

A Comparative Study of two Contemporary Writers Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur

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Bharati Mukherjee represents in her novels the contemporary woman's struggle to define herself and attain an autonomous selfhood, especially in cross-cultural crisis, a subject which has assumed a great significance in the present world of globalization. Through her creations she depicts the distorted psyche of female immigrants who have been in continuous conflict between traditional Indian values and the western American culture, a liberal society. Framed with the didactics of immigrants and emigrant, the thematic difference of which centers much of Mukherjee's fiction, her focus remains the predicament of migrant entities and the possibilities for absorption and rejection in the new world. However, there is also the common element of conflict of values and clash between different ways of life. In Manju Kapur's novels, male characters are dominating but they do not come in the definition of a hero. They are affecting the psyche of women to such an extent that all the major women characters whether they are Virmati, Astha Nisha or Nina, all are on the verge of secluding themselves from the company of man. These four major women characters are searching a place for themselves in the male dominated society

This paper aims at comparing the two novelists, encompassing the emotions that create upheavals in women lives, and brings to the forefront the suffering within. It highlights the trauma of change and coming to terms with inner conflict. The flavor of Indianness in the works of the two writers has been highlighted. A comparative study of the novels will be undertaken with the intention of throwing light upon the strains of experience and situation that are found common in the two writers. In addition, the times and the lives of these two novelists and the social ambience that shaped their psyche will also be commented upon.

Mukherjee reveals a different attitude towards her home country and uses a different language style. Like her characters in diaspora, "with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return" (Intro. to *Darkness* xv), Mukherjee locates the trajectory of her identity and cultural politics in the course of crossing and re-crossing multiple borders of language, history, race, time and culture. Mukherjee has repeatedly claimed that she now views herself not as an immigrant South Asian nor as Asian American but simply as American writer. She has continuously urged the immigrant minorities not to live in isolated communities dedicated to preserving their tradition and cultural norms but instead try being part of the mainstream. A chronological study of her major works ranging over a period of twenty-five years reveals her pride in her Indian heritage and her celebration of embracing America. She views the melting pot of America as a two-way adjustment of pioneers and immigrant to the society of their New World and the simultaneous adjustment of America's way of life, laws, beliefs and attitudes to its ever-changing citizens and social relationship. Manju Kapur invigorated the English language to suit representations and narration of what she felt about the women and their lives in

the post modern era. In the culture where individualism has often remained an alien idea and marital bliss and the women's role at home are in central focus, new generation no more follows the old traditions and values of the family. Even Kapur presents the new changing image of women characters who are ambitious, searching for a goal in life, wants the society to provide them a medium of expression and equal support and respect from their counterparts as well as from other males in the society. Man-woman relationship as an element of feminism especially in the realm of, sexual, cultural and racial aspects also deserves to be scrutinized.

Feminism in the Indian context is a by product of the Western liberalism in general and Feminist thought can be appropriated to Indian social condition and milieu in particular. Women caught between the traditional values and modernization form a crucial point of writing among the female writers. The contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. The feminist perspective on literature creative and critical, whether in a third world country or elsewhere, has had to confront issues of similar persuasion, male chauvinism, sexist bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, in not merely the male but also the female sections of society.

Feminism is a major theme of female writers even in the modern era which highlights the plight of women characters in various situations. Since the last four decades transformation of women character is taking place still women are in quest for identity and a victim to male dominating society. Mukherjee is a diaspora writer, her focus is on the predicament of migrant entities and the possibilities for absorption and rejection in the new world. In Kapur's novels, male characters are dominating but they do not come in the definition of a hero. They are affecting the overall personality of all the major women characters. In the present era, women are no more a sorry figure or a victim of male dominating society, as new woman she is confident and courageous enough to face situations and ultimately comes out as a winner.

Mukherjee's works focus on the phenomenon of women and migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by Indian women. Mukherjee's women have experienced displacement and dislocations in personal lives; they are better suited for an alien culture. A close analysis of her work reveals that her primary aim is to champion the cause of women; she is a typical feminist writer who understands the nature and attitude of the society in which she lives.

