

Women's Marginalization in Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's Selected Novels: A comparative study

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Abstract

Marginalization is the feeling of weakness and exclusion felt by a group as a result of an unequal distribution of influence over society's "resources and power structures." Feminism claims that women are marginalized as a result of society's patriarchal framework. When a person is cornered, alienated, and pushed to the margins of society, marginalization occurs. It's a methodical procedure, a kind of conspiracy weaved like a web, with the underlying traits of dominance and subordination always driving the woman into submission. However, feminist ideology promotes political, economic, and social equality. Even after harping on these equal rights, many feminists have recently realized that they are insufficient to free women from sexual and societal oppression.

Keywords: *marginalization, Oppressed, patriarchal, voice, highlights.*

Aim of this paper:

This study is based on Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's selected writings. They analyse the lives of women who live and suffer under the repressive mechanism of a closed society in their writings. In their writings, the characters yearn to be self-sufficient and to live lives of their own. In her novels *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Women*, Manju Kapur depicts women's academic deprivation, economic expression, home dominance, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and lack of personal freedom. She has also successfully and deftly brought to light new topics such as dilution in relationships, pre-marital and extra-marital encounters, man-woman relationships, fears, oppression, and suppression encountered in and beyond their homes through her fiction. This research is based on selected publications by Manju Kapur and Anita Nair. In their articles, they examine the lives of women who live and suffer under the repressive mechanisms of a closed society. The characters in these stories aspire to be self-sufficient and live their own lives. Manju Kapur addresses women's scholastic deprivation, economic expression, home dominance, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and lack of personal freedom in her works *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Women*. Through her work, she has successfully and deftly brought to light new subjects such as dilution in relationships, premarital and extramarital affairs, man-woman relationships, fears, oppression, and suppression experienced in and outside their families.

The term "marginalization" carries a lot of negative connotations. These are persons who have been robbed of socio-economic prospects and have become victims of the masculine chauvinistic web, as well as social, cultural, and political isolation. Being marginalized is being cut off from the rest of society, having to live on the outskirts and margins of society, and unable to take centre stage in any aspect of normal human life. They want to be recognized as distinct but equal individuals. Marginalized people do not have complete control over their lives and do not have access to all of society's resources. As a result, the concept of marginalization is relatively new in modern literary practice. It is a method of studying literature that lends identity and emphasizes the voices of marginalized individuals in society. In today's culture, marginalized persons are denied their human rights on social, political, economic, and legal levels.

If you go back far enough in history, women have always been regarded the less fortunate members of society in a male-dominated culture. To add insult to injury, women's marginalization in India's patriarchal society remains tragically unchecked today. All of these writings are harrowing accounts of marginalized women's battle to find their identity and appropriate position in a hostile society, despite alienation, subjugation, and, in some cases, outright oppression. Needless to say, injustice, misery, and suffering are all too typical in the lives of marginalized women.

Using this as a starting point, the current research work looks at how women are marginalized in Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's writings. In reality, their writings delineated the concept of marginalized women and their perspectives with astonishing elegance and unwavering power. They've used marginalization as a literary strategy to expose the previously untold afflictions of society's peripheries, particularly women.

Manju Kapur's writings highlight the lives of women who live and suffer under the oppressive mechanisms of a closed society. Protagonists foster the drive to be self-sufficient and live their own lives. They want to take on tasks that aren't limited to their husbands and children. They are aggressive, loud, determined, and action-oriented, rather than silent rebels. They transcend one patriarchal threshold only to be stuck in another, where their free spirits are restrained and all they can do is adjust, compromise, and adapt. Women were not meant to speak out for their rights, oppose injustice, or question established beliefs, practices, rituals, or superstitions. They must only exist in the patriarchal system, surrendering and subordinating to it. Women must be obedient, quiet, submissive, and passive, refusing to assert any of their rights as women or human beings. Female protagonists in Manju Kapur are generally educated, aspirational, or hopeful women trapped within the confines of a traditional society. Their education encourages them to think independently, which causes bias and intolerance in their families and society. Tradition and modernity are at odds with them.

