

Chapter V

Conclusion

Indian women in the contemporary times are in a conflicting state where they are trapped between the pressures of tradition and the advancements of modernity. The fictional narratives of Manju Kapur propagate to redefine the status of Indian women and liberate them from the conventional social structures of the past, which is the need of the hour. The novelist writes about women's lives and their perspectives through the vision of her women protagonists with the realisation that feminine individuality can no longer be hidden or suppressed. She is firm in making society aware of women's demands, desires, and ambitions to provide them with the medium of self-expression to break free from patriarchal constraints.

Manju Kapur has created her own style of women's literature to emancipate women from their state of subjugation by adapting current social problems and familial issues, especially through the life experiences of her female characters in the novels – *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody*, and *Brothers*. She records the discomfort of women with the patriarchal social order which restricts the female race to reshape themselves with their skills, talents, abilities, and potentials. She focusses her attention on the feelings and aspirations along with the burden and frustration of the present-day modern educated, middle-class women of the Indian society.

The women-centered novels give a new dimension to promote female liberation in the contemporary Indian society. The writings of Manju Kapur attempt to eliminate the destructive and claustrophobic patriarchal domination that continue to suppress and deny

new opportunities for women. Manju Kapur, through her women protagonists, argues that their vulnerability stems from societal expectations. Women endure sufferings right from childhood due to the biased upbringing practices of their parents, who believe that girl children are "...made for child care, home care and husband care" (MacKinnon 530). The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina, insist on doing away with prejudiced upbringing and the biased dictation of gender roles which holds back their opportunities and reduce their success rate in reaching the highest echelons of academic and professional endeavours. The negligence of the parents to nurture their daughters to develop their individuality make the women protagonists demand equal treatment of sons and daughters.

Women are expected to be dependent on their husbands in the institution of marriage. The women protagonists are denied the opportunity to assert their choices, their decision-making capabilities are brushed aside, and are abandoned by the male counterparts if they fail to oblige to the unjust demands in their marital relationship. The spousal separation traumatises the women protagonists when they are left in isolation to confront with solitude. They single-handedly nurture their children and shoulder the growing physical and financial needs of the family to maintain domestic harmony. They enrich their physical strength, emotional stability, and intellectuality to survive in the patriarchal world. They wish to awaken their feminine sensibility and prioritise their desires, ambitions, and wellness to make their lives meaningful. They try to annihilate the domestic violence and marital enslavement to establish their individuality. They fuel their unwavering determination to achieve their life goals and stride ahead toward their holistic growth and individual success. An attitudinal shift is observed in the women protagonists,

who are able to strike a balance among diverse spheres of their life from domesticity to professional accomplishments despite the upheavals of male domination.

Manju Kapur remarks that the notion of male superiority or entitlement and the patriarchal belief system often justifies the differential treatment of women. The novelist has unraveled the tapestries of male supremacy to expose the deep-rooted inequalities and challenge the traditional power structures that perpetuate gender discrimination. The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina are representations of 'New Woman', who interrogate the masculine social order that subjugates and oppresses women to withhold the hierarchy of patriarchal power. They believe that a meaningful change can be brought only from within when they recognise the power of self-awareness and personal growth. They are "...intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting" as defined by Salley Ledger in the book, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (8). They are the more accentuated with a futuristic view to reclaim their inner strength, courage, and confidence to transform their personal lives, and motivate women around the globe to build their self-esteem. They harness their resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment to unlock their dream goals toward empowerment. The experiences of subjugation, discrimination, and inequality transform the women protagonists to be the agents of social change to reconstruct the feminine standards and values.

The women protagonists are real warriors with fortitude as they have crossed milestones of challenges to ascertain their individual identity. They expect reciprocation of love, support, and respect from their parents, husbands, family members, and the society to get rid of gender differences that cripple women's competency and potential in

the familial and professional spheres. They aspire to lead a dependent-free family life and break the stereotypes when they enter into the conventional male-dominated professions enhancing their employability and excellence. They wish to create safe and secured familial and social milieu for women in the Indian society. They realise the need to be strong-willed, self-controlled, rational, and self-reliant to strengthen their individual authority. They take up leadership roles in social activities to become the role models and mentors for aspiring young women. They possess the intellectuality and maturity which enable them to contribute eloquently to the cultural, political, social, and economic fabric of the nation.

