



A Comparative Analysis of Manju Kapur's and Arundhati Roy's Novels for the Changing Images of Indian Women in Relation to Traditional and Modern Values

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to highlight the shifting images of Indian women in relation to traditional and modern values. An analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Manju Kapur's five novels-*Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody* help to focus on this point of view. Their stories depict how the modern Indian woman, in an attempt to build her life and identity in her own unique way, is caught between tradition and modernity.

Keywords: Traditional, Modern, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur

Introduction

The modern woman, educated and aware of her rights, is not only leaving her home, but also protesting her societal exploitation. The intricacies of a woman's life in many cultures and societal ideals, as well as her struggle under the partial mechanism of a fragmented society, are the focus of Kapur and Arundhati Roy's work. This thesis provides a sound introduction to feminist viewpoints on family life, using themes such as conjugal duties, dual obligations, and numerous social programmes to back up the feminist case. Both authors depict a lady on the verge of self-discovery who abruptly decides to take control of her life. She is the lady who seeks strength and independence while focusing on her own inner strength as a human being. Kapur and Roy's works inspire our understanding of the mind of a woman caught in a web of relationships, some of which she creates and some of which are created for her. The female characters in these writers' novels represent an enigma of tradition and modernity that many women face in Indian society: the inner conflict between the desire to care for their husbands and children and the desire to discover deeper modes of fulfilment that are outside of traditional social norms.

In Manju Kapur and Roy's stories, the traditionally celebrated woman is replaced by a genuine modern woman who is attempting to shed the burden she has been bearing for centuries. The image of the woman evolves with the passage of time. These novels' protagonists deviate from standard depictions of self-sacrificing, enduring, timid, and silent women.

They are contemporary depictions of self-assured, aggressive, educated, protesting, and ambitious individuals who are raising society's awareness of their needs and confirming their identities. These protagonists try to find solace while integrating two worlds-traditional and modern.

A comparative study of Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy

Through their work, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur have cultivated a fearlessness in expressing their thoughts. These writers strive to represent the dictatorial chauvinistic canons and traditional superstitious notions of Indian society that have bound women within the cobweb of marriage and the iron wall of caste, religion, culture, and tradition through their creative masterpieces. The primary ideas they perceive are centred on the domestic terrain; family life, sexual relationships, gender discrimination, socio-political turmoil, and the desire for peaceful coexistence, in which a woman attempts to carve out a space for herself.

These novels depict the familial troubles that women experience before and after marriage, as well as the lives of women who live and suffer under the restrictive framework of a closed society. These sensitive female writers seek to present Indian women's lives while taking into account the complexities of their lives, varied histories, cultures, and value frameworks. They believe that views must be expressed through writing, and that a successful writer is

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someone who can meet the problems of the period rather than someone who creates something ideal. They see a writer's intellectual labour as a means of increasing consciousness, recognising difficulties, and providing methods of resistance and negotiation. They testified that a feminist writer is one who is awakened and aware of the lives and issues of women. And feminist consciousness is the experience of specific social order contradictions. This means that a feminist writer regards certain aspects of social reality as intolerable and must reject them in order to reform society for the better.

Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur's novels attempt to connect several facets of their protagonists' lives, such as the drive for self-assertion, the normal female psychology, and marital strife, in order to establish a relationship between these features. Toward the end of the novels, these novelists are successful not only in proving their interdependence, but also in justifying the heroines' conduct as a result of these elements. As a result of the various parallels and differences between Arundhati Roy's and Manju Kapur's works, it is vital to examine their works critically and then proceed to bring out the resemblances and disparities between them.

To begin, read Manju Kapur's novel "Home," which depicts the complexities of a traditional Indian family. The novel's plot revolves around the important role of tradition, culture, and materialistic concerns in manipulating the lifestyle of every member of the family. In *Home*, Manju Kapur painstakingly creates a traditional world in which all of her characters walk on the pathways of their elders. In an engaging tone, the author reveals a familial hierarchical system mixed with the emotional raptures of the ordinary Indian psyche. She examines the inseparable importance of marriage in women's lives, as well as the unavoidable problems they confront in meeting the demands of culture and society, regardless of education, career, or modern living. She claims that even modern women are continually searching for self-identity in order to express their wifely status and fulfil the maternal tasks required of women. The family tree offered by Manju Kapur at the start of the narrative demonstrates her intrinsic passion for Indian culture and custom, which tie the roots of the Indian familial environment.

