SYNOPSIS
SYNOPSIS

Of Ph.D. Thesis

Of

Mrs. Manjiree Atul Vaidya

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Dr. A. P. Pandey

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The thesis entitled “Identity Crisis of Women Characters in the Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur” is an in-depth exploration of the female identity crisis and sufferings at various stages and phases of life span of women reflected in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. Being women writers, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur have captured the facade of female sensibilities and portrayed them comprehensively in their works.

These novelists portray the existing landscape of Indian society and set to sensitise the human psychology which grants woman a subaltern and marginalised space in social hierarchy. Woman, as a child, daughter, wife, and a co-worker and in various other capacities, gets subordinated spite of her significant contributions in shaping and formulating of the respective institutions.


The thesis is a critical attempt to test the hypothesis that female characters suffer a lot in the male dominated society, and their problems are neither properly addressed nor redressed by even their close relatives. It is the characters only who mustering courage to handle their own problems modestly to establish their identity and due place in society by their own virtues. During the course of research work, the researcher arrived at well-searched out findings by close study and critical examination of all the available primary and secondary resources. This thesis has been divided into five chapters to carry out the systematic and cohesive analysis of the research data.

**Chapter-I: Introduction**

This chapter is a comprehensive survey of the journey of novel as a genre from its rise in England to India and development of Indian English novel and its status in present literary scenario.

It also highlights the biographical accounts of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur which help a lot in critical evaluation of their literary works. It projects the fact that these novelists have primarily brought out multi-faceted cultural veneers and feministic issues through their creative expressions, as female subjugation and perpetration of injustice on women has been the major cause of concern of literary artists across the world.
The research problem has been objectively analysed and thoroughly discussed by the application of certain key terms like feminism, patriarchy, identity crisis, etc. emerging from the critical survey of literary forms. It is necessary to understand their relevance in the present research.

The following theories regarding feminism have been dealt with to evaluate the works of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur.

**Feminism:** Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and discrimination against women. Feminism is also described as an ideology focussing on equality of the sexes. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as ‘advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of equality of sexes’. Different types of feminisms like liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, eco feminism are discussed in this chapter for better understanding and analysis.

**Liberal Feminism:** It looks at the personal interactions of men and women as the starting ground to transform society into a more gender-equitable place. Issues important to liberal feminism include education, equal pay for equal work bring into light the sexual and domestic violence against women, childcare, health care etc.

**Radical Feminists:** They believe that male-based authority and power structure are responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system exists and its values are in place, society will not be able to reform in any significant way.

Similarly, **Marxist feminists** see women as being held down as a result of their unequal standing in both, the workplace and the domestic sphere. Prostitution, domestic work, child birth and care are all seen as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system; which devalues women and the substantial work that they do.

**Ecofeminism:** It links ecology with feminism. Since the men in power control the land, they are able to exploit it for their own profit and success. Similarly, women are also exploited by men in power for their own profit, success and pleasure. The research underscores the fact that in recent era the feminists, instead of negatively attacking on male, are shifting towards positive delineation of women’s redefinition of their identity in their works. Failure to establish own individuality due to psychological or social reasons is called as identity crisis. Feminist critics always blame patriarchal system for female subordination and identity crisis.
**Patriarchal system:** It is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

**Chapter – II: Identity Crisis in the Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande**

This chapter focuses on various factors which are responsible for the identity crisis in female characters in the three select novels of Shashi Deshpande namely ‘The Binding Vine, That Long Silence and Moving On’.