The sentiments of women and their self-introspections are well-represented in ManjuKapur's works. Both Virmati and Astha in "Difficult Daughters" and "A Married Women" have been exploited, victimized, and marginalized by society. Difficult Daughters is the narrative of a battle for independence. Virmati battles for the freedom to live her life on her own terms, as India fights for independence from the British Raj. She, like so many other Indian girls, wants to choose what she wants to study and where she wants to study it, as well as who she wants to marry and when. In the end, it looks like she accomplished everything, but it is no longer significant. She loses a piece of herself in the midst of the conflict. Virmati, the key heroine in the novel Difficult Daughters, defies tradition in her search for identity. She is driven by an inner desire to be loved as a person rather than a responsible daughter. She is disliked by her husband and shunned by her own family. Her mother even beats her whenever She returns to her first home to meet her relatives. She is not allowed into the kitchen or to speak with the family members by her step-wife. When Virmati learns of the Professor's wife's pregnancy, she realizes the futility of her illicit love.

In Amritsar, Virmati's marriage to the Professor turns out to be a tragedy. The Professor makes use of Virmati. He has the best of both worlds and is not present even during the most critical period of her pregnancy, when she is aborted. Her mother's marginalized existence and wretched condition inspires her to protest against a system that prevents women from considering options other than being a wife. Virmati has been taught and persuaded to believe that marriage is a woman's final fate. When Virmati saw Shakuntala ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's guidance, and buy anything she wanted, she realised there were other options.

It merely supplies Virmati with the much-needed motivation to pursue new alternatives for her existence. These beliefs motivate Virmati to refuse to accept, if not fully reject, the conventional Indian way of life for women, as typified by her mother, who is relegated to the status of a child-producing machine, and the heaviness in her tummy had begun for the twelfth time. Morning and evening nausea, bile in her throat when eating, clumps of hair falling out, and giddiness when she awoke unexpectedly (DD.7). Instead of considering other options and ways to escape her current miserable existence, Kasturi, Virmati's mother, seeks solace only in prayer. She turned to God, who is so beautiful with his gifts, and prayed fervently.

"I begged fervently to God, who is so wonderful with his gifts, for the miracle of a miscarriage" (DD.7). The narrator begins the tale by describing Kasturi's terrible and pitiful situation. She appears powerless in the face of the societal situation. The acknowledged goal of her existence, as well as the existence of all women in India at this level of development, is to be a female alone. Her job is to raise children and care for the family. Her only option is

to stay inside the threshold. What is the need for a work, she argues, because of the survival of certain ideals continually imposed on women? The shaan of a woman is in her home” (DD.13.). Virmati, on the other hand, is inspired when she observes Shakantula, her cousin, sipping the “wine of freedom.” She has a secret ambition to be self-sufficient and live a life of her own. She desired a life that was more than just taking care of her spouse and procreating. Her mother was the pinnacle of traditional women in patriarchal system, so she understood she needed to explore outside the family if she wanted to be free. Who thought of education as a negative force? When Virmati expressed an interest in studying, Kasturi replied by saying, ‘Leave your studies if they are going to make you irritable with your family.’ You’re overlooking the most important factor.’

In her novel *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur uses writing as a form of protest, a way of mapping from the perspective of a woman. In the personal allegory of a bad marriage, the work is a real confession of a lady about her personality cult. She has expressed the Indian male perspective of woman as a holy cow in a genuine manner. As a married lady, Astha, the heroine, grows into a devoted wife and mother. Her spouse forces her to act as “mother and father” to her children. This denies her self-fulfillment and leads to the breakdown of the marriage institution. Her dissatisfaction leads to rebellion and restlessness. Her worry, discomfort, loneliness, and isolation make it difficult for her to speak up.

She is suffocated by her family’s rising needs and “constantly adjusting to everyone’s wants.” (227 MW) Astha sees a married woman’s role in the household as that of an unpaid servant or a slave, and believes that divorce would be the end of her Indian status in terms of social and economic status. She believes that a married woman must possess “a willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet during the day, and an obedient mouth” (MW 231). She considers marriage a bad decision since it exposes her to a lot of fury, anguish, and indecision. Between duty and responsibility, religion and fact, public ethos and personal ethics, she is torn.

