TRADITION AND MODERNITY: CHANGING IMAGES OF WOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR AND GITHA HARIHARAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A
Summary of Thesis
Submitted to Jiwaji University, Gwalior

For
The Award of Doctor of Philosophy
In English

2015

Forwarded by:

Principal

Supervised by: Submitted by:

Dr. Charu Chitra Malti Singh
Assistant Prof. of English Research Scholar

Research Centre
Govt. K.R.G. Post Graduate (Auto) College Gwalior M.P.
Manju Kapur and Githa Hariharan have arisen among some of the women writers that are forming a body of Indian literature that is committed to feminist and social issues. Both writers have earned highly regarded status among the modern Indian English women novelists. Their novels illustrate how the woman of modern age in India is torn between tradition and modernity in trying to shape her life in her own ways. These are the novelists on whom the suffering but assertive woman has left a noteworthy impact. Their protagonists want to assert their individuality, carry their responsibilities on their own and prove their existence in a culture where individualism and protest have often remained foreign ideas, and marital bliss and a woman’s role at home is the central focus. Kapur and Hariharan display mature understanding of the female psyche in portraying the inner subtlety of a woman’s mind, as they have intellectually described through their novels, the different states of woman’s mind in altered circumstances. The concept of the new woman in Indian society varies from the one in the west; therefore, the characterization in the novels of Manju Kapur and Hariharan is based on a ground reality.

Manju Kapur registers her concern for the Indian woman and deals with various feministic issues like female education, their empowerment, financial independence, eradication of child marriages, the abolition of the dowry system, elimination of a woman’s sexual abuse, etc. Kapur who herself was an English lecturer at Miranda House Delhi, has taken up cudgels to fight for woman’s cause. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in postcolonial India. The novelist is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman’s problems. All her protagonists protest against the social rules to become self-dependent, but finally compromise for the sake of social harmony. She is aware of the seriousness of the Indian woman’s dilemma and her generation old struggles behind it, but she believes that a positive change in her social status can materialize by bringing
about a change in her mind-set and making her literate and well-informed. Kapur truly considers her role as Indian feminist as one of a humanist feminist.

Literature is considered to be the reflection of life, and now the new woman of India and her quest for identity is the key concern. A variety of shades of woman’s mind and plight are reflected through Indian women novelists, writing in the English language. Manju Kapur has made an important contribution in this field, by portraying the confident, ambitious, enterprising and individualized woman through her novels; who demands attention, equality and peace. The writer draws the images of the woman who is rising in power and strength, claiming responsibility for their life and declaring that society will be better with effective and capable females.

In 1999, Manju Kapur’s first novel, Difficult Daughters, received the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the best first book in the Eurasian region. Her second novel, A Married Woman, was the best seller in both India and U.K., and her third novel, Home, was nominated for the Hutch Crossword Book Award 2007. The Immigrant was short listed for DSC prize for South Asian Literature in 2011. Her latest novel is Custody. Besides these novels, Kapur has also touched other genre of writing i.e. short stories- The Necklace, The Birth of a Baby, The Power behind the Shame and Speaking up for Inter-Community or Cross Marriages. In all her novels, we meet the woman of modern era, her problems and her desire to become independent. The husband-wife relationship has been taken up as a major theme in all her novels. She exposes the exploitative trends of the patriarchal society in which male plays the dominating role, and portrays the woman who want changes in the norms of traditions.

Githa Hariharan is a great scholar and well- known feminist writer. She challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act as discriminatory against
woman as it supports the phenomenon of father as the only natural guardian of a child. She won the case and woman is provided the right to be the natural guardian of the child. She is well aware of the multiple identities that are attributed to a writer in India as an English writer, the regional writer, the woman writer and even as the children’s writer. As a writer she has been an wise observer of cultural issues. She attacks the traditional notions with humour, subtleties and tenderness. Her writings reflect her intellectual qualities. In the United States, she worked as a writer in WNET-Channel 13. In 1979, she started working as an editor in a publishing house called Orient Longman, for ten years in Mumbai, Chennai and New Delhi. She worked as a freelancer for some time, and finally, gave up her previous career of an editor to become a full time writer (Montgomery Fellows 2006). She always wanted to be a writer, and when in college in B.A. (in English Literature), she started writing poems and then moved on towards novels. She has written novels, short stories, essays, articles and columns in different newspapers. She edited the English translation of a volume of stories of South Indian language. She has written five novels till now. Harihara’s literary career began with her winning Commonwealth Writers’ prize for her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* in 1993. Her other novels are *Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travels The* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and her latest novel is *Fugitive Histories* (2009).

