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Portrayal of traditional women in Manju Kapur's novels

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Abstract

The present paper presents the portrayal of traditional women in the novels of Manju Kapur. Manju Kapur very adroitly presents women that belong to the colonial and pre-independent India who are well-steeped in tradition. They are nothing if not traditional to their backbone. The traditional woman brought up in the spirit of tradition takes it for granted that her status as a daughter, wife or mother is safe and secure and the pattern of family set-up, termed as patriarchal system safeguards her interests as an individual in society. In such a tradition, where woman takes everything for granted, the thought of rebelling against that system sounds absurd and irrational. Women's elastic sense of adjustment, and her shock-absorber like patience and, above all, her deep sense of dedication and devotion to her family fortify the traditional system. The reason for all this is not far to seek! Hindu ethos has instilled certain ideals into her consciousness even from her girlhood and this sense of dedication to her family, with a genuine sense of self sacrifice, no more can make her go against the existing traditional system. And the patriarchal mode of hegemony, especially in India, fortifies that system. Tradition, indeed, is tyrannical and is quite impervious to ideas new that come from outside.

Keywords: Tradition, patriarchy, marriage, zeitgeist, family

1. Introduction

Manju Kapur presents her concept of womanhood by creating different types of characters; and in so doing, she delves deep into the woman psyche and presents certain complex and surprising aspects of their personality. It is here that Kapur proves to be a past master at delineating human character, especially, woman character. With her keen insight, she hunts motives that propel her central characters into unpredictable actions.

The present paper presents the portrayal of traditional women in the novels of Manju Kapur. Manju Kapur very adroitly presents women that belong to the colonial and pre-independent India who are well-steeped in tradition. They are nothing if not traditional to their backbone. Often we say that they are the victims of a man-dominated society. This common observation carries an element of irony in itself. 'Male-dominated' society has, by now, become a critical jargon. Yes, it is true—true only from the point of view of the outsider—but the 'insider' namely, the traditional woman brought up in the spirit of tradition takes it for granted that her status as a daughter, wife or mother is safe and secure and the pattern of family set-up, termed as patriarchal system safeguards her interests as an individual in society. In such a tradition, where woman takes everything for granted, the thought of rebelling against that system sounds absurd and irrational. Women's elastic sense of adjustment, and her shock-absorber like patience and, above all, her deep sense of dedication and devotion to her family fortify the traditional system. The reason for all this is not far to seek! Hindu ethos has instilled certain ideals into her consciousness even from her girlhood and this sense of dedication to her family, with a genuine sense of self sacrifice, no more can make her go against the existing traditional system. And the patriarchal mode of hegemony, especially in India, fortifies that system. Tradition, indeed, is tyrannical and is quite impervious to ideas new that come from outside.

The burden of tradition which includes customs, conventions and social mores shapes, controls and guides the community of men that receives its general character from it. And it prescribes the guidelines for its norms. As an anonymous authority, it pontificates the individuals as regards their conduct within the community.

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It is an unwritten code that is transferred from one generation to another, and those who adhere to these norms and follow its dictates without ever deviating from those prescribed norms are labeled traditional. In other words, one's predecessors are one's examples and their role models. So a daughter who follows in the very footsteps of her mother is a traditional woman. And if this trend continues forever there is a danger of human society's being stagnant.

"The old order must change, yielding place to new.
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."
(Tennyson)

In Manju Kapur's novels, we see the image of a 'new woman' emerging from the age-old archetypal traditional woman. In creating the new woman Manju Kapur goes back to a status of a woman who is the very embodiment of the spirit of tradition. The author delves deep into the tradition of the past and depicts the traditional woman characterized by certain inalienable traits. Manju Kapur very cleverly invents situations to project the image of the woman of the past; and she creates the image of woman strikingly different from her.

In every novel of hers, we inevitably come across a woman character with traditionalist views and these characters happen to be the mothers who carry the burden of tradition and their immediate progeny—their children—come in conflict with their views. We may term this conflict as 'Generation-gap' or it may be the result of zeitgeist—the spirit of the times. After all change is the law of nature. But this change doesn't take place casually; this change is actually the result of a fierce conflict between the old and the new. This is the universal phenomenon. It has been very characteristically expressed by Alexander Pope in a couplet:

"We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so."(Pope)

The traditional women in Manju Kapur's novels, though they come from different socio-economic background, they belong to middle class and they are one in upholding the values of tradition. Traditional women hardly feel the pangs of dependence on others since they do not have what the concept of Independence means.

