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## The voice of women: Manju Kapur

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### Abstract

The human experience is a rainbow of colours. Every person's unique qualities should be recognised and celebrated. Dissolving separatist "isms" is a pressing need right now. For the "New Woman," being a housewife is no longer an option. They value being feminine and retaining their feminist ideals, but they are also seeking respect and parity. They are employed, wealthy, and influential. They are well-read ladies who are committed to working on their relationships. Women may seem placid, but they will not stand for wrongdoing. Although they aren't perfect, they do their best to discern good from wrong and expand their awareness and consciousness. Women are no longer portrayed in a passive role in Indian English literature, where they were formerly seen as the silent sufferer and upholder of tradition and traditional ideals of family and community.

Thus, the depictions of Indian women by Indian writers demonstrate that feminism exists in India. The nature and intensity of its presence vary, but it is there everywhere. The status of Indian women is at a pivotal juncture. Women authors are increasingly challenging stereotypes and breaking new ground. The standard fare of "Roti, Kapda, and Makaan" is not enough for them. They're looking for more. Examining the female mind is crucial at the present time. Women need to have their deepest motivations, mental processes, and uniqueness respected in order to be understood. To build a fair society (of people, of course), Indian males should consider how crucial the fair sex is. There should be no misunderstanding that this means women should be treated as equals to men. The gender gap must be closed, and both sexes must be given the same chances and protections in order to thrive.

**Keywords:** Separatist, new woman, feminist, upholder

### Introduction

To help women in India break out of their limiting roles, "representational feminism" is urgently needed so that they may find their own voice in the public sphere. Unless the protection of human rights is the ultimate purpose of such representative politics, such feminism may ultimately backfire.

Feminist ideology has been making inroads into Indian politics as of late. Politicians use it as a vote-gathering strategy rather than pushing for genuine gender justice and equality. The topics of women's emancipation and quotas come up often. Every time a law aimed at empowering women is introduced in Parliament, it fails. It's safe to say that this inquiry has garnered a great deal of public attention. Words like "empowerment" and "reservation," which seem at odds with one another and imply personal animosity, are to blame. The term "empowerment" connotes "reverse sexism," or some kind of vindictive militant feminism, and has a "feudalistic and schistic" ring to it. Even the word "reservation" may be divisive and offensive because of the way it suggests that certain people are better off apart from others.

In India, feminism has always been more prominent in the literary and intellectual worlds than in social activity. Women who had strong opinions on the patriarchal structure of society expressed such opinions in writing and fought for the recognition of women's identities and spaces. Women who have been able to have a solid education, who have not had to worry about their financial stability, and who have had a good exposure to the ways of life in the West have been more outspoken. The era of change is known as post-feminism. Even while many feminists may not be ready to admit that feminism has been defeated just yet, the truth remains that feminism is now only an ideology that lacks any specific goals or objectives. It is currently in the process of being repaired. A significant contribution that feminism has made is that it has made it possible for women to assert their rights.

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And even in India, it has been fairly effective in benefitting women by granting them the ability to vote, the right to engage in politics, the right to obtain education, the right to work, freedom, and equality of opportunity that is acceptable to males. In practically every sphere of modern life, women now have the same rights and opportunities as men. A woman's occurrence can be felt everywhere, whether it be in the realm of rationalism or literature, ideology or power, the authorities or the army, the corporate or management sector, the administrative or executive field, the judicial or legislative branches, journalism or the media, the municipal and rural governing bodies, science or technology.

It would seem that feminism is no longer relevant in today's world, which is undergoing a technological revolution, since women now have the same academic, economic, and professional opportunities as men. Feminism is, of course, still active when it comes to issues of protecting women from violence and other forms of harassment. However, even in the event that this occurs, the administration must shoulder the burden of being responsible for maintaining law and order in the community. Crime and atrocity are not issues that are exclusive to women; many other groups in society also want relief from different forms of repression, censorship, and oppression. The crises of crime and atrocities are not limited to women alone. As a result, the subject of redeeming every wounded human being by giving equality of rights, sometimes known as "human rights," is now the most pressing concern.

Following the tenets of feminism, society would undoubtedly arrive at a number of fruitful and amicable solutions to the many problems that it brought to light. It is anticipated that the next century, as well as the next millennium, would be devoid of all of those wars that have been allowed to go on for far too long only because to pompous egos and many other complexes. It is hoped that the 'post' phase of feminism would bridge the gaps that now exist between individuals of the human species.