Githa Harihara is not only a feminist but she is truly a great chronicler as she covers a variety of themes and plenty of ancient myths in her novels. To provide a better understanding of her concepts, she narrates her stories through mythological examples that ascertain herself as a lifetime learner. It is notable that feminism is rooted in all her novels and her feministic approach is bolder than of Kapur’s.
Purpose and plan of the research work:

In the rigidly formed and tradition bound Indian society, a woman is the worst sufferer, as the social norms and moral codes are framed to be particularly disadvantageous to her. This is perhaps why the Indian women novelists, encouraged to a certain extent by their historical and cultural context, consistently treat the feministic phenomenon in their fictional works, thus depicting an Indian woman whose lot has been, to silently suffer repression for ages at the hands of the society. In view of their high intellectual accomplishments and a masterly grasp of modern sciences, including especially psychology, these novelists amply put the suffering of their characters in sharp focus. Their natural feminine sensibility conveys to their observation a humane touch and a psychological depth in their novels.

The present study is an attempt to bring out the changing images of woman in Kapur’s and Hariharan’s novels from tradition to modern and postmodern era. Woman in Kapur’s and Hariharan’s novels seems to be a personification of a new woman, who has been continuously trying to throw off the burden of inhibitions she has carried for ages. We note a remarkable change in their protagonists. Manju Kapur and Githa Hariharan have deep concerns about the problems being faced by the woman in a male-dominated society, chiefly Indian society. The glorified woman is transformed into a real woman in the novels of Hariharan and Kapur. The modern new woman doesn’t want to be the rubber doll for the other hand to move according to their will, they can fight endless battles to uplift her position and survive in society. Both writers understand the female psyche and depicted the inner subtlety of woman’s mind through their novels. We see the budding of a new woman in their novels, their protagonists want to assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. The titles of the novels are cosy, linear plots and language easy to understand. The theme of the novels is the struggle of modern woman to elevate her position in
the society where they are still slaves to customs, parents, husband and children. Manju Kapur and Githa Hariharan have also explained and attacked on inconsistency of people and their relationships, religious fights, political issues, communal unrest, and some invisible issues.

The whole thesis is divided into the following eight chapters to elaborate the title-

**CHAPTER-I: INTRODUCTION**
- Indian English Novel
- Indian Women Novelists
- Manju Kapur: Life and Parentage
- Githa Hariharan: Life and Parentage

**CHAPTER-II: EMERGING NEWER IDENTITIES- DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS AND HOME**
- Traditional Role of Indian Woman
- Impact of Patriarchy
- Quest for Feminine Identity
- Religious Turmoil
- Complex Terrain of Indian Family

**CHAPTER-III: FRACTURED BOND OF MARRIAGES – A MARRIED WOMAN AND THE IMMIGRANT**
- Inconsistency of people & their Relationships
- Ironies of Manju Kapur’s Protagonists
- Male Space in Female Perspective
- Invisible Issues
- Rootlessness in Different Atmosphere
CHAPTER IV: VOICING FOR SPACE- CUSTODY
- Marriage versus Individual Freedom
- Extra Marital Affairs
- Woman of Post-modern Era
- Suffering Children

CHAPTER V: THE REDEEMING BLEEDING REPRESENTATION OF WOMAN- THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT AND THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER
- The Double Burden of Tradition and Modernity
- Ironies of Fate
- Patriarchal roots
- Exploration of Indian Traditional Female Stereotype

CHAPTER VI: FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM- WHEN DREAMS TRAVELS
- War of sexes
- Emerging newer identities
- Manipulating Desire
- Stories Creating Reality

CHAPTER VII: RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PREJUDICES- IN TIMES OF SIEGE AND FUGITIVE HISTORIES
- Existentialism
- Communal Unrest
- Reclaiming Tranquility
Expressing themselves liberally and boldly, Kapur and Hariharan attack the age old traditional notions with humour, intricacies and tenderness. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce the protagonists towards domesticity, their characters assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. These novelists successfully portray the conflict of tradition and modernity in their characters. Their female characters are not only involved in clangs against male-dominated traditional world, but they also suffer this conflict in the form of the generation gap. Tradition implies an established method or practice; belief or custom, passed on to us by our ancestors. Much of what we do today has its roots in the past while modernity is known to be a practice of modifying tradition according to the necessities of modern era.

It is very difficult for a woman to initiate a journey towards success; she has to struggle immensely, because of the complexities of life. However, time is changing, and our society is accepting the equality of woman with man, still so much is left to be attained. A boy gets every authority, right from the birth,
whereas a girl struggles and sacrifices from birth until death, to accomplish her rights as an independent individual.

