

Agents of Patriarchy: A Comparative Study of the Works of Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur

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Abstract -Through their works the Indian woman fictionists , in an attempt to make the Indian woman free from the clutches of the male-centered society, raise a revolutionary voice against the inhumane treatment being offered to the latter by the patriarchal culture. The male centered Indian society doesn't proffer woman a conducive environment to enjoy her rights and choices. She is entangled in the suffocative web of patriarchal ideology to the extent that at every step in her life there is a patriarchal agent to check her liberty. They expect her to perform the patriarchal role silently and submissively, subsequently annihilating her individuality. Not only the wedlock provides her a whirlpool of suffering but at her father's house also she is marginalized. The purpose of the present paper is to conduct a comparative study of the novels of Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur. In both novels the authors portray the patriarchal agents in a manner in which they deny autonomy and individuality to the Indian woman, but the patriarchal agents are different in the works of both novelists.

Key Words: Male-centered society, Patriarchal culture, Marginalised, Autonomy and Individuality.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the patriarchal society man is supreme, and woman is placed at inferior status to him. Woman is entangled in the web of patriarchy in a manner in which annihilating her individuality she becomes a passive and sacrificial being. She is made aware of her secondary position during her upbringing and socialization in the childhood. In an attempt to make her a submissive and sacrificing creature, she is subjected to atrocity. Best efforts are made to make her a perfect housemaker as she is expected to perform every patriarchal role in the society, and in this attempt she is deprived of her choices and rights. Wedlock also offers her a life full of pain and agony as here she is considered only a home manager and procreative device, subsequently showing her the way to identity crisis. Many female authors, through their writings, show the Indian woman a path to autonomy by way of making her aware of the rejection of the patriarchal ideals.

In their works, both writers, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur, apparently depict the oppressive nature of patriarchy. Arundhati Roy in her novel, *The God of Small Things* and Manju Kapur in *The Immigrant*, *The Home* and *The Custody* bring to light the exploitation of the woman by various patriarchal agents. In the direction of giving household training torture is inflicted on the girl child, consequently trampling down her aspiration for getting higher education. She is compelled to sit at home waiting for marriage as Simone de Beauvoir remarks, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445). The institution of marriage also proffers her a web of afflictions, conclusively creating a dependence syndrome in her. Through the plight of the protagonist of *The God of Small Things*, Ammu and her mother, Mammachi the writer explores the harsh reality of the society where at every stage of life the macho counterpart of a female acts as an agent of patriarchy whether he is a father, a husband, a brother or a son. Physical violence is inflicted on both the female characters of the novel by their respective husbands. A leading sociologist, Uma Vasudev explicitly remarks, "Even the poorest Indian male is fortunate in having opportunities for releasing his impulse to domination and the fury of his frustrated ego, because he always has a wife he can treat as an inferior" (62).

Arundhati Roy explicitly explores the stark reality of the society where a father, a brother and even a son become agents of patriarchy that is a cobweb of misfortunes for a woman. Ammu is tormented psychologically when her father doesn't allow her to pursue higher education and she is compelled to wait for marriage sitting at home. Her brother, Chacko inflicts psychic torture on her when she falls in love with Valutha, a low caste carpenter. The writer also exposes the patriarchal attitude of a son when Chacko, Mammachi's son takes over the charge of Mammachi's pickle factory. Rashmi Shahi rightly observes, "Our society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here a female is considered to be a peripheral member of the family, both in the parents' house as well as husband's. Throughout her lifetime she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity" (130).

In her work, *The Immigrant* Manju Kapur brings to light the male dominated approach of Ananda who exercises a social, sexual and economic patriarchal check on her wife, Nina, the protagonist of the novel. In the novel, *The Custody* The novelist exposes the bitter truth that a mother-in-law becomes the medium of patriarchy when she inflicts torture on her daughter-in-law. Not only a mother-in-law, but a mother also patronizes the male-centric ideals. She promotes male chauvinism by pressurizing her daughter not to cross the threshold of stereotyped tradition. Predicament of Nisha, the heroine of *The Home* explicitly reveals how a mother helps in transmitting the patriarchal ideals to the next generation. Chodorow, a psychological feminist aptly asserts:

Women as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not mothers) produce sons whose nurturing capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed (qtd. in Reena 7).