Every true artist paints a picture of life via their work. Everyone needs a tool to do their job effectively: painters with brushes, musicians with instruments, carpenters with saws, and novelists with pens. Since Manju Kapur was born and raised in the contemporary era of India, her writing reflects the values and outlook of that time. The most well-known of contemporary Indian novels, her legacy will endure as a cornerstone of English literature's canon of Indian authors. The image of the suffering but stoic women finally breaching customary norms has had a huge influence on a number of women authors from India, including Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, and Shobha De, and Kapur has joined their ranks.

Kapur is a thoughtful, giving author who accepts the fact that he has neither solutions nor final conclusions. Perhaps that's the quality most admired. She has vivid thoughts and writing, but it is the ambiguities and compromises in her characters' lives that she exposes with equal parts fury and tenderness.

Kapur has a highly developed sense of aesthetic appreciation. All books are equally impressive for their lifelike depictions of everyday situations. In her writings, she assumes the position of an objective spectator. She doesn't take a stance and instead points out both the good and bad aspects of the current social order. By using her talents as an artist, she encourages people to put aside their differences in caste, religion, and culture and embrace a

common bond of brotherhood and sisterhood. She writes this to express her worries about the rising tide of social turmoil, which she attributes to men's efforts to utilise other men for their own narcissistic ends. She has an intense curiosity in how people fit into larger social structures, and she uses this curiosity to probe the ways in which people may and do affect social change. Her research and presentation of the human mind are geared at an unbiased assessment of how people in India evaluate their own encounters with reality.

Kapur provides a comprehensive look into Indian home life. It includes everything from the smallest to the largest of household concerns. The author describes the ways in which male and female characters carry out their roles as providers, carers, and family members while still finding time for "Home" pleasure. Typical examples of Indian traditions and tradition include women assisting their husbands in the home while their husbands do not assist them in the same way. To put it simply, women perform all the housework, whether it be light or heavy, and only if their husbands give them permission to work outside the house. There has to be a sea shift in society if we are ever going to correct the past wrongs against women. This shift is essential in terms of respect for one's fellow humans, as well as one's own rights and responsibilities. No amount of "empowerment," "reservation," "law," or "ism" will solve the problem. There are already too many regulations, rules, and sophistications in place, and there is too much unnecessary hair-splitting in everyday life for anybody to enjoy it. The artifice obscures the inherent beauty and elegance of man ('human being,' to avoid the anger of feminists). This calls for an effort to avoid making things more complicated than they need to be. We need to break down all -isms and start from scratch in our understanding of what it is to be human. The fact of the matter is that 'men and women' make up 'humanity'.

Kapur's skill as a feminist is shown in her works. Kapur distinguished the main character's motherly figure from other female protagonists by naming her prayagya rupa (awake lady) (mother and lover). The Indian traditional system is steeped in history and custom. The gender roles in Indian culture are structured to favour men and so encourage male supremacy. The bride becomes part of the family from the moment she is married. She is introduced to and taught how to adapt to her husband's family's traditions. She has tried her hardest to integrate herself into the family, but her attempts have been met with hostility. Despite her extensive background in the sciences and high IQ, few listen to her or take her advice. It's not uncommon for her to feel alone and irritated. When that same bride becomes a mother-in-law and has sway over her son's and daughter's decisions, she acts not just as an advocate for the custom but also as a custodian of it.

### **The voice of women in the novels of Manju Kapur**

Manju Kapur gives women and their introspective thoughts a powerful literary platform in her writings. Interesting things happen when Virmati, Astha, Nisha Nina, and Shagun all start their hunt for home from the incorrect doorway. They all fall in love first, and then their quest for self-identity takes second place. Nisha, Shakuntala, and Rupa are the only women who come out on top and are ultimately happy. Manju Kapur raises some interesting questions, and her exemplary characters (Nisha, Shakuntala, and Rupa) show us the kind of women we should strive to

be like: those who, through thick and thin, never lose their sense of decency or compassion, and who never leave anyone behind because of their own financial difficulties.

Kapur has made it quite apparent, through her heroes, that there is no good excuse not to get married. For Kasturi, it's the burden of duty, for Virmati, it's the allegiance to a beloved, and for Ida, it's the duty to keep the family name alive. Astha's parents desire to marry her in *A Married Woman* because they believe it is their responsibility to do so. In the film *Home*, Nisha marries Arvind for the sole purpose of helping out his family. The mother of Nina in *The Immigrant* wants her daughter to be married so that she may have a stable life. And in *Custody*, for Shagun and Raman, it's the conventional path of beauty and intelligence, for Ishita and Suryakanta, to be happy, for Shagun and Ashok to pursue their passions, and for Raman and Ishita, the compromise.

