

## SEARCH OF IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPOOR AND BHARTI MUKHERJEE

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### ABSTRACT

The portrayal of women in various works by various writers varies. Manju Kapur and Bharati Mukherjee have created diverse facets of Indian culture and the contemporary situation. Their women characters have not been represented as enslaved people but as victims of society, male crimes, and cultural struggles; in countries like India, people consider her a Goddess or an icon of sacrifice rather than a regular human being. The Goddess has shown to be the finest at what she does but can't express herself. In the end, a woman is physically, intellectually, and psychologically entangled and unable to appreciate God's gift of life. She appears most fragile at first but eventually gains a strong feeling of freedom and a stubborn personality. The present paper will address various elements of the women in the works of Manju Kapur and Bharti Mukherjee. The female in both Indian and Western contexts caught in contrasting circumstances has been mirrored in their novels. The novelists stress the pain and difficulties that the female heroine faces. The work is concerned with comparative investigation. The feminist or women-centred approach is a crucial development in Indian English Literature, dealing with experience and circumstance from a feminist perspective. In the previous four decades, there has been a shift in the portrayal of female characters. Contemporary authors have evolved from the old viewpoint of self-sacrificing women to that of identity-seeking women, who are no longer portrayed as sad figures or victims.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Modernism, Struggle, Transformation, Self-Identity

### INTRODUCTION

Feminist thinking has had a long-lasting impact on English literature. The topic, however, continues to fascinate contemporary women writers. Many contemporary Indian fictions employ a female-centric approach, attempting to project and interpret life through women's eyes. According to Patricia Meyer Specks, "There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognisable through the countries". (48) In literature, women have an essential role in depicting society and civilizations. Throughout history, literature has been influential and evocative. According to ethos, norms, conventions, and religion in distinct backgrounds and circumstances, Alteration is visible in numerous works published by different writers. Other authors use clichés to argue that the position of women is

formed for the benefit of powerful and wealthy individuals. This procedure has harmed the status of women elsewhere. The depiction of women over the past four decades has undergone a steady change.

Manju Kapur is an accomplished narrator who enjoys giving details from a traditional Indian setting. Her female characters, as she has created them, are well-educated and conscious of their rights and obligations. Her females are far too natural, ideal, aggressive, and defiant. Prejudice, silenced voices and classic patriarchal crimes are all depicted in her female characters. It makes a plea to stop women from causing havoc. She also wished to love and convert to sexual and psychological demands while being culturally appropriate. She also has a niche for bringing up other themes such as gender, class, and religious conflicts while simultaneously carrying on a parallel plot. Her wording is simple but effective in raising the topic and discussing women's roles in modern scenarios. She portrays class tension very well, such as middle- and upper-class society dealing with the economic crisis.

Bharati Mukherjee has a complicated structure with a straightforward notion regarding females. She recognises the importance of language in conveying concepts to the human mind and the importance of brief speech. When it comes to the protagonist's tale, she has strong feelings. She has a knack for bringing the ferocious cultural and home sensibilities to light. Her protagonists use an unusual crime aspect to break out from their prisons. In her writings, she frequently employs Indian terminology and lexicon. She doesn't shy away from using slang from the United States, and her vocabulary is diverse. Her work demonstrates skilled recounting of a tale with a clear message and various goals and evoking the sensation of existence, cultural issues, and specifics.

A native of India, Bharati Mukherjee enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1961. As a result of her marriage to American author Clark Blaise of Canadian descent, she moved to Canada. Before moving to the United States with her husband, she became a Canadian citizen and settled there. Her work focuses on the change of Indian women living in a foreign country; she uses her personal experiences to illustrate the struggle and understanding of her heroine.

At Delhi University, Manju Kapur was a professor in the English department. Mukherjee had always wanted to be a novelist since she was a youngster, and she finally realised her ambition at the age of 42. In the same way, as she does, Kapur uses her own life experiences to write about the issues that women face. She despises the label "feminist writer," although her whole body of work reflects feminist themes and topics. *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Women* and *The Immigrant* novels have been examined in the present paper, focusing on Virmati, Astha, and Nina. All are urban Indian women from the middle class trying to carve out separate identities within the patriarchal system of which they are part.

*Desirable Daughters*, *Jasmine* and *Wife* by Bharati Mukherjee. All books deal with the evolution of fictional gender recasting. All works are about discovering one's ancestry and gender identity. Kapur returns to Lahore to investigate her mother's past in the pre-partition Punjab historical context. Mukherjee personifies the classic diasporic yearning for her homeland. Bengali culture and literary awareness. These authors work hard to tear down traditional barriers to build a world that resists modernist demands.