Modern India is still a long way from an ideal, emancipated, democratic model. Indian women continue to struggle against the weight of tradition, the legacy of the past, and the patriarchal system's dogma.

Manju Kapur masterfully weaves the nexus between the internal tensions of home life and the historical crises of India's division on the brink of independence in *Difficult Daughters*. The title *Difficult Daughters* is a literal indicator of the female gender's difficult encounters and sufferings, with reference to the concurrent metaphorical representation of the socio-political instability, unrest, and disparity that persisted on the eve of their hard-earned independence. The work is linked to the historical section of India-Pakistan split caused by the enormous disparity that existed between Hindus and Muslims in India. She illustrates the heartbreaking killings and political upheaval that raged in Punjab, particularly when Amritsar was designated as the border city and Lahore was assigned to Pakistan. The country's societal violence is reflected in the family as a cultural conflict.

Manju Kapur's work depicts how historic causes, cultural impediments, gender bias, and unavoidable biological aspects abuse and manipulate femininity. She sheds attention on women's physical and psychological issues that have previously been ignored, buried, or considered esoteric. Manju Kapur articulates the individual function of culture, tradition, and marriage in assessing and determining the position of women from three generations.

Essentially, Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* delves at the function of marriage in the lives of Indian women who are bounded by the iron walls of culture and tradition, as well as images of taboos imposed by conventional society. She claims that from time immemorial until the present, a woman has been a metaphor for suffering, but the difficulties have simply changed. However, the sufferings are unquestionably inherited from the past and emerge in a variety of ways. Manju Kapur has worked hard to document real political issues, their consequences, and the role of social institutions in pushing school and college students to participate in the independence struggle. She has painstakingly pieced together the minute details of the lost revolutionary actions in the Indian freedom fight, as well as the pivotal events of the pre-partition period.

"A Married Woman" by Manju Kapur is a dynamic attempt to investigate a woman's lesbian identity from a woman's perspective in a culturally supported and socially produced patriarchal culture. Judith Butler accurately detects the possibilities of upsetting hetero-normative gender discourse in her book *The Gender Trouble*.

In the Indian setting, a lesbian is an alien not only to males, but also to other women in the heteronormative realm. Lesbians are stigmatised, demeaned, and viewed as a filthy species in most patriarchal countries, particularly India. Logically, Manju Kapur celebrates the chemistry of a woman-woman connection in this storey, as opposed to the compelled heterosexual normative order imposed by a prejudiced and rocentric society. She projected the unseen psychological risks that women face and endeavours to reassemble the shattered women's self in a feminist attitude within an exclusive feminine zone.

The Immigrant, Manju Kapur's second novel, vividly depicts the inexorable modifications of conventional Indian soil configurations and the adoption of a new version of a multicultural mix in the alien setting. It depicts the protagonist, Nina's, journey from innocence to experience, assimilation, and taking on new problems in life by breaking the mythical and societal conceptions of marriage ties, which are compounded by the nasty betrayals and culture shocks of the strange geography. Manju Kapur interweaves the ultimate immigrant experience in this work, compelling the reader to accept metamorphosis as an experience and explore new vistas.

Manju Kapur's novel *Custody* wonderfully handles the theme of matrimony. In fact, a marriage torn apart by a socially undesirable romance appears repeatedly in her writings. This storey explores the emotional consequences from the divorce of Raman and Shagun, a wealthy extended Delhi couple. It tells the storey of the lives, loves, and losses of wealthy and urban middle-class Indians. Manju Kapur excels at unearthing disturbing truths and delving into dysfunctional relationships in her storey. The novel follows Raman and Shagun, a married couple, and their children, Arjun, who is eight years old, and Roohi, who is three years old, as well as Raman's boss, Ashok Khanna, and Ishita, whom Raman subsequently marries.