Manju Kapur cracks wide open the harsh reality of the society where mother becomes the patron of the male dominated culture. Through the mother-daughter relationship between Nisha and Sona in *The Home*, the writer vehemently criticizes the role of mother who attempts to reduce her daughter to a sacrificial and submissive creature. In the very childhood Sona makes Nisha aware of the adult issues like husband and marriage. At the early stage of life the latter is asked to observe fast for getting a good husband. The following dialogue between the mother and the daughter on *Karva Chauth* reflects how a mother carries her daughter over the path of identity crisis:

‘How are you going to get married, madam, if you do not make sacrifices?’

In school nobody does it’.

‘They are not manglis’....

...Nisha tried: ‘So?’

‘What do you mean, so? What kind of wife are you going to make if you can't bear to fast one day a year for your husband?’ (92)

The writer vehemently criticizes the promotion of religious dogmas by a mother, consequently inflicting psychological torture on the daughter. She is brought up with the patriarchal issues of self-annihilation and inferior status. The mother attempts to crush her existence. Reena asserts:

The author successfully unearths the reality how in the middleclass Indian society the girl child is brought up according to the social and religious norms. Religion is misused to reduce the woman to the secondary status by presenting her as a dependent and sacrificial persona, because the orthodox women like Sona follow the path of religion blindly without exercising the faculty of reason (*Manju* 55).

Sona is very well aware of the fact that her daughter will be supposed to perform all the patriarchal roles after her marriage, so neglecting her studies she tries to give her a training for the household chores so that the latter may be an outstanding housemaker. How explicit it is that the mother prepares the daughter for her secondary role in the society. Simone de Beauvoir is apt when she says, "One is not born but rather becomes woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in the society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine" (295).

Manju Kapur, in the novel, *The Custody* explores that not only a mother, but a mother-in-law also acts as a patriarchal agent and helps the male member of the society in the exploitation of her own sex. The writer also reveals the harsh reality of the society where the woman is considered only as a procreative device, and her existence lies only in it. When Ishita, one of the leading characters of the novel, fails to conceive, her mother-in-law inflicts psychological torture on her by uttering very harsh words, as she utters:

You must have known you couldn't have a child.

You will never get a paisa from us.

How long you think you can go on eating our salt?

There are ways to deal with shameless women like you (*Custody* 70).

Kapur reveals how infertility is considered a sin in the patriarchal society. The novelist underlines the fact how a mother-in-law increases the misery of her daughter-in-law. Reena asserts:

Kapur negotiates the problem of hierarchies in the middle class Indian society. In the hierarchical system one woman is placed against another crushing the rights of the latter. A mother-in-law who is submerged in patriarchal ideology, can't be supportive during her daughter-in-law's misery. Instead of being cooperative she aggravates the problem. For the fulfillment of her patriarchal interests she tortures her lot (114).

After having a comparative study of the works of both novelists it has been analyzed that their works have been replete with the feminist issues which negotiate the marginalization of women in the patriarchal society. Both authors bring to light the harsh actuality of the male dominated society where women are exploited in the hands of patriarchal forces. Arundhati Roy uncovers male domination at every stage in woman's life. The male member of the society whether he is a father, a brother, a husband or a son torments his female counterpart physically or psychologically at every stage of life, subsequently becoming the agent of patriarchy, whereas Manju Kapur also unearths how a female tortures the member of her own sex, consequently promoting male hegemony. In her works not only a husband does subject his wife to torture, but a mother and mother-in-law also inflict suffering on her daughter and daughter-in-law respectively. So the writer lays bare the harsh reality of the patriarchal society where woman also becomes a patriarchal agent patronising the male domination. But Kapur doesn't delineate the character of a father, a brother and a son in a manner in which they act as patriarchal agents.

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