



The Echoes of Barren Women's Emotional Turmoil Prevalent in the Novels of ManjuKapur

Miss Navita Malani

Assistant Professor Smt RadhabaiSarda Arts, Commerce & Science College Anjangaon Surji

Contact :9545221277 ,E-Mail Id: navitamalani3@gmail.com

Abstract :

In Indian social structure existence of a female is considered worth to be respected and recognized when she steps up continuously higher on the ladder of family structure and crosses the phases of being daughter, wife, daughter in law, mother, mother in law and so on successfully. Moreover, becoming mother is considered the epitome in the life of a married women. Initially 'marriage' is the destination where every girl has but to reach and to beget children and become mother help a lady attain a social status that she would not otherwise have. In the Hindu culture, a biological child is seen as being crucial to preserve the union between "husband" and "wife". Birth of a child or children ensures the success of a couple's married life. Unfortunately if a couple remains childless for many years after marriage, it is wife who has to suffer the repercussions more intensely than the husband. Women who are childless endure such severe anguish that it leaves them feeling deeply guilty. ManjuKapur portrays the heart rending suffering of barren women resulting in utter emotional turmoil and sheer chaos in their life from multifarious perspective.

Key words:barrenness, conscience, infertility, progressive, psychological, violent, torture, turmoil

The canvass of Indian Writing in English has always been depicting a number of issues concerning women's world and worries. The pens of Indian women novelists in particular have been instrumental in scribing complications in the feminine world. Their novels cover both current, urgent problems affecting women and those that have long persisted in society. Sensuality, servility, constant ambivalence in women's life, their subjugation, friction between conventional mindset and modern approach are just a few of the complex problems that Indian female writers have struggled with. The fictional world of ManjuKapur the staunch Indian women writer and the Booker prize winner focuses on the life of women and their wishes, desires, actions and aspirations. She herself admits that her prime interest be looking at the feminine world and find out more meaning in her existence. Through the present paper the researcher tries to probe deep into fictional world of ManjuKapur and catch the echoes therein of emotional unrest in women as a result of barrenness.

Kapur very peculiarly highlights the fact that for childless women harsh treatment begins at home itself. A childless woman has to bear taunts and experiences hostile behaviour from her in-laws and others around them, while women with biological offspring experience respect and honour in the eyes of the in-laws. The character of Sona in Home the second novel by Kapur is a realistic portrait of a lady who undergoes the curse of barrenness for a long period of ten years after her marriage with Yashpal. Sona is a very good wife and daughter in law; a sensible, devoted and caring one but all her good qualities fail to protect Sona from the harsh treatment from her mother in law. Her mother in law spits out torrents of abuses on Sona every now and then. The mother in law's following bitter words tears the heart of Sona who is already suffering much due to her helpless situation:

And then for no reason, no reason but that they were alone and nobody else could see her true colours, the old woman glared at Sona and spat out, 'You think sleep is possible? What can you know of a mother's feelings ? All you do is enjoy life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you.'¹

Sona in her blind faith leaves no path untrodden and tries every trick from observing fasts to fulfilling various rituals and worshipping God and deities in order to conceive. But the course of medical complications is not in her control. Sushila, Sona's sister in law is blessed with two kids and that too 'sons' and Sona still yearns to conceive for the first time itself. Sushila gets a high preference and much better treatment as compared to Sona in their household as well as in society. Beena Agrawal critically remarks over it in a valuable article:

"Sushila gets upper hand in family because she conceives immediately after marriage while as Sona remains neglected and humiliated. Sushila



is blessed with two kids and it creates greater insecurity in the mind of Sona. ManjuKapur accepts that pregnancy is a privilege of female anatomy but it is guided and controlled by the expectations of patriarchy.”²

The repeated bitter remarks from her mother in law and other senior ladies in family only makes Sona more panic every day. Through Sona’s humiliation the novelist depicts the similar misery in the life of so many Indian women from which they fail to find out any relief.