She became emotionally and physically connected to Rohan when she reached the prime of her youth in her college years. He was the physical embodiment of her fantasies for her. However, Astha was little more than a pleasure-seeking commodity for Rohan, and their relationship ended when Rohan relocated to Oxford for further studies. Daughter mother, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with fulfilling a crucial parental responsibility: getting her married. In their quest for a groom, Astha’s family settles on Hemant, a well-to-do bureaucrat. Astha’s married bliss is about to come to an end, and she begins to feel confined and bored.

To find her individuality, Astha, a married lady, confronts accepted standards. Astha, who was raised in a traditional and protective household, finds herself in the most chaotic circumstances in her life. The majority of Astha’s assertion of identity was shown through her choice of companions. Being with Rohan during her adolescence gave her a taste of independence. Being in a relationship that is overly physically intimate is an outward gesture of defiance of social norms. She tries to express herself through poetry, but they were also scrutinized by Hemant. Hemant brushed aside Astha’s poems, which she used to express her sentiments. Her writing expressed the inner tension that Hemant would not recognize.

Hemant despised Astha’s engagement with man and attempted to manipulate her emotionally in the guise of children and familial obligations. Even her mother-in-law frowned and reminded her that a woman’s place is in the home, not on the streets, and that politics is not a sphere in which a woman should participate. Her mother-in-law gave her a stern look. ‘It is not a woman’s business to worry about such things,’ she stated emphatically (MW186). Astha became more determined as a result of their wickedness. Astha asserts herself by refusing to give in to her husband’s demands and even by gaining financial independence. Most Indian women have no choice but to live with and accept the horrors perpetrated by their husbands since they have no other means of surviving.

Despite her economic independence, Astha is unable to take care of herself. Astha’s money paid for the family’s trip to Goa, and it was Hemant’s decision to squander it on plane tickets. When Astha asks for a certain box on the same trip, she is rejected, and she retaliates by asking, “I also earn; can’t I buy a box if I want, even if it’s a little overpriced?” Hemant sneered. ‘What you earn is truly substantial, and it will pay for this vacation,’ says the narrator (MW 165). Hemant’s satirical tone reflects his negative attitude about Astha’s economic independence, which he views in a disparaging light until Astha’s paintings change his mind. This demonstrates how money alters people’s perspectives. The amount of money you earn determines your family’s position and serves as a social case identifier. Astha asserts herself by requesting a separate painting place; this act defines her identity. Her want is regarded as

extravagance rather than a necessity. Having one's own place is unquestionably the most significant declaration in the spatial sense. Hemant even mentions that the amount of space she has would make many women envious.

Astha's gradual realization of her differences with her husband, her transformation from gentle and hopeful bride to battered wife, and her meeting with Peeplika reveal the other side of women in their "familiar agony" (MW 188). To find her identity, Astha questions established norms. She had lived a life of sacrifice and adjustments, but it had failed. She had wished for a husband who would value her, but as a mature woman, she expected more from herself than from others. She gains confidence as she continues to paint.

Ladies Coupé is a novel by Anita Nair concerning female identity and space. Anita Nair's novel Ladies Coupe is about the interaction between men and women, marriage and divorce, social and cultural concerns, and psychological issues. Ladies Coupe, the characters created by Anita Nair, have their own anguish and sorrows, but they overcome them and live their own lives in their society. The novel follows the lives of six women who drive in a Ladies coupe, each of whom describes her life to Akhila, the protagonist, who is on a quest to discover what she truly desires in life. When her father died, Akhila became the scapegoat for her family, as she assumed full responsibility for her mother and siblings. Despite the fact that she is a source of money. Despite the fact that she is a source of income, she does not always have social freedom. She is forty-five years old and her background dictates that she be a spinster. She is lonely without a companion and is exploited by her sister. The narrative follows Akhila's memories, which are intertwined with the stories of fellow passengers and their empathy for one another. They use the Coupe as a platform to express themselves and support one another. Sisterhood emerges unexpectedly among women of many castes, classes, and ages. Marikolanthu's narrative is one of a kind, revealing the numerous levels of exploitation she has endured throughout her life as a woman, minor, Dalit, and destitute. Here, we encounter women who have been enslaved throughout their lives by the masculine world's expectations. Margaret Shanti, a well-educated chemistry teacher whose abusive husband oppresses her, finds a seat in the Ladies Coupe. In her married life, she was like ice water. He was a dictator at home and at school, severely punishing latecomers. He wouldn't let her have long hair. It has to be severed. He wouldn't let her work on her doctorate. He asked her to terminate her first pregnancy. But she devises a plan to teach this cruel husband a lesson by turning him into an obese guy. Then he wouldn't stand in the way of her having a child. The stories in this book showcase some of their most personal moments. In this work, the female narrators discover themselves as they recount their stories. Through these narrations, Anita Nair demonstrates how women are marginalized in a male-dominated environment. Her works depict the effects of patriarchy on women's lives. She explains how, in the name of religion and societal conventions, women are exploited and mistreated.