Her important works are *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days and Nights*. Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years. She is not comfortable with her relatives and mother, as they cannot accept a woman who is not accompanied by her husband. Tara becomes mentally turbulent and makes her return to U.S.A.

In *Wife*, Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. She longs for recognition and fulfillment of her dreams. Her husband wants her to be docile and submissive. Finally, in her mentally upset state, she murders her husband in an act of self liberation and eventually commits suicide.

Jasmine is a survivor but fighter. She survives even after facing a lots of hardships in her life and decides to live a new life in an alien land. *Jasmine* can be interpreted as purely feminist novel. She is a rebellious character who not only rebels against the old patriarchal values but also breaks the old norms of society. Her various transformations present her strong attitude and determination to survive in an new land even after facing so many hardships.

Kapur's novels present a complete feminine tradition where one's destiny is the main theme. She speaks for the middle-class and even has earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp-eyed, finely turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*; Astha in *A Married Woman*; Nisha in *Home*; Nina in *The Immigrant*; and Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* all come up as the spiritual women who have learnt to live for themselves. The dauntless march towards their liberation and often fighting for themselves, challenge the false notions of the conventional middle class society. They crave for recognition for their work and when society seems apathetic and uninterested towards their work, they defy the long established traditions of the middle class Indian society.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur presents the image of suffering women. In post-colonial era, partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. During this phase, number of novels were written on the theme of the destruction. Kapur thinks that, "There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man. When, manhood is questioned womanhood is fragmented" (Nayak 13).

A Married woman is the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Kumar describes Astha,

A woman should be self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense (90).

Astha was not ready to bear the so called male dominating society and breaks all the age old norms in order to survive in the modern society. Unfortunately, she was caught between the modern developments and old biases. She even tried for self identity through her lesbian relationship, but there too, she was again trapped between social norms and her family.

Nisha as a child was a victim to incestuous abuse in a joint family. Then, as a college girl she falls for a low class boy, though being jilted by her lover, she stands against the conservative norms of society. Her continuous struggle with the society does not ruin her life and she survives.

While the other female protagonists struggle against the Eastern rigid social set up, in *The Immigrant* Nina's struggle is a bit different from her predecessor. She faced problems as a newly bride to an alien land like aloofness, frustration and western ethos. At last, there is a sea change in her personality and she decided to survive in the new world according to western norms.

The above discussion shows that women writers have gone up from difficult tribal and rural areas too, but all of them have expressed their concern for women and their

problems. The variety of subjects, they have touched upon is a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the globe. The variety of subjects handled by them considering Indian environment needs an appreciation. Some of the writers have not claimed that they belong to feminist's movement yet their writings suggest that their inner spirit and feelings are for the welfare of the women only.

Mukherjee in her writings reflects that the basic idea is self empowerment, which is essential for every human being and one can equipoise between the characteristics and the blending can produce characters like Jasmine and the imbalance in personality leads to be someone like Dimple. The conflict between being the ideal wife like 'Sita', and the need for self expression dooms her to her fate. Her ideal being Sita, as it was for the young girls of yester years, Dimple envisions a life of freedom after marriage. She wants to be an obedient, soft spoken wife and fantasizes sacrificing herself for her husband. Consequently, she sacrifices her baby, which is a hurdle in her stepping towards freedom. The protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee's novels are a mixed bundle of Hindu feminism; influences of the incarnations of 'Sita' and 'Kali' come through forcefully into their being. As Jasmine, a strong woman, who longs for authentic and generous reception and bold enough, to act out her dreams.