Childbearing is considered highly desirable in all the cultures, yet it is a wife alone who is generally held responsible for a couple’s infertility and is often blamed, abused and punished as a consequence. Verbal, emotional, and physical violence are the types of violence that infertile women are most often exposed to. The typical patriarchal pressure on barren women is well delineated in the novels *Home* and *Custody* by Kapur. She very boldly showcases that in our society where the patriarchal influence still dominates the ways of thinking even today, if a couple’s married life suffer on account of childlessness, it is mostly a wife who is blamed. The sad tale of Ishita’s suffering on account of barrenness in *Custody* reminds the readers repeatedly of the mental and psychological torture experienced by barren women in the society every now and then. Suryakant, Ishita’s husband and her in laws torcher Ishita on every plane as a punishment for her barrenness so that she goes out of her husband’s life forever giving a way to him for marrying twice.

“The mother began to call her shameless, the sisters refused to talk to her, the father and SK avoided her. She only saw her husband at the dining table- a place to which she seldom came. Who can eat if they are treated as invisible?.....A month of this and it was clear that his love must be completely dead for him to treat her so cruelly.”³

Kapur underlines the fact that it is a wife and a wife only to be blamed or punished whatever may be the cause of it. Suryakant who loved Ishita endlessly and promises to love her forever, doesn’t take much time to forget his promise once her barrenness is diagnosed clinically. He seeks divorce from Ishita on the account her inability to conceive and is ready to marry for the second time. Ishita’s wretched life recalls similar difficult circumstances of so many women whom their husbands and in laws desert just because they are not able to give an heir to their family. The following figures found out in a survey about physical, sexual and psychological violence experienced by infertile women shows that it is not at all an encouraging scenario. The survey says

“Out of the 200 infertile women 136 (68%) reported a history of physical violence, 120 (60%) had experienced sexual violence and 140 (70%) had psychological violence. There was a significant relationship between infertility and physical, sexual and psychological violence.....Violence affects the lives of millions of women worldwide and in all socioeconomic and educational classes (20). In this study the prevalence of physical, psychological and sexual violence in infertile women was 68%, 70% and 60%, respectively.”⁴

Kapur is a highly suggestive writer. Every successive paragraph in her writing has a lots of meaning hidden in it. A sensitive reader grasp more meaning through reading between the lines than through just reading the lines penned by her. Kapur sometimes exposes bad treatment given to a barren wife in a very blunt manner sometimes she gives subtle suggestions of it. She once observed beautifully in one of her interview:

“I’m not a didactic writer, I’m a mirror of society kind of writer, ‘okay, this is what I see’... It’s trying to understand these things, these poisons and viruses (that) grow if left unchecked, and it all starts at a personal level, she said.”⁵

In *Home* the novelists gives a strong hint of some violent incident which took place with the first wife of Arvind who was barren. He hesitantly discusses the problem of first wife’s barrenness and accidental death when he meets Nisha at her place to complete premarital formalities. His



following words create a strong doubt in the readers that either she was murdered or she committed suicide:

'She was seventeen. When we could not have children, my mother blamed her. They were alone in the house together, and she was very young.....'

Was this man telling her his wife was murdered, or had committed suicide, that the story of accident was fabricated- what was he really saying? ⁶

Socialization of Indian girls from very early age to become mothers is another aspect which Kapur keenly deals in her narratives. Through various incidents in her novels Kapur emphasizes the fact that the importance of motherhood is imbibed on the minds of young girls through their upbringing itself. They are given dolls to play with so they can practice their maternal care and nurturing. Besides in joint families, the eldest daughter frequently has to take care of her younger siblings or relatives, which greatly aids in fostering a motherly attitude of care and nurturing in girls from an early age. In the natural course of their routine life girls observe time and again that after attaining motherhood a woman gets the love and approval of society and thus internalizes the cultural and social standards of marriage and childbirth. Attainment of motherhood is valued by women as away of conforming to the existing value system that Indian society upholds. The doctrine of "compulsory motherhood" justifies childbirth as the primary responsibility of women. Kapur emphasizes that woman who fails to produce children generally feels less in her identity and her own conscience blames herself badly. She undergoes a panic state of mind even if there is no one abusing her for barrenness.

