

Women Entrepreneurship

Future Direction and Research Review



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Women Entrepreneurship Future Direction and Research Review

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Content

Sr. No.	Article/Paper & Author	Page No.
01.	A Digital Women Entrepreneurship Management In India Prof. Dr. Thore Shivaji Dattatraya	1
02.	Female Entrepreneurship in India:An Overview Dr. Meena M. Wadgule	5
03.	Women Entrepreneurship in E-commerce Sector in India Dr.Laxminaryan C. Kurputwar	10
04.	An Analytical Study of Women Empowerment in India Dr.Subhash. M. Vadgule	16
05.	Entrepreneurial Thinking and Mind-Sets Among Women in Indian English Literature Dr. Jayant K. Walke	20
06.	Empowering Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development: Bridging the Gender Gap in Economic Growth Dr. Kirti Awasthi Dubey	26
07.	Women Entrepreneurship in India: A Global Perspective Siddika Banu	32
08.	Analysis of MGNREGA's Empowerment of Women in Karnataka Dr. Praveen Kumar S.	38
09.	Sociological Analysis of Marriage and Divorce Dr. Pandit Sambhaji Waghmare	43
10.	The Role of Women Entrepreneurship in Start India Ms Kritika Verma	47
11.	Aspects of Entrepreneurial Thinking and Mindset among Women Dr. Vaibhav Tayade	53
12.	Financial Inclusion & Women Entrepreneurship Dr. Rajesh Bhausahab Lahane	59
13.	Teething Troubles in Women's Flight for Career: Reflections in Manju Kapur's Novels Dr NavitaN Malani	63
14.	Digital Entrepreneurship Dr. Rajendra . L. Kable	67
15.	A Study on the Level of Financial Literacy Among Rural Women with the Refference to Nandgaon Tehsil Priyanka Popatrao Sor	74
16.	Role of Female Entrepreneurs in Changing Society Chinchu Balan	80

Teething Troubles in Women's Flight for Career: Reflections in Manju Kapur's Novels

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur a teacher turned writer has penned six novels so far. From the publication of her debut novel *Difficult Daughter* to the latest arrival *Brothers* her creative genius has shown consistent growth. She portrays the myriad hues of obstacles encountered by women folk in the wake of establishing a career even in the postmodern era in all her half a dozen novels namely *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody* and *Brothers*. The social, economic and political scenario of the contemporary times show its effects on to the workings of her characters. Kapur looks at the everyday on goings around her with a feministic vision. She suggests through the life of her protagonists that gender barriers, economic challenges, legal and regulatory hurdles, work-life integration, overcoming mental barriers etc. are the chief reasons which hinder the professional journey of womankind in our society which needs a serious contemplation. In this chapter the researcher putting forth various aspects which pulls women back many times in their career and prevents them from becoming a successful entrepreneur; aspects which has been woven by Kapur into the fabric of her narratives meticulously.

Keywords: Barrier, career, equality, responsibilities, women

Manju Kapur portrays the myriad hues of obstacles encountered by women folk in the wake of establishing a career even in the series of her discourse namely *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody* and *Brothers*. Kapur is deeply concerned with women's walk in every arena of life. The life of her protagonists mirrors the ground reality of women's life; in India in particular and across the globe in general. Their achievements, challenges, struggles, agonies to gain an identity and to be able to take an independent flight in various courses of life; right from taking education to establishing themselves in career have been prominently focused issues in her novels. Astha's struggle to establish herself as an artist and social worker, the difficulties faced by Nisha while establishing herself as a businesswoman, Tapti's teething troubles while providing financial backing to her family are all the incidents which readers easily relate to. When the readers go through her novels, they actually empathize with women's battle in everyday life for gaining equal status for themselves and bitter experiences they go through during their interchange in human relationships. Kapur underlines the whole range of complications in the women's journey of education and career in her discourse.

