? SK says he doesn't want to be a father yet, but they say he doesn't know what he is talking about. They behave as though he were a child,' reported Ishita to her mother. " 3.

The same idea can be seen in her novel "Home". "Custody" shows two contrasting personalities in the form of Ishita and Shagun. It highlights the fact that whether it is a traditional or a modern woman, both suffer at the hands of male dominated society but their will and resilience carve a way for them. At the end of the novel Raman and Ishita are happily married and Shagun starts her life with Ashok Khanna. In a way both the women struggled to find their happy ending but at last they did. Initially Shagun's relationship with Ashok Khanna was not considered right but for Shagun it was really important because only she knew what she was facing in her marriage. When she talks to her mother about her divorce she says,

" 'I am not leaving the children, just their father' ...

'People get divorced, you know, Ma.'...

There is no home. What do you think this whole thing is about.' " 4.

Though infidelity is not justified but at the same time society needs to accept the fact that divorces happen and it is absolutely normal for people to choose their partners. Raman might be a good match for Ishita but it does not mean that this should be the same case with Shagun, two individuals can have differences in a marriage and they have right to choose what they want in their lives.

Similarly, Manju Kapur's "Home" is a novel that shows how in Indian tradition joint families are considered a blessing and home is thought to be a place of security and warmth. But the events of the novel show that may be home is a secure place for the men but for women of the house it becomes a suffocating cage. The novel is about a businessman named Banwari Lal who suffered the horrors of partition and after that he came to India and established his business for sarees. Banwari Lal's daughter-in-law, Sona conceives after many year of marriage and has a son and later on a daughter named Nisha who is also the protagonist of the novel. The story revolves around Nisha's struggle to

live in that suffocating family, how she struggled to build her own identity and what were the results.

Nisha always faced gender discrimination. She was never given the same love, admiration, freedom and trust like her brother. She was the inferior child as she was the only daughter in the family. Nisha's journey was full of hardships as her mother also discriminated between her daughter and her son. Sona herself was the victim of toxic family culture, as she was from a poor family and wasn't able to conceive also after so many years of marriage. She was more afraid by imagining the time when her brother-in-law's wife will have children and she will be regarded with more love and respect in the family.

"Pyare Lal's prospective sons lay upon her consciousness like a stone. How their mother would shine, how little by comparison would there be to recommend her in the family's eyes!" 5.

But she decided to carry that generational trauma to her daughter also by trying to make her submissive. Nisha decided to free herself from this toxicity but she didn't do anything which was morally wrong. Though she loved a boy from lower caste but eventually she gave up on her love life due to her family. This also highlights the rigid caste system prevalent in the modern India.

Nisha's journey would have been easier if her mother supported her as no one can understand the pain of a woman better than a woman herself and that too a mother. Despite all these circumstances Nisha remained determined to have her own identity, though she gave up on some things due to familial pressure but whatever she was able to do for herself set a great example in the society as well as her family. Moreover she will become a role model for her children as, "Ten months after Nisha's marriage, twins were born. One girl, one boy. Her duty was over- God has been kind, however hard it was to believe. ... Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies. All mine, she thought all mine." 6.

Thus, Indian literature in English is a field that is filled with variety of themes, genres, characters and plots. The women writers have been successful in showing a realistic picture of women in India. Both these novels of Manju Kapur have on thing in common that they voice out the concerns of women and their struggles to become what they have always dreamt of.

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