There are two versions of modern female in this novel: one who walks out of marriage in quest of her uniqueness, and the other who is forced out of marriage unwillingly due to inability to have children. The novelist attempts to demonstrate here that a perfect balance of passion and reason and judgement is essential for the smooth and flawless running of human existence, because when passions take control, chaos occurs and man slips from actual liberty to mental anarchy. This is exactly what happens to Shagun, who abandons her husband and children for the sake of Ashok Khanna, driven by passion and a yearning for charm and excitement in life.

In contrast to Shagun, Ishita, a very sincere, sensible, capable, and reliable middle-class woman with a casual appearance, becomes a victim of a traditional chauvinistic society that considers it a moral obligation for a daughter-in-law to produce children, and when she fails to fulfil this duty, she is forced into divorce. However, because she is educated, she does not allow herself to be swept away in the river of sadness. She triumphs by devoting herself wholeheartedly to the humanitarian mission of caring for and educating slum children. The terrible forces of patriarchal traditional norms and society's prying eyes do not dampen her spirit, but rather encourage her in her purpose of delivering affection and attention to individuals who share her fate. She is a fresh woman in the truest sense, one who retains her dignity in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, Kapur's work conveys the notion that the world is a stage for follies and anomalies. To live in this globalised materialistic world, one must establish new roots and coexist as an entity, redeem oneself from spite, remorse, and shame, forget the heinous episodes of the past, and reopen a place to embrace new amenities. Manju Kapur proposes such provocative tactics, particularly for women, and provides a constructive outlet for bereaved souls to revamp and revitalise themselves from their torturous agony, stress, and psychological concerns. This second chance serves to break, contest, and vanquish the stench of the past in order to welcome a fragrant tomorrow more analogous to rebirth or revival to an evolving, resurgent individual.

She praises and reflects all of the joyous features of Hindu culture, such as the intricate ceremonies of marriage, followed by a magnificent array of dishes on various occasions that inspire the reader to join in the author's happy mood. She describes orthodox Hindu fasting rituals such as the "Karva Chauth" and the "Savitri Katha," as well as the naming ceremony for newborn children.

Manju Kapur depicts the hardship of traditional moms who are completely absorbed in the patriarchal ideas instilled by the Shastras, Holy Scriptures, and spiritual moors. Furthermore, in all of her works, she depicts the superstitious concepts of hell and heaven, the compulsory choice of arranged marriages for women, and the taboos linked with such patriarchal ideologies. Almost all of her senior characters in most of her stories are steeped in conventional ideas and moral norms, and they place a high value on the Shastras, without which they dread being labelled as sinners. Kapur's depiction attempts to unravel the irreversible thread of women's mental servitude entwined within these mythical and spiritual notions. She also sheds light on the devious tactics of patriarchal chauvinism that enslave the women's community. In all of Manju Kapur's works, mothers become the carriers of servitude in the name of traditions, serving as the conduit of sacrifices and the principal agents of patriarchy.

As an outspoken feminist, Manju Kapur frankly focuses on the fate of womanhood through her protagonists in all of her works and ventures to chastise the male-dominated canons by vociferously questioning why a woman needs to be defined by the male normative order. Manju Kapur's works identify the brainwaves of dogmatic society's distorted dictums and reveal the irregularities and loopholes of orthodox Indian society. Manju Kapur, like many of her contemporaries, imposes the label of modern feminist on herself. All of her works are exemplary examples of radical feminism, with many of her female characters, other than her protagonists, serving as an alibi to her militant and ardent feminist beliefs. Manju Kapur, a modern feminist, deconstructs the heterosexual male-female relationship by substituting a passionate sexual adventure of woman-woman lesbian agenda, a full subversion of the myth that dismantles the allegorization of women.

Arundhati Roy, one of the world's most known novelists, depicts untouchability, gender bias, and the caste system vividly in her most celebrated work, *The God of Small Things*. She brings to light society's social problems and ethos. "This is the first novel, and it's a Tiger Woodsian debut—the author strikes the long socio-cosmic ball but is also exquisite in her little game, like a devotionally crafted temple," comments legendary novelist John Updike in his review. [1]

Roy encourages us to pay special attention to people who are disadvantaged and silenced in the postcolonial subcontinent through this literary masterwork. Furthermore, she delivers a crucial message: while colonialism may be abolished, the concept of empire will never die, both now and in the future.