‘The Binding Vine’ reveals the identity crisis of various women characters including Urmi, Mira, Vanaa, Akka, Shakutai, Sulu and Kalpana. The protagonist, Urmi is a lecturer in a college and her identity crisis is result of untimely death of her daughter, Anu. But she comes out of it when she sees the depth of grief of other characters. She is empathetic about Mira, her dead mother-in-law who loses her identity due to forceful marriage and marital rape about which she writes it in her diary in the form of poems. Similarly, next female character, Akka, suffers due to over possessiveness of her husband and his obstinate and dominant nature. Urmi’s sister-in-law and best friend from childhood, Vanaa expresses her disapproval about dominance of her husband, Harish. She presents the misery of a working woman who tries to keep balance on all fronts, yet her family expects more from her. Thus, Vanna and Akka are prey of male dominance, while Shakutai, Sulu and Kalpana’s identity crisis is due to their socio-economic status as well as patriarchal norms. Shakutai and Sulu are sisters who belong to lower class. Shakutai’s husband abandons her for other woman and Sulu’s husband, Prabhakar insults her for being childless. They are self dependent, yet struggle for their existance. Kalpana is victim of brutal rape by Prabhakar. The novelist throws light on hypocritical approach of the society towards rape victim and role of media in it. Urmi binds herself with bond of love and affinity to these characters.

‘That Long Silence’ shows identity crisis of the protagonist, Jaya because of her silence and submissiveness to her husband, in spite of her education, creative talent and reasoning ability. The “silence” in this novel is actually an articulation of self realisation of the lost identity of a woman waiting to be treated as a human. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel analyses her status in the family and discovers that neither as a child in her parents’ home nor after marriage she enjoys true recognition of her status which she deserves. At both places, she longs for her identity and her own independent recognition as a member of the family, but she is disappointed miserably at both points. She is compelled for the role of a submissive daughter, wife and mother by patriarchal society. In male dominant society, even daughter is
not considered as a part of her own family, as parents consider her final destination is in her husband’s house, whereas in her husband’s house she is usually alienated. But she tolerates the underestimation and suppression silently. This silence in the novel is a symbol of loss of identity not only of Jaya, but also of both, Mohan’s mother and sister, Vimala who suffer physically and psychologically and die silently. Similar identity crisis is seen in the characters of Jeeja, Tara and Nayana in the novel who belong to the lower stratum of society.

Shashi Deshpande does not blame males altogether for suppression and identity crisis of women. She portrays a picture of supporting males like Jaya’s father and her neighbour, Kamat who encourage her to create her identity. Thus, the novelist has a balanced opinion about the contemporary society.

The novel very truly states that, though at the outset the patriarchal set up is responsible for women’s miserable condition in the Indian society, it is half truth, for this responsibility also lies with the victims who refuse to raise a voice and achieve the goal.

Next novel for the research, ‘Moving On’ also presents women characters that struggle for their identity. Along with Manjari, Shashi Deshpande also depicts the characters like Mai and Kamala who look for their own independent identity.

The protagonist, Manjari’s struggle for self identity is very stirring. Ignored by her parents, she finds her identity in the spell of Shyam’s love. But it is rejected by her parents. Even after disapproval, she insists to get married to Shyam. After marriage, she always longs to live with her family and expects that her family should accept her husband as a part of the family. But it never happens. In the struggle of existence of her married life and intricacies in relations, she loses her husband and discards shelter of her parents. Living a life of young widow, she fights against all odds and evils in society and leads life on her own conditions. On the crossroad of her life, understanding the desire of her children to have a family, she accepts the marriage proposal by her cousin and childhood friend, Raja and thus moves on.

In this way, Shashi Deshpande eliminates the misapprehension that Indian woman’s identity rests on her relationship. Through the portrayal of Manjari’s character she presents the image of a fighter woman who creates her own identity even when all her relationships fall apart and asserts that Indian woman can create her identity beyond relationships.

Thus, Deshpande’s novels are concerned with a woman’s quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonists’ place in
it. Deshpande’s women undertake an arduous journey to discover self and in the course of their journey, they encounter the contingencies and vicissitudes of life. They move from a state of passive acceptance to active assertion.

Chapter – III: Identity Crisis in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur

This chapter expresses the female identity existing in the novels of Manju Kapur, selected for research namely ‘Difficult Daughters’, ‘The Married Woman’ and ‘Home’.