In most households, the man is the head of household; the woman is a counsellor or a minister who aids or assists, but not the dictator. Due to her social and cultural anxieties, a lady finds life less promising and perplexing outside of her home. When women leave their confinements, they must strive to erase the unfavourable image of women that has already been imprinted on men and women's brains. Women are viewed as angels and gods in some ways. In other ways, women are viewed as slaves who are willing to work for a man's privileges and comfort.

Margaret Shanti is one of the women coupe's fellow passengers. Margaret's narrative is about a lady who develops her own tactics to achieve her goals. Ebenezer Paulraj, Margaret's husband, is a model of male dominance. Margaret is manipulated into a position of submissive silence, as if she were an overlooked and ordinary young lady. A girl with a stellar academic record and a warm, engaging demeanour is relegated to the status of average. His covert harshness towards the students at his school is reproduced with his wife. He was once enamoured by Margaret's girlish qualities. Even at their first meeting, it was clear. When she excitedly revealed her pregnancy, she wanted to keep her girlish charm. She eventually takes her life into her own hands after growing tired of her submissiveness at home. She gathers her buried strength and sends the ball to his court with incredible willpower. She takes her retribution by using the same strategies that her husband uses to govern her, which she learned from his incessant playing of games to get his things done. Margaret has struggled with physical, emotional, and spiritual issues all of her life. She continues to develop until she reaches a pleasant and calm condition. Margaret considers her marriage to Ebenezer Paulraj to be a fairy tale. Ebenezer Paulraj adores Margaret Shanti with all his heart, but he isn't ready to embrace her unique preferences.

“I’ve always been looked after as a woman. My father and brothers came first, followed by my husband. When my spouse passes away, my son will be ready to pick up where his father left off.

Women like myself are prone to becoming frail.” Ladies Coupe 22). Anita Nair masterfully employs the story of Marikolanthu to comment on the sexual exploitation of Indian women from rural backgrounds, demonstrating a deep psychological insight. Marikolanthu’s account recounts her interactions with males, concluding that most men prey on women’s loneliness, illiteracy, reliance, ignorance, and dissatisfaction. They never hesitate to point the finger at the lady in the end. A patriarchal society tends to establish the notion that a woman’s responsibility to her family comes first. Marikolanthu is humiliated and degraded, resulting in the rejection of her son Muthu. Marikolanthu’s persona exemplifies the physical and mental toll of ignorance. Marikolanthu is from a low-income family. Her mother works as a cook in Chettiar’s house, which belongs to one of the village’s wealthiest families. She has been a victim of social and economic persecution since she was a child. As a result, she loses her schooling. When her mother goes to work, she watches after her house; later, when her mother becomes critically ill, she works at the Chettiar’s house. There, she is tasked with caring for a child of Sujata Akka, Chettiar’s daughter-in-law.

In *Mistress*, Nair has brought to light the topic of marital rape, which is rarely mentioned in public and does not always constitute violence under the law because the perpetrator is the husband. For centuries, women have suffered in secrecy and suffering as victims of male dominance and sexual abuse. Through her novel *Mistress*, Anita Nair depicts how men oppress and subjugate women. Finally, she rejects both Shyam and Chris, releasing herself from the roles of wife and mistress in the process. She provides her baby a maternal identity through maternal care alone, rendering it fatherless, in her decision to split away from both men in her life yet keep her urban baby.

Conclusion: In this work, Manju Kapur and Anita Nair depict the shifting image of women, moving away from conventional depictions of enduring, self-sacrificing women and toward self-assured aggressive and ambitious women who make society aware of their needs and so provide a platform for self-expression. All of the novels deal with the problems of combining middle-class Indian women’s expectations of family loyalty with their aspirations and desire for a life beyond the home.

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