The *God of Small Things* is a novel of protest, departing from standard patriarchal discursive patterns in thought and action. Submissiveness and sacrifice are the patriarchy's mandated benchmarks for women. The women depicted in the novel are from the 1960s. In Indian history, this is known as the changeover period. The newly created modern India accepted modern concepts of equality, fraternity, brotherhood, and fairness, but this could not be accomplished overnight in the firmly caste-and-gender-hierarchical India. The pace of progress was gradual. Some individuals clung to traditional ideals, while the young, who had never witnessed India's servitude, were easily swayed by Western philosophies. This development has added to the intricacies of Indian society.

The story depicts the private and public lives of the Ayemenem family's men and women spanning three generations, whose lives are ruled by patriarchal ideas, caste prejudices, and gender discrimination. It delineates women's home, political, social, economic, and cultural lives in a male-dominated world. The novel's rigorous examination reveals the truth that men control the public and home spheres, leaving no room for women to demonstrate their qualities and talent.

Madhu Benoit says:

The plot appears fragmented in the novel *The God of Small Things*, where unspeakable desires are articulated and repressed memories are recalled, because the narration follows the process of an unspecified narrator's recollection of traumatic past events, a remembering that can easily be distracted by the simultaneous emergence of divergent memories [3].

As Murari Prasad observes:

"*The God of Small Things* exposes the rigid hierarchy of the caste system in Indian society, where the untouchables are placed at the bottom of the social ladder" [4].

As S.P Swain writes:

"Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* accurately depicts the plight of subjugated females and untouchables, social injustice, and the enduring conflicts between love and law that she intends to explore" [5].

This revolutionary tale also emphasises the legal structure in Indian society. Laws are drafted with the goal of preserving justice and social order. To ensure progress toward wealth, members of society are expected to observe the laws. Aside from written laws, there are invisible laws that govern an

individual's daily interactions, such as love, common sense, inherited beliefs, faiths, conventions, and traditions. The system of laws, however, does not function normally in *The God of Small Things*, but rather in a controlled manner.

In this regard, Paul Kingsnorth says:

“The power structure endorsed by the laws is metaphorically reflected in the novel’s narration of the tense relationship between the Big God and the Small God” [6].

As Binod Mishra writes:

“The novel *The God of Small Things* is a very rich text dealing with several social issues. Ammu, the protagonist of the novel, seems to be a woman alive and not a fictitious character. She tolerates all the humiliation silently. But she always has her way of life” [7].

The most distinguishing analogical component of Manju Kapur's and Arundhati Roy's writings is their intrinsic need to convey an individual's impressions on others. They reflect human personalities and feelings in part by revealing the inner psychology of the character's role through dynamic conversation and creating a picture of it. The reader is exposed to pondering events entirely via the perspective of the novel's characters. The majority of their characters are bruised, crippled, exploited by force, and immobilised, and they are among those who begin their lives as auxiliary personnel. As Ashok Kumar reflects on the annihilated 'woman-self,

The astringent and conical social web compelled women to eliminate their "selves," quirkiness, and distinct personality. In the modern day, the self finds it difficult to reach agreements with the social network since the self's fundamental values and the outer social needs are irreconcilable. This inability to develop the self, familiar with the social web, results in self alienation. [8].

Language, according to modern feminist writers, is the most important weapon for demystifying feminine myths. Language emerges as a critical life-blood for incorporating feminine literature in its true sense. Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy, predictably, reject linear structured language in favour of a negative nonlinear presentation of the substance. Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy's literary achievements have arrived at a time in history when current feminist thought has brought about a tremendous revolution in the history of literature. One could see their works as the result of rewriting a big literary history, because social change produces language change, and language change effects changes in attitudes slowly and indirectly.

Ammu's effort to escape "the grips" is reminiscent of generations of women's demonstrations. In women's literature, the word "home" invariably connotes imprisonment. Ammu's desire to cross the threshold is nothing more than a woman's defiance of age-old conventions and ideals. When she gets the chance, she takes advantage of it to get out from the crushing clutches. Only marriage can ensure her release from the precarious circumstances she has found herself in. Pappachi agreed one day to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta, where she married Baba, a man of low morals.