Manju Kapur is a post-colonial writer who deals with the inner self of women and their struggle for the quest of their self identity and various problems they come across during the journey of their life. She is a representative writer who reveals the post colonial feminine world which is teemed with innumerable and indefinable hardships, barricading them to go ahead in male dominant society.

Her protagonists are women blessed with brilliant faculty of mind and delicate emotional temperament. They are consistently trapped in the whirlpool of thoughts and feelings in search of their identity. They fight and challenge for equal status of women in patriarchal society. Since they reject the traditional concept of marginalisation of women in dominant society, they always experience recurring hurdles in their life.

Her first novel that the researcher takes under the preview of critical analysis and exploration is ‘Difficult Daughters’. The novel is set up against the backdrop of Second World War, Indian freedom struggle and partition of India and Pakistan. It highlights multiple issues like freedom struggle of India, traditional role of women, their self discovery in patriarchal society, women’s education as well as love, marriage, jealousy, degradation of value system in modern society, gender discrimination, women’s rights and their struggle for identity. The protagonist, Virmati Similarly, her mother, Kasturi, her aunt, Lajwanti, Her husband’s first wife, Ganga, her friend, Swarnalata, her daughter, Ida consistently strive for self identity.

It is quite interesting that in the odyssey of quest for identity, Manju Kapur’s protagonists are in search of varied ways to spell out their angst against oncoming practices perpetuated in male dominated social milieu. The protagonist, Astha, of her next novel ‘The Married Woman’ is a rebel just like Virmati, but her struggle makes her to tread quite unusual path of lesbianism which is socially not accepted yet.
It is a story of quest for self identity of the protagonist of the novel, Astha who is an educated woman of upper middle class, working in Delhi. Manju Kapur, through this novel, explores many complex issues such as suppression of women in patriarchal society, conflicts between traditional Indian values and changing norms of post modern society, communal disharmony about the Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid issue and their impacts on political and social reasoning of the community. As the title suggests, Astha, the protagonist is a representative of all married women who are confronted with innumerable problems in their lives as daughters-in-law, wives and mothers.

Asthã is a simple middle class girl who is the only daughter of her parents and who loves drawing and is also a literary writer. From her childhood, Astha’s life is controlled by her mother, who has always imposed her rigid decisions on her daughter. Like a typical mother, she spends all her time in moulding Astha as an ideal wife, daughter-in-law and a good mother.

Asthã’s quest for identity begins after her marriage with Hemant. After birth of her two children, she decides to utilise her time in teaching in a school. In a drama workshop in her school, she meets Aijaz, a social activist and history professor who helps her in rediscovering her confident self. After his unexpected, brutal death in communal violence, she meets his wife, Pipeelika and their lesbian relationship recharges Astha’s life and hones her talent as a painter.

However, in her next novel, ‘Home’, the protagonist, Nisha tries to search her identity remaining in the boundary of domestic values and traditions cherished by her family. The novel also portrays the power politics in a joint family and quest for identity of the female characters in different situations.

In this novel many women characters like Sunita, Sona, Rupa, Sushila and Puja strive for their identity in different situations. For instance, Nisha, the protagonist who rebels against the old family system to assert herself roles which she is not supposed to play, even never crossing the boundaries of morality and family values.

Nisha represents Indian middle class which gives importance to the family, traditions, and values. She strives for converting her love with Suresh into bond of marriage. But her family discards it on a futile ground of lower caste of the boy. She is compelled to be confined in the house. When she frequently insists to work, she is reminded about the convention of her
family where women are restricted to go out for work. After her complaints about boring routine, she is allowed to work as a teacher. She tells her father about her dissatisfaction with the work and wishes to be a fashion designer. She is successful in making her mark. However, the bond of marriage restricts her from continuation of her work. Not only Nisha but her mother, Sona, her aunt, Rupa are in quest of their identities despite multiple barriers coming in the way. The female characters relentlessly struggle in search of their self-identity and yet give importance to familial values.