Gender Barriers:

Gender barriers still remain strong in Indian society, despite the fact that everything has changed and everyone says that men and women are equal. It is still difficult for women to demonstrate their abilities and receive acknowledgment for their achievements, even in spite of the government's efforts to support women's leadership and empowerment. The two main issues that hinder Indian women's career most frequently are gender inequity and income inequalities. To carry on higher education for a long time, to look for work or launch a business, they still want "permission" from their father, sibling, or spouse. These kinds of barriers keep females from acquiring mastery in the field.

their choice. It also prevents business owners from reaching their full potential. Starting from their education Indian females are kept on a check. Manju Kapur has been depicting the same problem in her narrative *Home*. The protagonist in *Home* Nisha is the woman in the third generation of family. Nisha shows better flair for education and academics as compared to the boys in Banwarilal's family. But her intellectual talent and caliber has no value amongst the typical conventional atmosphere where home is the only place for women. She has to face initial opposition at different levels. Beginning from her mother and women of the family they oppose Nisha's going out and work. Nisha's brothers show less inclinations towards studies as compared to Nisha but being male members they enjoy better prospects in studies and career. Through her example Kapur highlights the same situation occurring commonly in the society. But Nisha is more assertive and knows how to negotiate for her rights amidst the male dominating attitude of family members.

Work-Life Integration:

According to a recent National Family Health Survey (NHFS) report, only 32% of married Indian women aged between 15 and 49 are employed. In most Indian homes, women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children and other family members. Society expects these roles as a woman's obligations that they must play adequately. Manju Kapur has portrayed the chaos which becomes the share of Astha's life in *A Married Woman* when she attempts to go ahead with her artistic inclinations to establish herself as an artist and set a career for herself. Hemant, Astha's American return husband too shirks off his share in household responsibilities and warns Astha to take charge of everything at home efficiently. Hemant prefers to enjoy an air trip to Goa on money gained by sale of Astha's painting but when it comes to share the household duties he has nothing to give in return to Astha. Life of Astha is the replica of so many females who find it very difficult to manage both the fronts if they prefer to become a working woman. Money earned by them is welcomed but the consequent extra responsibilities are not.

Nisha in *Home* is the mouthpiece of so many Indian Young Girls who despite having caliber to carry on their own business have to keep their desires aside so that their other responsibilities can be fulfilled smoothly. Nisha's undaunted spirit and efforts to establish her own identity at par with the male members of her family brings out the cult of new woman in her. She has a knack to become an entrepreneur. She tries her hand at school teaching and then decides to go for a business. She makes her father agree to support her to set an independent boutique. She does very well in her business. Kapur brings forth the fact that Indian woman has a potential to prove herself in the business sector which is considered as a male dominating bastion. Manju Kapur's approach toward making every woman strong in the arena of her choice makes us agree with opinion that

"Feminism is to be used as a socio-cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in enjoyment of all rights – moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic."¹

-R.K.Dhawan

Kapur stresses that Indian woman in the post-colonial scenario gives equal importance to marriage as well as career. They show knack for becoming financially independent. They are ready to move out of four walls of home to prove their worth. Nisha's example in *Home* is the best example what woman can achieve if given an opportunity to give a shape to her dreams in reality. Her clothes enterprise 'Nisha's Creations' get good response in market. Yashpal feels proud of her-

"His daughter was growing, not in the way he had anticipated, but growing. Sometimes it occurred to him that she was more intelligent, methodical, and independent than Raju. Still it was his duty to see that she married. Her fulfillment lay there, no matter how successful her business was."²

(AMW, p.295)

In modern time women are proving themselves in those fields, which have been previously

considered as men's expertise. Nisha too emerges as a successful businesswoman. But Sona is not pleased at this new development in Nisha's life because she is obsessed with the idea of her daughter's marriage twenty four hours a day. Kapur asserts that mother's obsession with the thought of their daughter's marriage all the time is the greatest obstacle in the realization of their dreams, aspirations, and potential to turn up as an individual entity. There is no field where Indian girls haven't proved their worth. They perform as well as their male counterpart. What pulls them back is the strong notion of withholding their potential under the check of patriarchal hegemony. Work- life integration is a challenge which disturbs Nisha and her booming business after marriage. Life of Nisha shows the disturbed atmosphere in working woman's family. Kapur presents realistically when a woman moves out of the home to start a business or for job her priorities and schedules change. Household responsibilities and family commitments may disturb working women's work-life balance, making it challenging for her to go ahead successfully. If there is no family support the situation worsens. Eventually they have to make a final choice, take an ultimate decision. Nisha leaves her business contentedly for the sake of her family life with Arvind and her children.