Manju Kapur and Bharati Mukherjee were born in India and moved to the United States. The Researcher picked their works because they deal with urgent gendered, ethnicised, and national identities that must be negotiated and revised. Identification entails being identical or similar. These characteristics of identity and alienation are depicted in Mukherjee's work. Jasmine, the protagonist of her work, describes the aspirations of Indian women as she walks away from her Lahori jat peasant family's rural beginnings in the Jullundhar area. It is a tale of displacement and migration. As the main character, Jasmine sheds life afterwards to take on new ones, travelling further west while losing pieces of her past. She broadens her horizons by travelling to America and adopting a new identity: Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jase-Jasmine. She has cobbled together a new Jasmine from every location she visits and every name she has heard. As described by the author, Jyoti is the essence of Indian civilisation, women's difficulties, and immigration.

Manju Kapur is unceasingly followed by two types of female replications: one at home and one on the street. Women are balancing jobs and life, as can be deduced. A Married Woman emerges as a unique piece that reflects current textual cultural trends while remaining unorthodox. The protagonist lives in a society that is both traditional and contemporary. Indianness and equality quotients go hand in hand with customs entrenched in the ancient system. Astha is a married woman portrayed as a sacrifice and adjustment idol, which makes her a family favourite but lowers her social rank. She was reared in a conventional family when she was a child. "The young lady is now blooming. The fruit must be plucked when it is ripe. Later, she may join the wrong firm, leaving us to wring our hands. She will have no trouble adjusting if she marries at this age. We, too, are not young enough to afford to wait "(20 AMW)

In most societies, the attitude toward the girl kid is established from birth; as she grows older, more emphasis is placed on the matchmaking and marriage of the girl than on her professional pursuits. According to Astha's mother, they both think in the same way. In her development as a young woman, she passes through her college years with pals before settling down to have a family. In addition to her love life, meeting Rohan helps her develop as a woman by increasing her bodily demands. Even though she is educated, she lacks the confidence to make her own choices. Still seeking a shoulder to lean on, she isn't giving up. 'Where was the man whose arms were waiting to hold her? (AMW.15)

Manju Kapur's ability to write about the state of a tired woman while also treating her emotional scars via storytelling places her among the world's greatest authors. Kapur portrays Astha, who is taught to prioritise duties by her mother. She perceives discrimination due to the norms she is required to follow, which impose responsibilities entirely on her while ignoring her opinions and feelings. Her husband, Hemant, is an average guy who enjoys himself at night, and she works hard to please him after a long day at work. Her marriage had an ideal vision of a spouse who would take care of her and pamper her, but when she met reality, her illusions were shattered. "I had responsibilities to my parents... I wanted someone who would fit in with our family life. American women are too demanding. Their men have catered to all their whims and fancies. (AMW.40)

Hemant reveals himself to be a traditional spouse who believes in the ideal marriage. The partner is a lady looking for her parents and relatives. He had no desire for a companion who was demanding. That is why Astha is his soul partner. Astha's mother is also a stereotypical

female who prioritises the MALE kid, as she prays for a male child throughout Astha's pregnancy. "May it be a son who bears your name for all eternity." "A fantastic son of a fantastic parent." (AMW.56) Even Astha's mother-in-law develops the pinnacle of the traditional female image, doing pooja to have a son during Astha's second pregnancy. Although Astha finds it unusual, she understands society's desire and the significance of having a newborn son. She realises that caring for her husband and raising her children causes her to lose her individuality, causing acute anguish. Her spouse regards her as a commodity and seeks out other partners. It shatters her completely. Hemant becomes agitated as she represents her wants and demands acknowledgement. "I require more room...The whole house is yours...I was thinking of something more specific. You know, a place to work in peace, spread my stuff about." (AMW.156) Her spouse mistreats her and insults her. Through Mukti Manch, her pilgrimage to Ayodhya offers her wings to soar and a sense of emancipation. Pipeelika, a widowed Brahmin girl and a free spirit in love with Aijaz, a Muslim lad who perished in an accident, comes into her life.

Manju Kapur discusses emotional coherence and creative yet exposed feminism in an interview with Nivedita Mukherjee. On a personal, religious, and sociopolitical level, she has adopted several characteristics. She portrays a character who was formerly reliant on others but now manages her emotions independently. Manju Kapur has provided her lady, bringing up the rigorous setting and giving in-house women a voice via the nature of Astha Bharati Mukherjee discusses the hardship of a woman in a strange environment. Her nervousness, anxiety, and will to work in the face of adversity are all predicted. Her distinct feeling of being an American with an Indian soul is remarkable. She seemed too enthralled by western culture's liberty of a woman's spirit. She has tackled racism, isolation, cultural clashes, and prejudice. She has adapted nicely to the diasporic experience. She has designed a sky for a lady from a conservative and traditional society. Her works reveal her desire for recognition and her attempt to create something that is both native and alien.