Rather of pigeonholing women into a single mould, Kapur shows 'the multiplicity of woman and the uniqueness inside each woman. In each of her books, she is shown as an advocate for women rather than someone who is fundamentally against men. Her female protagonists, although sometimes coming from a more conservative background, are always fully realised and formidable individuals by the book's conclusion. No matter how great or tiny their triumph, they are shown to win in the end. Both her characters' minds and, more importantly, their psyches mature during the course of her stories. The narrative progression is consistently shown as a release from confinement to freedom.

The women of India have made great strides in the last sixty years of independence, but Manju Kapur appears cognizant of the fact that much more work has to be done before she can consider her country's women really free. New types of women are emerging in Manju Kapur's characters; these ladies refuse to be manipulated like rubber toys. Women nowadays are actively challenging patriarchal ideas that confine them to the home by pursuing higher education and therefore expressing their desire for independence. They foster a want to strike out on their own and make their own way in the world. They desire to be responsible for more than just their spouse and children. These radicals refuse to remain in the shadows and instead are loud, resolute, and eager to take action. None of the characters can rely on outside help to fix their homes, so they all take matters into their own hands.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur uses the character Virmati to convey his belief that an Indian lady who, despite her education, rank, and intellect, wants to marry pertaining to her own judgment is likely to ruin her chances in both the society she revolts for and the one she loves. Any bold move in this path is roundly criticised and rejected. Marriage of this kind almost often ends in tragedy, driving the couple into misery and gloom.

The books' main female characters reject patriarchy's narrow conception of what it is to be a woman. Since their own sense of self is skewed in favour of men because of patriarchal society, they are actively working to dismantle phallogocentric notions of female superiority. In an effort to elevate the status of women, today's feminists prioritise seeking personal fulfilment above accepting traditional roles. Kapur provide a look into the mind of a woman and address the complete spectrum of women's experiences, all while attempting to introduce a social order that is supportive of women's physical, social, and mental health.

Their "Women thinking" would no longer be confined to a patriarchal framework, and they would be freed from enslavement and exploitation under such a social order. That way, they'll have the means to live their existence with respect and the freedom to develop their own moral standards according to their own free conscience. There would be tremendous benefits to the male-female relationship if this rule was changed so that women could share wealth and power on to an equal footing with men.

Kapur strives to demonstrate, via the discourse in the preceding chapters and the study of the female characters in the novels, that she undertakes the herculean job of conveying the real image of development she perceives in Indian society. Her words reflect the complexity of transformation without becoming reformist propaganda.

Women like Virmati from her first work, *Difficult Daughters*, Astha from *A Married Woman*, Nisha from *Home*, Nina from *The Immigrant*, and Shagun and Ishita from *Custody* all stand out as strong, independent protagonists. They bravely advance on their freedom and, in the process of battling for it, frequently confront the erroneous beliefs of mainstream culture. In order to get the attention they deserve, they would often go against the norms of middle-class Indian culture.

Women's liberation has reached a new high point, although the struggle for independence and self-determination was only beginning before the advent of the modern period. Virmati has tried to express her worth and be held in high respect, and although she has failed, she has tried. She learns to appreciate not just knowledge and the finer things in life, but also the more sinister realities of existence. She is a wise lady because of the many challenges she has overcome. She overcomes the limitations imposed on her by patriarchal society and finds the happiness and success she has always sought.

Manju Kapur's literary success comes from her ability to remain a staunch traditionalist while still transforming pivotal moments in India's history into groundbreaking works of literature. Her high level of education and sophistication has not caused her to abandon her country's customs. Kapur, as a writer, cares more about tale and social criticism than he does about psychological characterisation, complicated technique, or a deep perspective of life. Her writings are accurate depictions of modern-day India.

Feminism is not spelled out for the reader in Manju Kapur's books; rather, it emerges through the experiences of her female protagonists. They sound like Manju Kapur's spokeswomen at times. Virmati from *Difficult Daughters*, Astha from *A Married Woman*, Sona and Nisha from *Home*, Nina from *The Immigrant*, and Shagun and Ishita from *Custody* are all examples of strong, independent women who have forged a new feminism in their own stories. They have come out of the shadows to speak out against male dominance. They are not insecure about their abilities because they have consistently met the sexism and misogyny they have faced from males with reasoning and reason.