Ammu's reaction to the suggestion is out of the ordinary, just, and violent. She recognises her own dignity as a human being and objects to her treatment as a slave. Ammu, unlike her mother, is not a silent suffering since she does not accept her husband's mistreatment passively. When she smacks him with *The Reader's Digest World Atlas*, she reveals her altered demeanour. Ammu leaves her husband and returns to her parents in Ayemenem, unwelcomed, when the ill-treatment does not end and he begins to beat the children with her.

Ammu's life as a woman is snuffed out by the divorce. Her physical, sexual, and emotional needs are met the moment she leaves her husband. The only position left to her is that of a mother, with the burden of raising children without the financial and emotional support of their father and her parents, a difficult task for a single woman with no personal fortune of her own. Ammu is unable to afford her children's expenditures because she is financially dependent on her brother and parents. They are completely reliant on Mammachi, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma's kindness. The circumstance has an impact not only on their financial situation, but also on their psychological existence. For the twins and Ammu, life appears to be a struggle for survival. Ammu's sexual inclinations are also influenced by her uniqueness. A woman is burdened with the wifely, motherly, and womanly responsibilities that come with parenting. When she becomes aware of her body, she dismisses her children and demands her body back.

These women have a natural desire for liberty and have dared to debunk myths by doing bold anti-patriarchal actions. They have arisen as "New Women" by rediscovering their roots and reimagining a new history, and they have declared a new order for posterity.

Similarly, Pipee's predicament in defying religious, cultural, and traditional boundaries by having an open lesbian affair with Astha is a wonderful example of liberty in its purest form. Through her revolutionary acts, she subverts and explodes the mythical conceptions of an androcentric society and inverts the gender template protocol. As a widow with a strong personality, she embraces and meets life's obstacles with courage. She also inspires and instils courage in the submissive Astha, in addition to openly criticising her chauvinistic husband, Hemant. Pipee, as an independent woman, decides to pursue her doctoral studies in America.

Swarna Lata in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* comes into the concept of a 'new woman' in the sense that she imbibes a far-sighted perspective and clarity to act prudently and straightforwardly when making judgments. When women have been treated like slave dolls under patriarchal dicta, she has the ability to prioritise her thoughts and establish her revolutionary attitude with endurance and amazing guts. She is a staunch believer that every woman has a life for herself outside of marriage and never allows others, whether her parents or husband, to intrude on her personal independence. Her aggressive role in the freedom struggle and the Punjab National Women's Conference in her forties is notable. She, unlike Virmati, is a political activist, and even after marriage and having a kid, she continually insists on Virmati participating in a civil rally.

Conclusion

The current research project presents a comparative examination of Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy's depictions of women's plight in their works. Both novelists have firmly established themselves in the world literary canon. They have successfully brought to light something new and rarely discussed, particularly the condition of women in India, through their writings. They both believe that, even in this day and age of progress, women are still oppressed and unable to assert their independence in a male-dominated world. Both Kapur and Roy have addressed the issue of "women's distress" by witnessing and analysing their sad fate from two perspectives—psychological and social.

Both novels examine various aspects of a woman's existence, including her struggles as a kid, adolescent, married woman, and divorcee. Their female characters are ladies who have overcome obstacles at practically every stage of their lives to justify their existence. They highlight the desire of the entire female community to be treated equally with their male counterparts. Their heroes dispute the absurd practise that requires Indian women to dress like mythological goddesses. They contradict this convention with today's realistic reality. They stand up to say that these ideal women only existed in epics; they were princesses and queens who were far removed from the pains and sufferings of a modern woman who has no identity of her own; she lives for others, breathes for others, and even surrenders to her husband's will to make the marital home pleasant for him.

The books of Kapur and Roy also highlight the significance of family and society in developing a woman's personality. Ammu, Rahel, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, and Ishita represent the struggle of a female child who is taught to internalise and accept the dominant patriarchal ideology, which is the conscious and unconscious premise of male supremacy, during the process of socialisation. As a result, their groomed childhood teaches them to deny their own sex and participate in their own servitude.

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