

THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF MANJU KAPUR SUBSERVIENT TO THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM OF SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HER NOVEL: “CUSTODY.”

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ABSTRACT

The Indian social system is highly inspired by the Vedic culture and the prevailing traditional values are the outcome of the orthodox mentality of the customary people of India who have been remained the blind followers of such customary values. These unacceptable traditional values have been proved the cause of the predicament of the Indian women not only during the Vedic influence over the society but even in the present scenario also because such customary rituals have been imposed upon the women of the civilization from one generation to another generation. The male members are being contemplated for the humiliation and victimization of women category but in fact it is a social construct resulted to the mind set up of the society which is mainly responsible for the exploitation of the women of society. The gender-based discrimination is started to women category when she is identified as a female child on the basis of sex determination through the identity being disclosed by the genetical organ. Women category has been suppressed beyond the limit as per the socio-cultural construct ideology. Women has been remained the part of their exploitation and humiliation on one side and the men category has been contemplated superior to women in every sphere of life. This traditional orthodox ideology of the society has been proved wrong as the women of the present era is doing their best in every sphere of life. There is no field of life where the women have not shown their dexterity and have not accomplished their respective tasks skilfully. But since then, they are not credited with their successful endeavours and are not treated at par with the male members of the society. According to this cultural and traditional ideology of the civilization, the women are only meant to play their respective roles with the obedient and subservient attitude and approach to the family of their parents and the same for the families of their in-laws soon after their marriages. Women of every civilization, are remained striving for their freedom and equality as the oppression and inequality often paves the way towards revolutionary approach among the human beings. But such handful women who are involved in the practices to raise their voice against their exploitation and oppression are being considered as the non-conformists to the religion and culture as well. Finally, they have to lead their life under the subordination of the conventional rituals of the traditional mind set-up of society

KEY WORDS: Traditional, Discrimination, Genetical, Cultural, Conventional, Oppression, Customary, Exploitation, Subservient, Predicament and Orthodox.

INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur is one of the well-known Indian English feminist writers who has profoundly experienced the pathetic conditions of Indian middle-class women and tried her best to sensitize the humanity to understand the miserable conditions of the women of the civilization and to give them a respectable place for which they actually deserve. Almost all the heroines of Manju Kapur are fighting for their self-independent identity and equality at par with the male of civilization being human but

they have to face barriers at every step they taken to establish with a balanced approach for the equilibrium. Gender based discrimination is due to the fact that gender is no longer considered as a sex based biological determination or identity of human being but rather it has purely become a social construct. It is the common mind set-up of the society that when the biological gender of human being is identified, the discrimination is started at the very outset in such orthodox mentality traditional people. It is purely the result of conservative mind set-up where the women have to be subservient to the male-dominated patriarchal system of society having no fault of their own.

In her novel, “Custody” Manju Kapur has depicted two female protagonists; Shagun and Ishita. Besides them there is Mrs. Sabahrwal, the mother of protagonist; Shagun, Mrs. Rajora; the mother of Ishita, Mrs. Kaushik, the mother of hero of the novel, Raman and a little girl Roohi.

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Manju Kapur’s both protagonists; Shagun and Ishita are born in the ordinary middle-class families. Both of them are well-educated and being educated are well aware with their surrounding environment of discrimination, humiliation, and oppression of women. But being the women of traditional patriarchal civilization could no help them to escape from the clutch of the orthodox dogmas of the society. According to the contemplation of the socio-cultural mind set-up of the society, the discriminatory practices are being adopted and implemented to both these protagonists with their earlier course of life. The women category has been victimized as per the ideology of the primitive outlook that this category is inferior to the male category of the society since the ancient times. Spencer has rightly observed the pathetic conditions of women by quoting that the women are:

“The creation of Indian consciousness”. (Spencer,1960)

Shagun wants to become a successful model as her career in future life rather than gaining further higher education. On the other hand, her mother Mrs. Sabharwal desirous to marry her daughter rather than such non-conformist ambitions of her daughter. Mrs. Sabharwal is a type of traditional woman who keeps the ideology of conventional rituals of society higher in her life than all other aspects of her life. Under the influence of patriarchal set-up of the society and family, no woman is allowed to take the decision of her own life or about any aspect of her life that allow her to have some freedom of her own. The traditional ideology demands from the

women to remain the passive and to become mere the follower of familial decisions regarding their life. Being an educated and modern girl, Shagun wants to lead her own independent life by taking her own decisions. But her mother follows the traditional ethics of family lineage and chooses Mr. Raman Kaushik as her son-in-law fit for her daughter, Shagun. Both the families join hand for their children to marry as a perfect match to each other:

“Raman and Shagun’s marriage had been arranged along standard lines, she the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects.” (14)

Manju Kapur here has presented with the hypocrisy of the society where women are treated as a useful asset but only then, if they are useful for the family from the family’s point of view. Her respect and position in her in-law’s house is increased when her pregnancy is identified by the family. Shagun becomes the center for all cares and attentions when her conceiving news is revealed to her in-law’s family:

“Everything was a glorious adventure, and being pregnant plunged her into the center of all attention. She didn’t throw up once, her skin glowed, her hair shone, her husband called her Madonna, her mother said she was fruitful like the earth, her in-laws looked proud and fed her almonds and ghee whenever they could get near her.”(15)

Shagun’s second pregnancy becomes the cause of her mental and physical torture as she is not prepared for all such again. She wants to have more time to think over this matter but she is confronted with the conservative persuasions from her in-law’s family. Her husband Raman tries to put the spiritual and traditional beliefs of his elder members of family into the intellect of Shagun. She feels embarrassed and in her mental agony, she says:

“it’s not like that. I’ll be thirty, Arjun is just becoming independent, I don’t want to start all over again. Always tried to a child, is that what you want?”(17)

As per the socio-cultural construct of Indian society, Shagun’s love affair with Ashok Khanna, being a married woman and mother of two children, is considered as an illicit love affair which is first identified by her mother Mrs. Sabharwal. This revelation of her secret becomes the cause of huge perturbation to her conventional mother, Mrs. Sabharwal. She envisages to her daughter in her mental agony:

“Society could point finger at her and say, she knew and did nothing.” (39)

Shagun is now entangled between her married life to her household, then social responsibilities and on another side, her love affair with Ashok Khanna. To come out of this situation, she has to choose one person; among her husband and her lover. Her individual physical and emotional needs allow her to cross the narrow lines of the conservative orthodox society. Contrary to this, the socio-cultural construct of civilization does not allow her to make such advancement with her lover by crossing the threshold of conservative household. When she takes divorce from her husband, she becomes the non-conformist among her society. Her mother tries to expostulate Shagun in such desperate exposition:

“It was an uncomfortable arrangement, with Mrs. Sabharwal looking at her beseechingly, begging her not to ruin her life.” (93)

Mrs. Sabharwal is the blind follower to the traditional patriarchal system of the society and moreover considers it as the role model of her ethical values. It is really a painful moment for her when her daughter, Shagun leaves her married life and divorces her husband for the sake of her love affair with another man. The pathetic condition of Mrs. Sabharwal under traditional threats has been depicted artistically by Manju Kapur in the course of novel:

When Shagun left her marriage, it became impossible for Mrs. Sabharwal to hold her head high in the community... If Mrs. Sabharwal didn't mind her saying so, there must be something wrong with Shagun for her to leave a husband as devoted as Raman.” (133)

Ishita is another female protagonist of this novel, a victimized female character in the traditional Indian society. She is the daughter of a middle-class family of a traditional merchant just shifted to South Delhi from Morris Nagar. Her mother is a librarian at the Arts Faculty of Delhi University. She is the only child of her parents and is a submissive child to the traditional family as per the expectations of the traditional demands of the social mind set-up of civilization. Ishita completes her graduation in Arts stream and then gets B.Ed. degree as per her aspirations to become a teacher. Her parents are desirous for her education but only due to the fact that their daughter must be married to a reputed family and must be useful to her husband as Prasad has been rightly said:

“Education is meant primary to help a woman to marry well, be socially useful to her husband, be adept at bringing up her children, equip her to render social service and is considered to be an insurance policy against a broken marriage.” (Prasad, 42)

After her marriage with Suryakanta, the family wants the early child within the family as the most of the traditional family household's people do believe it for the status icon of the family. When after the couple of months Ishita remains unsuccessful to conceive, the family of her in-law's begins to ask:

“Suryakanta was their only son, and grandchildren were expected within a year...Eighteen months into marriage the boy's family began to make noise. They are beginning to ask, why haven't you conceived?” (51-53)

When the infertility of Ishita is identified by the family, Ishita no longer is taken into consideration as an important member of the family. She is disregarded by the whole family by which Ishita feels too tortured by her humiliation among her own family household. no member of her family is now worried about even her existence in the house. Her own mental turmoil gives her way to the thinking:

“At that moment Ishita thought it is easier to commit suicide than to live. From the day of her wedding, she had thought of this family as hers, reveling in the togetherness, sharing and companionship. Now instead of love all around her, there would be rejection.” (61)

The social system of Indian civilization gives importance to the women who are being capable to run bloodline of the households and only those women are given some importance who are being capable to conceive soon after marriage to give the heir to the household within the desirable time period. Otherwise, the females are not considered having any important place within the family or even within the community they live in. The same thing happens with poor Ishita when after much her endeavours she remains infertile. It is now something clear to her that what would be her future in her in-law's house but rather than her mother-in-law clears the situation in more transparent way:

“For us money is not as important as family. But beta, it is essential that Suryakanta have a child. As the only son, he has to make sure that the bloodline of his forefathers continues. And now'- she hesitated slightly- 'I need to talk to your mother.” (66)

Finally, her humiliation continues to her divorce and predicament as she becomes the victimized character of the patriarchal traditional system of the society. Ishita tries to come out of her miserable circumstances by becoming an earning woman. She has a very bitter experience from her married and divorced life. Consequently, she does not want to be bound in this relationship once again. Contraries to this, her parents being

the victimized members of conventional family, want to marry her again to avoid from the jeer of the community. Subsequently, to escape from the sneers of people and give their daughter a new life they think more upon her remarriage rather than her personal and economic independence which show threatening influence of traditional dogmas of society over them:

“Every Sunday both parents sat with the papers, pencil in hand, circling the marriage advertisements where a divorcee was acceptable. This narrowed their choice, but surely somewhere there was a man suitable for a girl like Ishita Rajora. A girl with all the home- making qualities, with so much love to give.” (133)

Both the old women; Raman’s mother; Mrs. Kaushik and Shagun’s mother; Mrs. Sabharwal are the role model of the conventionality who are not ready to meet such circumstances which might be harmful against the well-established authority of cultural values. Raman’s mother is embarrassed with the behaviour of her daughter-in-law and the unlawful activity of hers. She compares her son with Lord Rama and is harassed with the idea of wrong done to her son by her daughter-in-law. On the other side, the mother of Shagun is also desperate with the illicit love affair of her daughter and the injustice is being done to her faithful and decent son-in-law by her own daughter. She tries to expostulate her daughter not to ruin her married life due her own individual benefit. Shagun’s decision to break her marriage with Raman becomes the cause of Mrs. Sabharwal’s predicament that how she will face the sneers of the surrounding community after the divorce of her daughter; Shagun.

SUMMERISATION

The women category of Indian civilization has been remained under the oppression due the tyrannical rules laid down by the predominant supremacy of its orthodox primitive conventions and dogmas as well as some superstitious ideologies within the customary traditions of the different civilizations of Indian socio-cultural environment. The fundamental reason behind all such unauthorised practices is the conformist thinking of the society which further caused to gender-based prejudices with the mind set-up of the society which paves the way to the discriminatory practices being employed to the women of every civilization. On contrary to this the male category of the society is contemplated to be meant for enjoy their personal as well as socio-cultural freedom within almost every community of Indian civilization. The spread of education and advancement prevailed in our civilization inspired by the modernity of western culture as well as concept of feminism, some handful of women have tried to be liberate themselves from the traditional bounds of the society through

their forceful endeavours. Some of them have been got the desirable success in their efforts up to some desirable extent but most of the women within these women have to be subservient to the traditional patriarchal system of the society. The need of the present hour demands to change the primitive orthodox thinking of the society for the upliftment and improvement in the pathetic conditions of the women where they are being humiliated, tortured, beaten, oppressed and exploited only upon the basis of their sex determination only. It is the last hope for the survival of women from their victimization under the male-dominated patriarchal system of civilization that devalues them.

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