As Meena Devi puts it:

"They seem to be behaving uniformly. To them, it is the moral aspect that counts. Naturally they glorify the institution of Marriage as the "be-all and end-all" for themselves."(223)

Kasturi, one of the major characters in the novel, "Difficult Daughters" is an embodiment of tradition, Kapur has chosen a few incidents quite characteristic of what we call 'tradition'. She is nothing if not traditional to her backbone. Kasturi, the mother of Virmati in 'Difficult Daughters', in the role of mother becomes a formidable force of patriarchal system. She is the very replica of the traditional woman. She embodies all the traditional qualities, we find in her, all the salient traits ingrained in a traditional woman.

Kasturi comes of a well-to-do middle class, traditional, Arya Samaj family. She is trained even from her girlhood that marriage is her destiny. As such Kasturi was trained in

the culinary arts which were an essential qualification for a young girl to be married. Marriage changes the status of a daughter into the status of a daughter-in-law and from then onwards her in-laws, becomes hers. And her chief duty as a daughter-in-law is to please her in-laws. Traditionally she is well-equipped to be a daughter-in-law whose chief duty is to be good at cooking.

"During Kasturi's formal schooling 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 qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws."(DD-62)

The instances or incidents dealt with by Manju Kapur in order to bring out the quintessential features of tradition in Kasturi are most admirable. Firstly, for traditionally minded Kasturi it was no crime to give birth to a large number of children. Secondly, she staunchly opposes Virmati's proposal to go for further studies and thirdly, the arranged marriage with Inderjeet without the consent of her daughter, Virmati. And Kasturi's concept of education was the result of her traditional brought up and this creates a situation which renders Virmati quite helpless as an individual.

The concept of the traditional womanhood consists in being a little educated and to be well-trained in domestic chores. Kasturi fulfills both these qualifications and so her uncle pays her tribute that she was one of the finest flowers of 'Hindu Womanhood'. One conspicuous feature about Kasturi is that she is a mother of eleven children and as tradition permits a woman to give birth to any number of children and society accepts it. Thus we see the indelible mark of tradition on Kasturi:

"By the time Virmati was sixteen, Kasturi could bear child birth no more. For the eleventh time it had started, the heaviness in her belly, morning and evening nausea, bile in her throat while eating, hair falling in clumps, giddiness when she got up suddenly. How trapped could nature make a woman? She turned to God, so bountiful with his gifts, and prayed ferociously for the miracle of Miscarriage. Her Sandhya started and ended with this plea that somehow she should drop the child she was carrying and never conceive again."(DD-7)

Kasturi has never been happy with giving birth to children—one after another and ManjuKapur condemns the practice of unlimited procreation of children and its adverse effects on women's health. ManjuKapur observes, in this context:

"Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying her children was a strain, even when they were very young. Her stomach was soft and spongy, her breasts long and unattractive. Her hair barely snaked down to mid back, its length and thickness gone with her babies. Her teeth bled when she chewed her morning neem twigs, and she could feel some of them shaking. She had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted, but with another child there would be nothing left of her."(DD-7)

Ruby Milhoutra observes:

“Kasturi’s repeated pregnancies made her sickly, resulting in her total dependence on Virmati to manage household. As a natural consequence her unique position in the home is lost which she has to yield to her daughter quite unwillingly. Virmati thus becomes a ‘substitute’ and not the double that every wants her daughter to be. As a consequence the relationship assumes hostile dimensions.”(165)

The views of Kasturi regarding marriage of a daughter are quite traditional. She firmly believes that a girl who attains a marriageable age must be married. In the course of their conversation, during their stay at Dalhousie, between Kasturi and Lajwanti, the former broaches on the topic of Shakuntala’s unmarried state saying: “Still it is the duty of every girl to get married.”(DD-15) and in her conversation with Shakuntala, Kasturi says:

“Hai re beti what is the need to do a job? A woman’s shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shaadi. After you get married, Viru can follow.”(DD-16)

In their brief discourse, when Virmati tells her mother that she has failed her F.A. exams, Kasturi tells her to the effect that Virmati’s education has been practically over; since, in her traditional concept of education a woman may put an end to her studies with her high school education. She found Virmati’s making fuss about failing her exams unreasonable saying:

“I told you it was too much for you. Ever since we’ve come back you have been making difficulties, you had the kotha store room to study in during your exams and still you fuss—Leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad-tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first.”(DD-21)

and she adds, “At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother”.(DD-22) She believes that the real business of a girl’s life is to get married and look after her home. When a brief discussion takes place between mother and daughter about the proposed marriage of Virmati with the canal engineer, the latter suggests to her mother that she is not prepared to marry as early as that, then the mother (Kasturi) irritably retorts:

“Are you out of senses? Two years is not long enough for you?
You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you, otherwise would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you.”(DD-58, 59)

The dialogue between the mother and the daughter presents a live discussion on education versus marriage. According to Vera Alexander:

“In the juxtaposition of marriage and education, education is either described in terms of a threat, or

portrayed as a dead end, reducing accomplished female characters to obedient wifehood and dependency rather than enabling them to make a living out of their training.”(275)

When Virmati pleads her mother that she was not harming anybody by studying, Kasturi retorts in an indignant tone:

“You harm by not marrying. What about Indu? How long will she have to wait? What is more, the boy is getting impatient, what about him?”(DD-59)

When Virmati in a point blank manner tells her mother that she is not going to marry the canal engineer, then Kasturi loses her temper at Virmati’s impertinent answer and gives her right and left, ‘grabbing her by the hair and banged her head against the wall’. Crying out,

“May be this will knock some sense into you! What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?”(DD-59)

Kasturi’s traditional view of education is clearly revealed when she says,

“What had come over the girl? She had always been so good and sensible. How could she not see that her happiness lay in marrying a decent boy, who had waited patiently all these years, to whom the family had given their word? What kind of learning was this, that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education; it had got her husband, and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading. In her time, going to school has been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one’s parents. How had girls changed so much in just a generation.”(DD-60)

After the Tarsikka episode, in spite of her family’s repeated urges to marry, Virmati adamantly sticks to her opinion of pursuing higher studies; Kasturi as a last resort compromises to the situation which Virmati has created and accompanies her daughter to Lahore to admit her in RBSL College for her B.T. and she casually advises Virmati:

“If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself. There is a time in the cycle of life for everything. If you willfully ignore it like this, what will happen to you? A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings.”(DD-111)

Kasturi holds the values of patriarchy as ideal and thinks her responsibility to uphold the values by imposing them on her daughter and when her daughter, Virmati rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self. As Simon de Beauvoir points out:

“Most women simultaneously demand and detest their feminine condition, they live it through in a state of resentment vexed at loving produced a woman, the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: ‘you shall be a woman’. She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom, she regards as double and she...sometimes she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: ‘what

was good enough for you, I was good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot.”(533-534)

In the brief discussion between Kasturi and Suraj Prakash, about sending Virmati to Nahan, as a Headmistress of the school, reveals that Suraj Prakash is inclined towards progressive views although he doesn't overtly emphasize, while Kasturi, with the weight of tradition on her mind, fails to summon up her confidence to agree with the views of her husband and plaintively tells her husband, “What kind of Kismet is ours that our eldest daughter remain unmarried like this?”(DD-181)

When Virmati formally visits her mother soon after her marriage with the Professor, the very presence of Virmati enkindles Kasturi's unspent, accumulated, hatred and indignation against her daughter, bursts out like a volcano; and she becomes besides herself and in her uncontrollable anger takes her chappal and beats her shouting:

“You have destroyed our family, you badmash, you randi! You have blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth?

Because of you there is shame on your family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are!”(DD-221)

Kasturi is implacable to the end towards her difficult daughter, Virmati. She becomes hard hearted as a mother and indifferent and harsh to her daughter and she has not moved with the times. ManjuKapur very vividly and realistically presents Kasturi as the very embodiment of the spirit of tradition. Every act of Kasturi has been prompted by her ingrained sense of tradition.

Lajwanti, belongs to the conventional type of woman, firmly upholds the traditional values and gives utmost importance to the institution of marriage. She feels miserable and disappointed at the unmarried status of Shakuntala, her daughter saying,

“When will this girl settle down? All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should have been a man.”(DD-16)

Lajwanti is traditional in spirit but not overtly. If we critically analyze her words, we find that her traditionalism is skillfully veiled by sounding to be progressive. Whenever there has been any reference to Shakuntala's unmarried state, Lajwanti prevaricates by saying:

“How can anyone see her when she has no time? Such Talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for the younger ones.”(DD-15)

Though it is a great insult to her and she herself doesn't understand or cared for the achievements of Shakuntala, she continues to say:

“She lives for others, not herself, but what to do, everybody in our family is like that. And with all this reading-writing, girls are getting married late. It is the will of the God.”(DD-15)

It is quite natural on the part of a mother to be a little worried about the unmarried state of her children when they attain marriage age. But in the case of Lajwanti, this worry seems to be more accentuated when she says that her daughter Shakuntala's unmarried state causes her 'enough heartache' and she persistently insists, in the same way, on her son's (Somnath) marriage:

“His mother often pointed out that it was his duty to see that her old age would not be spent in darkness and loneliness.”(DD-32)

She becomes hysterical about her children's unmarried state and she regrets that so much of her son's beauty is being wasted. Such thoughts as these are nothing but the promptings of the traditionalist in her.

Next in the order of traditional women comes Ganga, the illiterate wife of the Professor. Ganga, as a wife has been very perfect in running the household and the Professor is thoroughly satisfied with his wife in this aspect; but his major grievance is that there is an unbridgeable gulf from cultural and intellectual point of view between them. We learn from the Professor's letters to Virmati that they—Ganga and the Professor were married at the age of two and three. Ganga is seen another victim of the traditional society. She has entered her in-laws' house at the age of twelve and tried to prove herself to be a good house wife but she could never become an intellectual companion to her husband and this leads to her plight. We really sympathize with the sad position of the Professor. The adverse effects of early traditional marriages have their own evil consequences on society at large.

Kapur presents Ganga as a thorough-going traditional wife; Ganga is every inch a traditional wife and she attends to every trivial duty not to win her husband's love or affection but as a part of her duty as a traditional wife:

“From washing his clothes to polishing his shoes, to Tidying his desk, dusting his precious books, filling his Fountain pens with ink, putting his records back in their Jackets, mending his clothes, stitching his shirts and kurtas, hemming his dhotis, seeing that they were properly starched—Ganga did it all.”(DD-216)

Since Ganga is a traditional wife, she wails reluctantly accepting her fate without questioning her husband when the professor brings Virmati home as his second wife. “What have I done, that God should punish me like this?”(211) Bhagbhat Nayak remarks:

“The novel evokes some concern over the problems of women in a male-dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix and a husband stands as a 'sheltering tree' under which a woman proves her strength through her suffering.” (103)

Had she been a woman with modern views she would have silently left home as a protest against what he has done. As a traditional wife, Ganga wants to be the whole mistress of the domain of the kitchen. When Virmati tries to go into the kitchen, Ganga weeps and wails all day cleaning and cleansing all the pots and pans.

“Such ritual rinsing of every pot and pan to wash away her polluted touch, that she felt intimidated. It was clear not an inch of the territory was going to be yielded.”(230)

In this way, she asserts her rights as a traditional wife lest her right as a wife should be wilted out. Ganga’s grievance is more against Virmati than against her husband whom she still holds in high esteem:

“Her husband continued to be Ganga’s public statement of selfhood. Her bindi and her bangles, her toe rings and her mangalsutra, all managed to suggest that he was still her God.”(DD-278)

Harish’s mother, Kishori Devi, a woman of wide experience is able to understand life and its ironies. Although, as a woman she feels sympathetic with the sad situation of her daughter-in-law Ganga, with the arrival of Harish’s second wife Virmati, yet, as a traditional woman, she is forced to accept Virmati as Harish’s second wife. She is an apt example of traditional notions that force people to behave in such strange ways. Since she has belief in the horoscope that her son would have two wives, she is easily convinced when he brings virmati as his second wife. “She knew she could only bow before the inevitable.”(DD-208)

As a mother Kishori Devi cannot but, be ever so reluctantly, compromise with the situation while the woman grieves too much for her daughter-in-law, Ganga. Kishori Devi is all sympathy for her daughter-in-law whom she loves and respects as an able, traditional house-wife. But unexpected incidents take place even in the best organized families. Such a thing has happened in the life of innocent Ganga and, it is a big irony in her life that her husband has brought a second wife into her life.