Neena in *The Immigrant* is an exemplary character through which Kapur focuses on the thinking mechanism of women which too carries the high impact of patriarchal influence ultimately leading to her tremendous suffering without any outer element or person responsible for it. Neena who stays at Canada with her NRI dentist husband Ananda is very much panic-stricken when she is not able to conceive. Ananda tries to convince Neena to pursue further studies and become economically self-dependent by seeking a job in Canada. Much conflict arises between the couple over the issue of infertility. Neena tries to convince Ananda to go for different therapies to overcome the problem of sexual dysfunction. Ananda on the other hand insists on taking time for everything and waiting for things to take place in the natural course of events. Consistent craving for a child doesn't let Nina spend even a single day at peace. And the yearning for a child and Ananda's high unwillingness to go for medical assistance to get a proper diagnosis and sort out the complications increases Nina's heartache with passing time. Ananda is not ready to shoulder the responsibility of it. Through the repeated disputes between Neena and Ananda, Kapur highlights the fact that infertility in man and woman is looked at with a different approach. If the barrenness is found in a wife, she can be tortured, punished, driven out of home or even divorced but if a husband has some problem leading to infertility, wife doesn't have much liberty to create a havoc over it. Even in-laws of a lady show enough patience if the problem is diagnosed in their own son but if a daughter in law is diagnosed to be barren unfortunately, they can't bear with her for a long time. This partial outlook causes more and more emotional unrest in barren women. Kapur throws light on the partial mindset in the patriarchal society where everything in society; rules and regulations, norms and parameters, practices and restrictions everything is set in accordance with the male dominating outlook resulting in emotional turmoil for women.

Conclusion :

Kapur's treatment of the sensitive subject makes readers think twice about the unjustified ways in which barren women are treated in their own families as well as in society. Besides the present issue of barrenness in women under discussion, Kapur has always been keen on bringing forth the sad patches in feminine world and offering frequent glimpses of real anguish they suffer. She encompasses the most sensitive issues in her fictional discourse and gives a jerk to the thinking process of the readers. The novels *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody* brings forth microscopic image of the barren women's suffering from various viewpoints. The representation of barren women's distressed life in the aforesaid novels is not at all far away from actual scenario. The journey of her women characters from Sona to Ishita shows a progressive approach in barren women. We see Ishita who knows it perfectly well that there is no chance of her ever be able to conceive prefers a remarriage with Raman. Moreover she accepts and nurtures his daughter Roohi as if her own child. Through the love bonding between Ishita and Roohi, Kapur exemplifies that a barren woman can be an equally loving mother if she gets a chance to adopt a child. Even a non biological child can also bring joy and colours in the life of a childless



couple. Kapur's efforts to awaken the conscience of the readers become increasingly successful with each reader empathizing with women around them striving to sustain in such adverse situations.

References :

1. Kapur, Manju. 'Home'. New Delhi: Random House India, 2006; London: Faber and Faber, 2006. p. 181.
2. Agarwal, Beena. "ManjuKapur: Quest for a New Feminist Idiom", ManjuKapur's Fictional World : A Critical Spectrum (ed.) Beena Agrawal Aadi Publications; 2020, p. 7
3. Kapur, Manju. 'Custody'. Penguin Random House India, 2011; p. 69.
4. <https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-25-2019/volume-25-issue-8/relationship-between-domestic-violence-and-infertility.html>
5. <https://indianexpress.com/article/books-and-literature/my-books-should-reflect-what-i-see-in-society-manju-kapur-7197121/>
6. Kapur, Manju. 'Home'. New Delhi: Random House India, 2006; London: Faber and Faber, 2006. p. 301.