

Mirroring the Nulliparity of Women in Select Works of Manju Kapur

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Abstract: *Infertility is the foremost quandary in the life of a married couple. It is said that a woman is considered as incomplete unless she procreates a child. Nobody blames men, although the issue is with men, but women have consistently been affected. Wife and husband are two wheels of a chariot, and one cannot enjoy life in lack of the other. It is women who cannot adore even a single minute, if they are impotent and are always agonized. These infecund women lead an insecure and very painful life, but none takes the pain to peer into their groaning, who pass their nights with tears in bed. This paper sheds light on the barrenness of women and their experience in the select works of Manju Kapur.*

Key Words: *Barrenness, women's experience as an infecund, adoption, painful life*

Manju Kapur is a unique storyteller who presents the post-modern novel in a traditional narrative idea. Manju Kapur who occupies an important role in the world of Indo-English literature tried to deal with physical, psychological and emotional stress of women's pitiable plight in her novels. She raises the innumerable issues that are deep-rooted within the family. Her writings include, *Difficult Daughter, A Married Women, Home*, etc. offer a close view on the man-woman relationship enmeshed in forced arranged marriages, love affairs that are not accepted by society - ranging from extramarital affairs to homosexual relationships, infidelity, adoption, divorce etc. The women protagonists or 'female heroes' of Kapur's novels are shaped by the social and cultural codes of the Indian society and further she is deeply concerned with their personal agonies and aspirations, financial and emotional dependence, carnal desires, etc. However, one characteristic that remains intact in every novel of Kapur is her foregrounding of vivid shades of women. All her women characters undergo various dilemmas regarding their relationships. She also portrays women's problems that arose due to infertility and its implications.

In medicine, a woman who has not given birth is referred to as "nulliparous." It does not imply that she has never been pregnant; a person who has never given birth to a live child but has experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth, or an abortion are considered nulliparous.

Infertility is one of the topics that Kapur explores in her works. Especially, in "*Custody*" and "*Home*". In these works, she discusses how women go from being infertile to becoming mothers and how they embrace parenthood by embracing other people's children as their own.

Kapur's novel "*Custody*" glimpses over the element of infertility. Kapur shows the realities of conventional Indian society, which has oppressed women from enjoying their rights and powers, due to a woman's failure to procreate the next progeny for her family.

Through Ishita, Manju Kapur presents an interesting and enthralling portrayal who enjoys both the bliss and agony of married life. She enjoys the bliss of being the wife of Suryakanta, the social stigma of unproductiveness and motherhood makes Suryakanta to reject her and finally, she walks away from him. The act of inhuman rejection by her husband and in-laws engulfs her with tension and social stigma. Kapur exposes the deep-rooted notions of patriarchy. Patriarchy demands female productivity to continue the family bloodline.

Hindu women should prioritize being wives before becoming mothers. Traditional Hindu beliefs hold that a woman can only exist inside the confines of marriage and motherhood; otherwise, she is viewed as worthless and useless. A woman can only acquire status in the outside world if she is a wife and mother. An Indian good wife is expected to bear a child shortly after marriage. Consequently, women who are childless frequently face marginalization and stigma. The institution of marriage is a kind of harsh enslavement that women endure. Marriage must necessarily be followed by motherhood. Wife, mother, and daughter-in-law are the roles that society expects women to fulfill.

Suryakanta's affection and concern are overcome by the curse of barrenness. Manu Kapur paints a depressing image of what happens to an Indian married woman who is unable to have children. Her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law who showed love and affection earlier changed overnight when they realized that Ishita is medically pronounced as infertile. Manju Kapur bitterly says, "*Had there*

been something wrong with SK, they would have moved heaven and earth to get a son's defect corrected. In an ideal world, the same resources would have been put to the disposal of a daughter-in-law" (Custody, 65). Suryakanta, who previously showered her with unending affection, grows up to be his parents' loyal son. When Ishita is accused of not having children, she is just twenty-seven years old. Her marital life takes a bad turn. Here's how Kapur describes her condition: She could look for a job, but the meaning of her life came from Suryakanta. For three and a half years she had been surrounded by his shy and tender love, she had set down roots in this home, and the thought of being expelled from it was heart-breaking. "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 in the dining table- a place to which she seldom came. Who can eat if they are treated as invisible? She stayed in her room, reading magazines, flicking through TV channels, waiting for it to be late enough so she could take a sleeping pill." (Custody, 69)

In a patriarchal family structure, the happiness and space of a young woman is based on her fertility. Her mother says, "Producing grandchildren was a moral obligation" (Custody, 52). Helpless Ishita feels that "clouds were entering her soul and shedding heavy drops of unworthiness" (Custody, 61). Head buried in a pillow, "she thought of the body that had known so much love, and then so much punishment" (Custody, 121) and now is like a living corpse. She has to face social rejection and to struggle under the oppressive mechanism of the closed society. Ishita experiences a lack of identity and feels that she is not fulfilling her role as a woman. Kapur emphasizes the universal phenomenon of women's oppression in the marriage that fails to deliver a child. She writes, "No matter where you lived, what your circumstances, women always suffered" (Custody, 122). Thus the novel illustrates the pain and the struggle undergone by Ishita from the bondages of marriage due to barrenness.