The great novel *Wife* written by Bharati Mukherjee is noticeable in her copies. Dimple Dasgupta, the protagonist, moves from Calcutta to New York. She is regarded as though she were a foreigner. Her traumatic condition, as well as her psychic state, are both apparent. She comes from a patriarchal home where the father is dominant, just as the husband would be, and they may have some similarities, and the wedding is the ultimate life ideal. She imagines a marital fairy tale. Because of her physical structure, she is usually empty and is regularly mistreated by her father. She is more aware of society's attitudes and pleasures. She has severe depression and a strong desire to meet her psychological and emotional demands. She dreams of marrying a neurosurgeon but instead marries an engineer. She thinks about grooming herself before marriage by learning to cook, dress up, and master other arts. She desires reciprocal behaviour from her fiancée or future spouse, such as caring for and caring to her own needs. She is determined and wishes to study all of the possibilities for living a wealthy lifestyle. "She saw pre-marital life as a dress rehearsal for real life." (wife.3) Marriage, in her eyes, is an advertisement for the perfect person, and her desire is unmistakable. She wished her husband looked like Superman. Her parents made her realise that she is surrounded by inferiority and complexes due to her skin colour. She picked the perfect guy from an aspirin commercial, the perfect lips, eyes, and chin from a bodybuilder and shoulder ad, and the ideal stomach and legs

from a jeans ad and placed him alone at a Park Street restaurant or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel. "He wore blue bathing trunks. no ugly black hair on his back and shoulder blades as he leapt first into the pool ...in a scarlet sari with a gold border, behind wraparound sunglasses, and trailed her toes in the water". (Wife, 23)

Dimple desires to have a good time in life. She never wants to stay at home and appreciates life's comforts. She has no plans to increase her family. She is desperate enough to kill a pregnant mouse..It demonstrates her underlying desire to destroy her foetus. Her spouse is fighting for a better life and a better career. She becomes enraged at her pregnancy, and her conduct shows her deep sadness. She aborts herself after killing her foetus. She can't take it anymore and resorts to self-harm as a defence mechanism. She talks about how killing the mouse changed her fury into delight. When she moves to the United States, she wants to live an American lifestyle, but her husband is not ready. Even she betrays her marriage by having extramarital encounters and is content. She doesn't even live a pleasant life; instead, she seeks to satisfy her psychological and physiological demands.

Manju Kapoor's novel Immigrant is about Nina, a professor who is 30 years old, single, and lives with her mother in Delhi. She marries Ananda, an N.R.I am a doctor, and moved to Canada as a newlywed bride. The author explores the lifestyle of a married woman who lives alone in a strange nation. In a culture where autonomy and pragmatism are frequently foreign concepts, marital joy and the role of women at home take centre stage. In conclusion, readers will notice a significant shift in Nina's personality and mental state. She adopted a fresh outlook on life and began pursuing a new profession and work.

Mukherjee and Kapur deal with gender, marriage, and the metamorphosis of characters. The female characters created by these two writers are from various castes in Indian culture, and they defy their predetermined fate: Virmati, Tara, Jasmine, Astha and Nina all decide to start their own lives. Their natural sex obligates them to accept patriarchal authority, and their planned marriages demonstrate that they cannot hold their perspective because they must submit to another power: their husbands. As a result of their lifestyles and aspirations, they are forced to migrate to escape the Indian traditional tyranny of their sex and marriage restrictions, representing their obligation to society and family.

## CONCLUSION

Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur are known for their ability to reflect women's experiences in various cultural contexts. The female characters are disobedient and in search of a sense of belonging. It might be claimed that they have lost their confidence in institutions like marriage. Both protagonists find it tough to carry on and fine-tune their lives and identities. They are looking for respect and a position in society with a posh lifestyle for their heroes, Astha and Dimple. As a result, we may claim that they cannot adjust to the Indian family structure and marriage institution, including male supremacy, ignoring female identity, and being awful against women. Instead of submitting to their male counterparts, women in today's society are forging forward, becoming more educated and conscious of their rights, which has strengthened their womanly personas and allowed authors to depict the current status of women in society in precise detail. The social traditions, people she knows, and her family all have an impact on a woman's self-image. However, she has made an effort to improve her public image, get recognition, and aspire

to achieve more in this day and age. Instead of being an amusement item, she transformed herself into a human being by saving and forming her own opinions, beliefs, and wants in psychology, emotion, and physical well-being.

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