Chapter- 1 Introduction

The Introductory chapter is an effort to survey of the various stages and development of Indian- English novels, especially in reference to feministic aspects. It gives an account of the status and position of a woman in the society and the family. A brief discussion on feminism, its impact on women writers and how their characters are influenced is also done. A section of this chapter focuses on various themes, dealt with Indian English writers in general and Indian- English women writers in particular. It also gives a brief introduction to the life and works of the writers whose novels are comprised for analysis. It is proposed to analyse the stipulation of woman’s equality as par with man for various reasons, through the selected novels. It also introduces the themes of the novels, taken for analysis in brief.

Chapter- 2 Emerging Newer Identities: Difficult Daughters and Home

This chapter surveys the life of the two protagonists of Manju Kapur’s two novels, Virmati in Difficult Daughters and Nisha in Home, to illuminate their protest against the patriarchal families to emerge as new women. The novels under study are the evidence of the fact that a woman can easily be manipulated because of her emotional approach and lack of education. Due to her age old subjugation, she herself feels inferior to man and can easily be influenced and manipulated. In Difficult Daughters, Kapur presents a traditional family that considers a woman’s education secondary, while giving importance to marriage and family duties as her primary objectives. Virmati’s mother is cast in the conventional mould. Her father comes under the category of a benevolent patriarch. In this novel, patriarchy operates in a different manner. The novel
deals with the conflict between traditional and the modern society. Virmati is a difficult daughter, who unlike her mother’s willingly surrendering to the destined social role, is not ready to blindly succumb herself to the long-established norms. Kasturi holds patriarchal values as an ideal inheritor, as her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it as a rebellion against her own self. By suppressing Virmati’s desire for freedom, she turns out to be a voice of patriarchy. Virmati’s rebellion against the patriarchal norms is presented in detail. Virmati’s struggle to acquire higher education and self-dependence is gone through the analysis.

The novel, *Home*, exposes the still prevalent narrow-minded attitude towards the upbringing of a girl child in India. Kapur traces the painful journey of the protagonist, Nisha, from childhood into adulthood in search of self-identity. The analysis reveals Nisha’s search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately, to a woman in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security, nonetheless, it sometimes does not provide them any physical security. The novel describes the story of an ordinary middle class joint family, settled in Delhi. The physical abuse of children, in the hands of their own relatives, is also discussed through Nisha’s sexual abuse by her own cousin, Vicky. A girl is considered as an object of sexual arousal, thus it is expected that she should take care of her physical appearance, to be able to grab the attention of people as a perfect marriageable girl. Nisha’s mother, Sona, always shoves her to be neat and well-dressed like a princess. She does not allow her to play in parks with other children because her complexion may become dark. The displacement that protagonists suffer and the suffocation that they face in the traditional limits of marriage and family is clearly brought out by the novelist.
Chapter- 3 Fractured Bond of Marriages: A Married Woman and The Immigrant

This Chapter is an analysis of the frustrations and adjustment of modern marriages. Marriage is defined as a legal and social certified union between two persons, which is legalized by the culture and traditions that recommend the rights to the partners. It refers to the rules and regulations which define the rights and duties after marriage. Marriage signifies the equal partnership and intimate union between a male and a female. It is a strong association which connects not only two individuals, but also builds up a relationship between the two families. It brings stability and essence to human relations, which is incomplete without marriage. Its strongest function is concerned with the care of children, their upbringing and education. The concept of marriage varies from culture to culture, but its meaning is the same that is the union of two individuals of the opposite sex. This bond is supposed to be lifelong and special. The traditional concept of a husband and wife’s status and role is slowly changing in contemporary Indian society, the tradition-oriented concepts of male dominance still largely conquer.

Chapter- 4 Voicing for Space: Custody

Manju Kapur’s latest novel, Custody is examined in this chapter, which truly narrates the universal angst of modern marriage, the burden of individualism and the harmful effects of divorce on children. The analysis of the novel also displays that a childless marriage is scorned. The blame is always attributed to a female and infertility is recognised as a ground of divorce. The process of industrialization and urbanization has brought about socio-psychological changes in the attitude and values of the people in metropolitan cities. The novel is set in the flourishing, upper middle class colonies of Delhi of
the mid-nineties, against the backdrop of the initial surge of foreign investment in India. Shagun, a modern woman voicing for space, fulfills her individual dreams instead of familial fulfillment. She is an ambitious woman, over-ridden by individualism and her own well-being. The novel charters the life of a changing woman in a time of increased globalization. It chronicles the various intricacies around the dissolution of a marriage and a family in modern India.

Chapter -5 The Redeeming Bleeding Representation of Woman: 
*The Thousand Faces of Night and The Ghosts of Vasu Master*

Hariharan has portrayed the sufferings and anguish, faced by an Indian woman as a traditional inheritor of thousands of duties. Tradition is deep-rooted in India, and in this traditional system Indian society is organized around gender division, giving more space to male for dominance. Right from the marriage, the bride's incorporation into the family begins. She is guided and trained to adopt her husband’s life style, but she, despite of her devotion dedication and sincere commitment to her family, is considered an outsider. Her opinion or voice hardly gathers any mass, in spite of her good education and intelligence. She often feels frustrated and alienated. The miserable part is that the same bride, when becomes a mother and mother-in-law, turns out to be an advocate and custodian of the same tradition, and dominates and dictates in the same manner, as she was dominated and dictated. The women characters, in Hariharan’s novel, represent three generations, with their ethics, mind-sets and relations.