They are so impatient and restless that they don't care that you're going through your own personal hell, fighting to break free of the limitations life has placed on you. Constricted by preconceived notions, they want to emerge from the shadows in which they live. All of Manju Kapur's books revolve around the same central problem, and it's tempting to think that even if she'd just written *The Difficult Daughters*, she'd be a fantastic author.

While some of her protagonists, like Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala, Sona, Rupa, and Nisha, learn to love and devote themselves in the spirit of self-sacrifice and compassion, others, like Astha, Nina, Shagun, and Ishita, learn to love and devote themselves to the other as creators and to work as creators in the spirit of duty.

Kapur's books reveal her literary sensibility as endearingly nebulous understandings of the many national consciousnesses that drive human advancement in the contemporary world. Her artistic integration of long-established tradition under the troubling pressure of modernity may be traced out in an understandable pattern throughout her works.

Kapur emphasises the elements which limit a woman's ability to live, develop, and become fully realised in the same ways as men do. The ways in which women's lives are stifled and limited by the ways in which religion, tradition, and myth are used to mould women into accepting their subordinate role. The main character, a woman, fights back against ideological repression and ultimately reinvents herself by reshaping her goals and her values. By this measure, her works make important contributions to both Indian English literature and feminist psychoanalysis in India.

Manju Kapur paints an accurate and vivid picture of modern life through her writing. This diversity in social norms and their application throughout India's many social strata is indicative of the country's rich cultural tapestry. Each of her novels has a narrative focused on a different facet of Indian social life, such as a birth, marriage, festival, feast, social gathering, etc., and their effects on the larger community. Relationships that are sanctioned by the framework of society bind the old and the new, the little and the large, the affluent and the poor, and the privileged and the unprivileged. The current social order gives equal weight to both evil and good.

The plight of women subjected to arranged marriages was central to the feminist cause. Because to advancements in education and work, as well as the evolution of property law, women gained the freedom to choose whether or not to marry, and in certain cases, to divorce their husbands. This meant that feminists did not have a conventional view of family structures like marriage and divorce. They also did not assume women would passively accept a concept of marriage that stripped them of their legal autonomy and marginalised them in favour of their husbands. The views of the organised feminists on marriage remained acceptable, even puritanical, far into the twentieth century. If they wanted divorce law to be more gender neutral, it was only to protect spouses from unfaithful partners, not because they wanted greater autonomy in the bedroom. Therefore, these feminists adopted the idea of "free love" as an individualistic and private reaction to the societal and legal limits of a traditional marriage.

By not marrying, they wanted to keep their freedom and the Custody rights over their children that they had lost when they tied the knot, notwithstanding legal reforms. Some feminists saw reforms that made divorce simpler and cheaper as counterproductive. The widespread idea that simpler divorce procedures would encourage people, and especially males, to take marriage less seriously contributed significantly to this trend. Divorce has long been a reflection of feminists' mixed feelings about marriage, which they see sometimes as a paradise and a trap. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that feminism views divorce as

primarily a question of equal rights, whether in the Custody of children or the transfer of property. Some of the most fundamental challenges raised by divorce and marriage itself have just become significant to feminism in the contemporary era.

Kapur's characters are defined by a critical and reflexive stance that questions their location and, as a result, attempts to reshape cultural and historical stigmas and beliefs to create a place of their own, which will in turn generates a reinvention of their selfhood and a debate and personality clashes with the cultural setting and a prevailing and influential patriarchal ideology.

### Conclusion

Manju Kapur delves deep into the psyches of her main characters throughout her novels. Today, violence against women is unfortunately commonplace. It is common for women to suffer physical violence in committed relationships such as marriage. It's been established that Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, and Ishita have all been beaten. Children are more vulnerable, but the whole family feels the effects. The family unit is the basic building block of civilization, hence it inevitably has an impact on the larger society. Feminist lawmakers, sociologists, and writers all channel the destructive energy of violence against women into building something constructive. Feminists have utilised the pejorative word "violence" to instill the new way of thinking among women, just as a boatman utilises his power in the opposite direction to propel a boat. The cumulative effect of all this violence against women will be for women to speak up and demand an end to such treatment. The victims of violence against women must also be treated with compassion. Judicial officials' attitudes and ideals need to shift, family courts need to be established, and police tactics need to be revised. In a court of law, it is important to weigh the circumstantial evidence. Violence against women has to be analysed from a psychological and scientific perspective. There has to be more empathy and objectivity shown towards crime victims. Now more than ever, women need to take stock of their situations and take matters into their own hands. They won't go far by preaching the feminist idea. There has to be an inner shift for this to work.

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