The novels of Kapur highlight the emotions, experiences and plights of Virmati, Astha, Nisha and Nina, all are searching for their ground realities but their approach seems wrong. All of them fall in love first, and the search for the self-identity becomes the second thought. Among all the female characters Nisha, Shakuntala and Rupa really win in the end and are contented to a great extent. The facts raised by Kapur worth research and inquiry and through Nisha, Shakuntala and Rupa the exemplary figures, she presents an ideal image of women who amid all thick and thin, maintain their chastity and humanity and do not leave anyone destitute.

As gender studies in formal scholastic environs is emerging as a force to reckon with, fictional works are a trajectory of authentic feminist thought processes (Banerjee 163). As one delves into the world of Mukherjee, Kapur and other woman writers of the same genre, one finds it a mode for contemporary gender location and reconstruction. Mukherjee's status as a diaspora writer provides a peep into the psyche of the globalised entities. Immigration posed a myriad dilemmas which have spawned in terms of literature simplistically. Women writers appreciate the gender facilities on alien shores, yet cannot release themselves and abandon their genetic framework. Mukharjee also has focused on Indian women and their struggle in India in some of her early novels. Her own clash with identity has come up in many of her writings.

Kapur and Mukherjee offer a full range of experience of the emerging Indian woman who though rooted in traditions, is firmly committed to re-defining her role and her relatedness to various institutions of the society in the light of modern thought and consciousness. One can find in these works recognition and appreciation of the potential of independent selfhood of woman with all its agonies, conflicts and contradictions. These women writers avoid discussing the conservative forces of subjugation of women in the male dominating society. Moreover, they try to depict the new women characters who are self-independent, confident and ambitious and are ready to face the challenging roles in the global world.

Difficult Daughters and the *Desirable Daughters* struggle hard to break the barriers of conservative norms in an effort to eke out a dignified existence for themselves in a world which offers sharp resistance to such daring modernistic desires. These daughters are carrying all kinds of domestic and social pressures, they desire for higher education, and overall personality development and are even willing to be a part of socio political movements of the time. The images of woman protagonists, Virmati and Tara Lata, presented in the two novels are successfully able to challenge the dominant patriarchal attitudes and practices and do these images liberate them of the 'dependence syndrome' so deeply entrenched in the inner and outer psyches of human minds and social structures in various forms of subordination. Further, despite the pulls and pressures of conservative and market forces, the two woman protagonists are able to assert their individuality and freedom.

Marriage is one of the tools for a creative writer to depict the cultural ethos representing Indianness. Kapur has both opted for it and cashed it. Marital bliss and home is a crucial theme of writings. Her every novel opens with a live discussion on marriage - the topmost significant issue in the life of the female protagonist.

In *Difficult Daughters* and *Desirable Daughters*, Kapur is able to analyze and interpret the respective journeys of the women in the contexts of broader colonial, patriarchal and neo imperialistic oppression and suppression. Whereas the mothers get stuck in the trap of emerging contradictions but their daughter Ida and son Rabi are involved in rejecting that does not fit into their scheme of things and in reconstructing and redefining the old and the new connections in keeping pace with the changing times. In the case of daughters in particular, it is the difficult that is desirable in the sense of questioning the conventional and the orthodox opinions and practices and hence the images of women in the two novels make a decisive leap from *Difficult Daughters* ultimately taking up the place and authenticity of *Desirable Daughters*. The multiple challenges and multiple identities as represented in majority of the literary texts and in real life provide much hope and assurance to the new generation of mothers and daughters in the direction of transformation of the individual and collective consciousness of society paving way for the emergence of an actually empowered and emancipated new woman.

Gender and marriage are the topics that Mukherjee deals with in her novels. The female characters that Mukherjee creates are from different castes of Indian society, and they subvert the doomed fate they are in: Tara, Dimple and Jasmine all decide to make a life of their own. Their duty to obey the patriarchal authority and their arranged marriages reveal that they cannot hold their own subjective because there is another patriarchal power from their husbands they need to obey. Their life in Indian society is as being someone out of someone's expectation; therefore, moving to a new place is to free from the Indian traditional oppression of their sex and marriage rules, which also represent their duty to the society and to their family.

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