Ishita occasionally hangs out with Roohi, the neighbour and divorced daughter of Raman. Eventually, the relationship between Raman and Ishita develops. Following their divorce from Shagun, Raman, and Ishita tie the knot and begin a happy married life. Through Roohi, Ishita reaps the benefits of motherhood.

In her work "Home", Manju Kapur portrays the lives of two sisters, Sona and Rupa. The sisters don't have any children. Yashpal is the husband of Sona. She is the eldest daughter-in-law of the wealthy business

family, the Banwari Lal family. Rupa is wedded to a government employee with a meager salary. Following her marriage, Sona has to face a fallout. Sona's family, particularly her mother-in-law, constantly targets her. Sona and her spouse try to become parents after two years of marriage. Sadly, they are unable to have any children. When Sona's sister-in-law gives birth to a boy, she feels uneasy. Sona is accused of her barrenness by her mother-in-law, when she consoles her mother-in-law on her daughter's death Sunita. Instantly her mother-in-law spats on Sona as "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." (Home, 18) Since Sunita leaves Vicky behind when she dies, Sona has come to regard Vicky more as her own child as a result of being childless. This indicates that Yashpal and Sona adopt Vicky, look after his academic needs, and push him to pick up commercial skills. Despite not having children, Sona's heart is so loving that she accepts her nephew as her own child, in spite of her undergoing agony for being a barren woman.

Her mother-in-law continues to treat her with extreme coldness and cruelty. Sona's need to cry a lot serves as evidence of the miserable life that women generally lead. She worries about her future without children and has restless nights. She begins to lose hope and wonders what will become of her in Banwari Lal's household: "She was humble, easy to mould, and ready to please. Sona was gold, like her name, but what use was all this if Banwari Lal blood did not pass on its expected quantity" (Home, 14). This anxiety makes her jealous of her sister-in-law who lives upstairs and has "delivered with so much promptness" (Home, 15) and she feels choked by the "fecundity of life upstairs, falling through the floor and pressing upon her heavily, that for nights and nights she could not sleep" (Home, 15) and declares that she "I cannot bear the emptiness in my heart" (Home, 19). Sona experiences more mental anxiety and psychic unrest as a result. It depicts the psychological suffering of a woman without children. She loses her innately sensitive feelings for other family members as a result of her anxiety. Sona ponders if her family had encouraged seeking medical aid "how willingly she would have put herself in the hands of modern medicine, suffered thousand tests. Perhaps they wanted to punish her, perhaps they felt she was not worth the money" (Home, 24). The mental and physical trauma undergone by Sona indicates her lack of space in her house.

Sona battles mightily to become a mother in order to secure her place in the family. After ten years, at last, Sona gives birth to Nisha, a baby girl. Because "It is

good to have a girl in the house.” (Home, 35) Sona gets pregnant once more after some time, “And now the womb has opened,’ continued Rupa, ‘a baby brother will come soon.”(Home, 36) When Sona had her second child, a son, the birth was almost as joyful and welcomed as when she had given birth to a daughter. Sona's mother-in-law exclaimed “Now I can die in peace.” (Home, 48) Even though Sona gives birth to a girl first, she is not thrilled because most families view a boy's birth as a blessing because they believe that god has blessed them with a male kid, which is seen as a blessing to the family. In contrast, a girl is viewed as a financial burden by the family. Sona's characterization can be the individual who is victimized through the subordination practiced and marginalization imposed by the society and her life is just the reflection of it. The pain inflicted upon her led her to suffer for most of her life.

In Rupa's case, her family consisted of her father-in-law and her spouse. Rupa is childless, as is her spouse, Premnath. Rupa is really lucky in this situation. In actuality, her in-laws do not make fun of her for not having children. “Childlessness is considered as a curse to women. Rupa once remarks, “It is our fate. Perhaps it is just as well we don't have children...” (Home, 1). Nisha, their niece, is looked after by Rupa and Premnath. Manju Kapur beautifully portrays the life of a childless woman and her saga. She extremely executes the infertile women's emotions, turmoil, and the treatment of family and society in her novels which commonly happens every second in India.

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