The '*Nari Shakthi*' (Women Power) of India has the ability and authority to adorn the nation with a prestigious status around the globe. The tireless efforts and contributions of the Indian female population strengthen their empowerment to bring about a significant socio-cultural enhancement to the nation. The empowerment of women plays a significant role in the nation's growth and progress. It would enable to revolutionise the hegemonic set-up and reinforce the democratic values of social justice and independence. It paves the way to challenge and reshape cultural norms, traditions, and stereotypes to foster a culture that celebrates the achievements, contributions, and aspirations of women to acknowledge their rightful place as equal partners in the society. Dr. Neeraj Dhankar and Alka Gaur in the article "Women Empowerment through Education" states that,

Empowerment is a process through which a woman is able to have the ability to make choices, control resources or enact decisions. The empowered woman can become the agent of their own development,

exercising their choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge and change their subordinate positions in the societies. (6)

A transition in the Indian society is expected to necessitate a better living environment where every individual enjoys equal respect irrespective of their gender. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the “Independence Day” speech (2022) has addressed that,

Gender Equality is a crucial parameter for Unity... The more opportunities we give to our daughters, the more they will take India forward... Do Nothing that Lowers the dignity of Women... For some reason, a distortion has crept into our conduct, our behaviour, our words so at times, we insult women. Can we take a pledge to stop this behaviour? ...Respect for women is an important pillar of India’s growth... (1)

It is essential to recognise, support, and amplify women’s voices to uphold their respect and dignity which contribute to the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. A society gains multiple benefits such as increased economic growth, better education outcomes, and enhanced social cohesion when women are empowered. Nazhath Sara in the article “Social Change and Women” quotes the words of Datta, who defines the empowerment of women as “...acquisition of the capacity as well as the adoption of needed strategy by women in order to exercise their powers more effectively and professionally, for their own development in particular and of the society in general” (47).

Women have the right to express their individual thoughts and make choices that align with their personal values, interests, and dream goals. Women supportive ecosystem should be established to nurture their growth and provide continued opportunities for their advancement in academic, professional, and political sectors. Indian women have

explored the professional arenas of judiciary, politics, governance, academics, arts, literature, entrepreneurship, armed forces, sports, aerospace, science, and technology. They inspire the future generations to challenge the traditional gender roles and encourage the female folk to pursue their ambitions to rise as empowered women. In recent years women have held important political portfolios such as Presidents, ministers, leaders of panchayats, local-body chairpersons, and speakers of parliaments and have brought about significant legislative policy changes for the welfare of female gender. They create awareness about social legislation, gender lacuna, and disparities in the personal laws governing marriage, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance rights of women.

Women have gathered the courage to build solidarity and support networks, enabling them to connect with their community across the globe and build associations to share the fruits of freedom and assert their rights. Women of contemporary India are able to amplify their voices and connect with like-minded individuals through social media, creating a powerful network of female supporters and volunteer to work towards establishment of gender equality. The collaboration among countries, international organisations, and society would help in sharing the best practices, exchanging knowledge, and providing financial and technical support which in turn facilitates to accelerate women's empowerment at local, national, and international levels. The framework of the United Nations General Assembly such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) serve as important tools in protecting the individual rights and promoting the empowerment of women.

The women empowerment movements around the globe should include men to understand the plight of women surviving in the gender prejudiced society. Men have to step into women's shoes to analyse how their misogynistic behaviour affects the female inner strength, which eventually results in the marginalisation of female race. They need to challenge the existing unjust social norms and change their hegemonic behaviours to imbibe the spirit of unity and equality. They must work towards the abolition of historic gender discrimination to remove the prejudices and cultural beliefs that perceive women to be inferior. They should join shoulder to shoulder with women and engage themselves as allies to establish a gender equitable society which is free of injustice, crime, and violence. They are expected to be forward thinking individuals, who should readily take risks to break the societal oppression and speak up for women's rights. The collective efforts of all the citizens of the nation are required to dismantle the barriers that obstruct the journey towards attainment of feminine freedom.

The scope for future research in the literary works of Manju Kapur lies in the application of historical and sociological forms of study that would lead to boulevards for a revolution to formulate new women-oriented social policies. Application of psychological theories in the novels of Manju Kapur helps to comprehend the human psyche when they encounter challenges in the familial and social spheres. The comparative study of Manju Kapur's novels with her contemporary writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan, and Sudha Murthy helps to identify commonalities and differences in terms of language, style, themes, or characterisations. A study may be pursued to elucidate the postcolonial narratives with issues related to identity, nationhood, and cultural belonging. The study of the male

characters in the novels of Manju Kapur helps to analyse the impact of patriarchy on the lives of women. The literary contributions of Manju Kapur serve to acknowledge women's selfhood and honour the uniqueness of womanhood that contribute to the enrichment of the country's cultural heritage.