Manju Kapur is a dynamic writer who represents postcolonial world of women who are realistic rather than romantic. The protagonists of her novel struggle for their identity. They tread uncommon paths to create their own status in family as well as society. They struggle for their survival in the patriarchal society. Although they are educated, they do not cross their limits laid down on them by their families. They try to explore their status and rebel against the suppression of women in male dominant society that delimits identity of women in the four walls. Manju Kapur with her visionary talent creates a perfect mirror image of the present society which reflects the constant dilemma of the modern woman to make choice between tradition and modernity. Her creative talent has placed her at a high pedestal among the postcolonial Indian women writers.

Chapter-IV: Comparison and Contrast between Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur’s Novels Selected for the Study

This chapter comprises the comparison and contrast between the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. It focuses on the similarity between these two female writers display in respect of their ideology towards female characters and yet they differ from each other in many ways. Though these writers are contemporary and telescope the Indian sensibility, they are bound to have some differences regarding the literary perception and response to situations they are confronted with in their life. However, the fact cannot be denied that they also share similarity in a number of aspects with regard to life and society despite their different cultural, social and academic backgrounds.

Their writing style, plot construction, narrative technique, characterisation and language are the unique features of their novels where they prove to be notable and representative writers of contemporary Indian Writing in English. They are successful in bringing out the present Indian social scenario and female psyche. Both of them write about the enclosed domestic space and women’s awareness. They portray different types of female characters and their
diverse minds that relentlessly search their self-identity, rather than portrayal of traditional self-sacrificing, submissive women. Their female characters deal with issues like exploitation of women in family and society, sharp distinction between status of male and female, establishing self-identity by opposing imbalanced conventions in patriarchal system.

The female characters portrayed by these writers are middle class educated women who are trapped in very common patriarchal situations, yet they try to find a way out to accomplish their unfulfilled aspirations and ambitions without crossing the boundaries of domestic relationships and social conventions. Another important issue discussed in their novels is insistence of older women characters to remain in restricted domestic conditions, whenever a modern protagonists rebel against Patriarchal constraints. Thus, the image of women in their fiction has undergone a change.

As the writers of post-modern generation, they reveal many similarities and differences in their writing. As far as similarities are concerned, both of them deal with estranged mother – daughter relationship, revolt of protagonists with family for love, creative talent of female characters, problem of childlessness, supportive role of father and problem of childlessness. But it is very interesting to note that despite similarities, they reveal their own style of writing with universal appeal which makes them distinguished writers of their age. They are different in context to background which includes setting and linguistic variations, family structure. Shashi Deshpande prominently tackles social issues like rape, corruption, life of young widows, cruelty of property mongers, glimpses of underworld, oppression by drunkard husbands whereas Manju Kapur’s emphasis is on historical issues like independence of India, trauma of partition, Ramjanama Bhumi- Babri Masjid issue, communal violence.

Chapter – V: Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher puts down the findings of the study based on the critical analysis of the preceding chapters.

Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur are the eminent and most prolific Indian novelists writing in English who have been consciously exploring women related issues. The women characters in their novels are realistic and rebel. They constantly struggle for self expression and self identity fighting against all odds. Even if they are educated and confident, their right as equal human being is usually ignored or denied. They try to fulfil their traditional roles as daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law and mother. However, they persistently expect the
patriarchal society to motivate them for using their potential. The select novels unveil that identity crisis is very common yet serious issue in Indian social scenario. It needs urgent and serious attention, as it indicates imbalanced gender status in the demographic aspect of society. The protagonists in these novels like Urm, Jaya, Manjari, Virmati, Nisha and Astha are educated women who aspire for their esteem and identity in spite of many barriers in their way to destination. These two versatile novelists have revealed the woman’s struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity and the multiple levels of oppression, they have to bear from the patriarchal society. The researcher has focused on the various aspects of patriarchal norms leading to oppression and identity crisis of women. These novels can be further investigated in the light of narrative techniques, sociolinguistic aspect and stylistic and pragmatic analysis.
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