Kishori Devi feels deeply sorry for Ganga, who is an embodiment of all domestic virtues. In this context, Kishori Devi contemplates:

“Her daughter-in-law was exemplary, thrifty, efficient, industrious and respectful, but if this was to be her fate, what could anyone do? She should have to accept it.”(DD-210)

As Kavita Tyagi observes:

“The notions of patriarchy were so strongly embedded in the psyche of women of older times that they, so fearful of their physical and financial security that they dare not cross their patriarchal thresholds for the fear of being discarded by society.”(207)

In trying to console Ganga in the hour of her deepest distress, like all traditional women Kishori Devi, in a resigned mood, resorts to fatalism:

“He Bhagawan, we are all in your hands, who can predict anything, or decide anything on their own? whatever happens is for some ultimate good, even if we do not understand it at the moment. In this life we can do nothing but our duty. Serve our elders, look after our children, walk along the path that has been marked for us, and not pine and yearn for those things we cannot have. Since our destiny is predetermined, that is the

only way we can know any peace. Duty is our guide, and our strength. How can we control the things outside us? We can only control ourselves.”(DD-210-211)

In traditional Philosophy men attribute things beyond their own control to fate or to the sins of the past life. In response to wailing Ganga’s question as to what wrong she has committed that things should come to such a tragic pass, Kishori Devi consoles Ganga saying:

“Who can tell why this has happened? Something in his past life or yours, or hers, or mine. We do not know, we cannot. We have to accept-----This is our lot in life.”(DD-211)

Here Clara Nubile aptly remarks,

“In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of the patriarchal system.”(271)

Astha’s mother, Sita in ‘A Married Woman’, is presented as a woman who is traditional to the hilt. Every word and syllable that she utters reveals that she has thoroughly imbibed the spirit of Hindu ethos. Like all traditional mothers, she is very much worried about the marriage of her only daughter. Astha’s mother expresses her great concern for her marriage saying:

“When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Doyou know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth?”(AMW-1)

It is apt to quote Simon de Beauvoir,

“Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society”

When Astha skeptically tells her that she has no belief in that stuff and suggests her mother that as an educated woman, neither she should believe in such things, her mother becomes fatalistic and sighs that no one can escape their destiny. Thus, she believes that everything is predestined saying, “Who can escape their duty?”(AMW-1)

The only problem that Sita is obsessed with is the marriage of her daughter. She gives the first and foremost priority to it and she believes things must be done at the proper right time, especially in marriages.

“There is time for everything, the girl is blossoming now.

When the fruit is ripe it has to be picked. Later she might get into the wrong company and we will be left wringing our hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem adjusting.

We too are not so young that we can afford to wait.”(AMW-20)

Astha’s mother is so deeply traditional minded that she insists on her daughter’s reading the Shastras that teach her the art of living—she means in a moral sense.

“Our Shastras teach us how to live. You can learn from the Gita, the Vedas, the Upanishads.”(AMW-27, 28)

Sita has the latent spiritual leanings which make her easily accept the invitation of her colleague to meet a Swami. The death of her husband leaves some void in her and her spiritual life fills it up. She seems to have come under the spell of the Swamiji and digested the spirit of his sermons. So she addresses a letter to her daughter about the importance of spiritual life. In this context, she tells Astha that peace is to be found within oneself:

“In ourselves alone is peace. Even when we know how difficult it is to change ourselves, still we expect others to change, and are unhappy when our expectations are not met. —Accept without condition if you want to live in peace.”(AMW-83)

Sita acts exactly like a traditional woman where money is concerned. The proceeds of their land are entrusted to Hemant, since financial matters come under the domain of men. When Astha questions her why she has entrusted the money to Hemant, she tells her:

“He is a man, he knows about money. He will invest it for you and the children. I have discussed the whole thing with him.”(AMW-97)

It is also a mark of traditional thinking on the part of Astha’s mother to feel undue concern about her daughter’s family and her happiness even when she is grown up enough to deal with her own family affairs. She advises her daughter to pay more attention towards Hemant’s health and be a dutiful wife.

“God bless you my little one and your family. Poor Hemant needs a break from all his troubles. You do not give him much attention. Remember men have to bear the burdens of the outside world, home is their refuge.”(AMW-270)

Sona is one of the major woman characters of the novel ‘Home’. She is the wife of Yashpal and the daughter-in-law of the patriarch, Lala Banwari Lal. Theirs is a love marriage. Sona is presented as a restless woman and the reasons, of course, are obvious. In the first place, she enters the Lal’s traditional family through love marriage without any dowry and it entails a continual taunting by her mother-in-law. Secondly, Sona’s being childless for a long period incurs the deep displeasure of her mother-in-law. As a traditional woman, Sona feels her womanhood is incomplete without her being a mother. And this is much more so in a traditional family. Sona leaves no stone unturned and becomes stricter in the observance of rituals.