Chapter -6 From Bondage to Freedom: *When Dreams Travel*

This chapter is an attempt to examine the new aspects of feminism, added by Hariharan in the retelling and giving new dimensions to the ancient myth *A Thousand and One Nights*. Dunyazad emerges as the new woman, who refuses
to surrender or compromise against the dominance and violence, and fights the battle to accomplish freedom. She differs from others in the sense that she aspires and attempts to be true to herself. In the original myth, Shahrzad narrates continuous series of stories for thousand and one nights for bringing Shahryar to repent the continuous killings of more than thousand virgins; whereas Dunyazad in When Dreams Travel suggests a poetic justice for his sins by killing Shahryar. However, Shahrzad does not let her kill Shaharyar because she advocates peace and redemption. When Shahzaman makes darkness, his enemy after discovering his wife sleeping with a dark skinned slave in the darkness of night and murders people because of his false suspicions, Dunyazad kills him and becomes the saviour of the city. Dunyazad also helps Shahryar’s son, Umar to execute his plan of chastising him for the killings, he did in the past to become the king of Shahabad.

Chapter -7 Religious and Cultural Prejudices:

In Times of Siege and Fugitive Histories

Hariharan has explored the disastrous consequences of religious and cultural chauvinism through these novels. The analysis of both the novels reports certain important issues of culture and identity; and also critically examines the direction in which our nation is moving. The recent chapter evaluates the current social psychological approach of people about the process that inspires prejudice through the references from In Times of Siege. Though we live in a Democratic India, but still are slaves to our prejudices. It’s not easy to express our opinions fearlessly because of some stereotype people. The same problem is faced by professor Shivmurthi, who dares to write a chapter about Basavanna, revealing the truths about religious structure of his time. He is condemned by some theocratic people for writing about the dominance of the
Brahmins at that time. He is considered to be an anti-Hindu and is advised to go to Pakistan. Itihas Suraksha Manch protests against him. Though Shiv has given the facts and references after a thorough research, but still he faces hatred and contempt.

Githa Hariharan’s recent novel *Fugitive Histories*, exposes the legacy of religious prejudices. Sara is the central character and Mala is her mother. Yasmin is a victim of Gujarat riots; Sara meets in Ahmadabad, who is looking for her missing brother. Sara’s mother, Mala, is a Hindu and father, Asad, a Muslim. Mala, because of her marriage to a Muslim, struggles a lot in the society. Mala, who is brought up traditionally, dares to cross the patriarchal threshold by marrying a Muslim, and pays for this decision throughout her life. Her parents never forgive her for spoiling their name and dignity. Mala never forgets her grandmother, whom her grandfather always abuses in public places. Sara, who works as a social worker in Mumbai, also faces many problems in her life, as being the daughter of a Hindu mother and a Muslim father. She goes to Ahmadabad to write an article for a documentary on the pogrom of Gujarat in 2002. In her article, she focuses on the victims, especially the women who suffer even after many years of such riots as in Gujarat. She is very much carried away by the suffering of women in Ahmadabad. After many years, Yasmin, a teenage in Ahmadabad, too, suffers because of the Gujarat pogrom, since she is not left with any identity.

**Chapter -8 Conclusion**

*Concluding Chapter* is an effort to analyse the traditional role of an Indian woman on the basis of previous seven chapters. In addition, it includes a comparative study, based on the themes and techniques of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. Also, it brings out Indian woman’s steady development and
feminism in Indian Fiction in English. Beginning from traditional phase, roaming to transitional stage and finally attaining modernity is studied critically with references from the novels by Manju Kapur and Githa Hariharan. A woman seeks her goals in the ordinary tasks of womanhood, of serving her family members. She often does not find what she strives for. The ancient consciousness of a woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, seems in her to have brimmed and over-flowed, and uttered a demand for emancipation.

An effort to sum up the journey of a woman to accomplish equality with man is made in the concluding chapter. Their female protagonists fight endless battles to survive in the society where they are still slaves to customs, parents, husbands, and children. It is noteworthy that both the novelists express their deep concern about the problems, being faced by a woman in male-dominated domain. They deal primarily with the problems, faced by the Indian woman. Their educated protagonists try to assert their individuality and make an attempt to lead a liberal life. Purposefully, Kapur and Hariharan emphasis on the changing images of woman, from traditional into modern, increasingly.