Kapur showcases life of Rupa in Home who carries a bit progressive outlook. Rupa goes forward to set up a small scale pickle and beverages business rather than just lamenting on the sad aspects of being a childless woman throughout her life. Rupa starts a small business to improve her economic condition. Rupa's mentality shows a bit progressive approach. Her husband Premnath supports her in various ways he can. Slowly and steadily her business achieves a boom and makes her small world a happy one. Kapur doesn't forget to highlight cases like that of Rupa and gives the message to her readers that even small scale business can bring positive approach if the family supports the lady aspiring to set her business.

Economic Challenges:

Although it might sound unfair, massive gender gaps exist in the society when it is the matter of establishing business by females. Gender gaps have been always there but they lay dormant other times and appear clearly when a woman aspires to take up a job or wants to set her feet in the business world. Female business owners in India commonly face economic challenges due to prejudiced mindset in society on every level. They have to face the opposition right from their own home and family members. Astha's helplessness in taking a strong decision regarding her parent's financial investment after death of her father though she is the only heir to her parents makes the readers ponder over the grim situation in the present times. Her mother too trusts her son-in-law better than her own daughter Astha regarding the investment and financial planning. The discourse in Home focuses on economic challenges faced by woman when they aspire to set up their own business. Nisha has to 'borrow' money from her father when she endeavours to go ahead with her boutique, 'Nisha's Creations'. After her wedding when it becomes difficult for her to carry further her business it is taken over by Raju's wife Pooja so that business doesn't go out of the Banwarilal's family. Nisha obviously feels dejected over her stranded situation but she has no alternative and she accepts it as her fate. Story of Nisha touches the heart of the readers profoundly and many women can hear reverberations of their own stories in her sad destiny. In A Married Woman Kapur throws hints over and over again depicting the secondary position of a woman in economic issues.

Mental Barriers:

India is a patriarchal society where men and women have different roles. Women are expected to cook food, raise kids, handle domestic chores, care for older adults, etc. Juggling between professional and family responsibilities is a significant challenge, especially when a woman sets out to build a career. Manju Kapur has given a pictorial representation of the torments and stress a woman undergoes in the wake of managing both the fronts; her household duties and career aspirations. Home and A Married Woman both the narratives resound with such crises encountered by Nisha and Astha respectively. Their life has a larger relevance. There are so many Nishas and Asthas around us always and we see them managing their exhaustive routines and getting frustrated if anything goes wrong both

at workplace and at home. Guilty complex is share they often are gifted with. Hemant Astha's husband asserts his right on everything; on money received by Astha from her parents, on the money earned by her by the sale of her painting but he doesn't like Astha raising questions or expressing opinion about its investment or expenditure. Astha suffers a lot on the account of whole treatment given to her. Manju Kapur presents conflicts in the life of woman between family responsibility and personal aspirations. Nisha the protagonist is the voice of so many Indian girls who despite having capability to shine in academic and career have to compromise on every front just because they are 'the second sex'. 'Adjust', 'Compromise' and 'Adapt' becomes the basic fundamentals for woman to survive in home.

While concluding it can be said that Manju Kapur encourages her readers to think twice about the future prospect of new woman; especially of young girls. She shows the hidden spark in women to excel in different fields besides fulfilling their basic feminine duties. Her protagonists Astha Nisha voices young girls' aspirations for proving their worth in entrepreneurship. Kapur also brings to notice that while the problems faced by women characters are real, modern women are slowly becoming stronger to overcome the challenges and bear adversities with courage. Manju Kapur very efficiently brings forth the contradictions in the ideology and the actual behaviour in society through the life of her protagonists. Kapur strongly suggests that when wives are being referred to as 'better halves', 'daughter in laws' as 'Laxmi' then it is much needed that they are given enough scope as well as assistance so that they soar high and prove their capabilities to the best.

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