“Every Tuesday she fasted. Previously she would eat fruit and drink milk once during this day, now she converted to a nirjal fast. No water from sun-up to sun-down. She slept on the floor, abstained from sex, woke early in the morning, bathed before sunrise. For her puja she collected fresh white flowers, jasmine or chameli, unfallen, untrodden, from the park outside the house.”(H-15)

She appears to be fatalistic in this regard when she even believes that “there must be some deficiency in her prayers or a very bad past karma that made her suffer in this life” and to make amends for her deficiency she prays to lord Krishna most earnestly;

“Please, I am growing old, bless us with a child, girl or boy, I do not care, but I cannot bear the emptiness in my heart.”(H-19)

Sona, after a relentless psychological struggle for ten long years, gives birth to a daughter, Nisha. When Sona becomes the mother of a male child, there comes in her life a new light that dispels the darkness that envelops her be it ever so thin. The birth of a son has raised her status in the family. As a traditional mother Sona wishes to train her daughter on the lines of a traditional girl befitting the future wife of a good family. She insists, keeping in mind the mangli status of Nisha that her ten year old daughter Nisha should observe, as tradition demands, a fast. But when Nisha protests she retorts saying:

“What kind of wife are you going to make if you can’t bear to fast one day a year for your husband?”(H-93)

Nisha, on listening to the story of Karva Chauth, protests that the brothers in the story should be punished and not the sister; then Sona tries to drive home the idea that any deviation from the stipulated norms may result in sad consequences. She tries to inject the spirit of tradition saying.

“That girl should have followed her elders and not eaten by herself. After all, no one else was eating, were they? She was trying to be independent, and you can see the consequences.”(H-95)

She advises her daughter to be like the devoted wife Savitri in ‘The Vat Savitri Katha’ that Sona dins into her daughter’s ears to be traditional whenever there is occasion for her.

“—Like Savitri be a beacon in your married home,—This what you must be like.”(H-130,134)

On the eve of Nisha’s return to her home, after eleven years of her stay at Rupa’s house, their casual discussion turns to education. When Rupa suggests the importance of education which helps one to stand on one’s own feet, Sona rejoins that as it is Nisha doesn’t need any education and says:

“—If something happens, she has her family, her brothers, her aunt and uncle. What is the need to blacken your face looking for a job, as though you had no on to protect you? Might as well live on the streets.”(H-124)

And also insists that, “We are old old fashioned people. Tradition is strong with us. So is duty.”(H-124) Sona is awfully disappointed to know that Nisha doesn’t know the very basics of culinary skills. Sona is mainly obsessed with the idea that Nisha should be well-equipped in the house hold as a traditional wife so that this might neutralize her negative karma. She is of firm opinion 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.”(H-129)

Sona’s thoughts always hover around the theme of marriage wherever the argument begins it ends in marriage. She is so traditional that she believes that the be-all and end-all of a woman’s life is marriage. It has become an obsession with her. Sona, as a staunch traditionalist, believes that a girl must be happily anywhere and for this she must be very adept at cooking.

“What is there in happiness? A girl has to be happy Everywhere—Besides she is hopeless at cooking. —Her real education is in the kitchen.”(H-135)

It is scientifically proved that any psychological disturbance will manifest in the physical disorder. But, when Nisha is taken to doctors of different description, all of them express the same opinion that mostly diseases are psycho-somatic; But, Sona dismisses this idea and like a traditionalist, believes that, “It is the evil eye that has cursed my home.”(H-234)

Sona is the force of patriarchy within her home; the opposition for Nisha doesn’t come so openly from the male members as it does from her own mother. Sona is starkly opposed to Nisha undertaking any kind of business since she believes that she is going to be married. The very obsession of Sona with her daughter’s marriage leaves her a monomaniac and all her arguments where Nisha is concerned end with the refrain of ‘Nisha’s marriage’

“She is going to get married, why waste time and money n all this? A business was not teaching, resignable when The bridegroom reached the door.”(H-290)

Sona, like all mothers takes it is to be her first and foremost duty, while other duties are subordinate, is to see that her daughter is happily married. When Nisha’s marriage has been settled, like all mothers Sona feels extremely happy. We cannot conclude Sona’s character better than to quote her own words, “My duty is done, and now I can die in peace, Roop.”(H-306)

2. Conclusion

Thus, Manju Kapur very effectively delineates the characters of traditional women who are gender stereotypes and act as a formidable force of patriarchy. They not only carry the burden of tradition but also try to pontificate their next generation thus being the flag bearers of it.

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