Marriage in Indian English Literature: A Comprehensive Exploration Through the Works of Shobha De and Manju Kapur

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Abstract

In the realm of Indian English literature, marriage emerges as a central theme that encapsulates the complexities and nuances of human relationships within the context of societal norms, traditions, and personal aspirations. This research work explores the multifaceted portrayal of marriage as an institution in Indian English literature, with a particular focus on the works of authors Shobha De and Manju Kapur. Marriage, a fundamental societal construct, serves as a rich and complex theme in literary narratives, allowing authors to delve into its intricate dynamics and the transformative impact it has on individuals and relationships. Through the lens of De and Kapur, this work aims to examine the intersection of marriage and literature, shedding light on how these two domains intersect and influence each other within the context of Indian society. Their novels serve as mirrors reflecting the societal norms, cultural shifts, and individual aspirations that intertwine with the institution of marriage.

Keywords: Marriage, Society, Complexities, Compromise, Expectations, Experiences

The concept of marriage is a fundamental social institution that varies across cultures and societies. It typically involves a legally recognized union between individuals, often accompanied by social, religious, or cultural rituals. Marriage signifies a commitment between two individuals to share their lives, support each other emotionally and financially, and work together to achieve common goals.In most societies, marriage involves legal documentation and rights that grant spouses various legal benefits, such as inheritance, property ownership, and tax advantages.

Marriage often carries cultural and social significance, symbolizing the union of families, the continuation of traditions, and the establishment of social ties. Marriage typically involves a deep emotional connection between partners, often rooted in love, affection, and companionship.Married couples often have defined roles and responsibilities within the household, which can vary based on cultural norms and individual preferences. Historically, one of the primary purposes of marriage has been procreation and the raising of children within a stable family unit.

Marriage is a prominent theme in Indian literary works written in English, highlighting its significance as a cultural institution.In Indian literature, marriage holds a vital position due to its role in connecting individuals, with some viewing it as a sacred union.Marriage symbolizes a significant life change for both men and women, often seen as a religious sacrament binding two individuals permanently.Indian authors have extensively delved into the cultural and societal impacts of marriage, the hurdles faced by couples., and the diverse ways in which it influences individuals and their families.

Smita Narula in "Marriage and Family in India," writes in the similar vein, "Marriage is considered the most important decision in an individual's life in India. It is seen as a sacred bond that is not only between two individuals but between two families. The expectations and pressures placed on individuals in India to marry and marry well are enormous" (205).

In English-language writings originating from India, authors have examined the institution of marriage from historical as well as contemporary angles.Within traditional Indian families, there was often a practice of familial involvement in the marriage process, aimed at ensuring that their offspring entered into a socially and economically suitable union.This tradition persists in some regions of India, and numerous Indian writers have tackled the tensions and conflicts that may arise in prearranged marriages.Literature serves as a powerful medium to examine the characteristics, challenges, and evolving nature of marriage in Indian society.

In R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, we follow the story of a young woman compelled into an arranged marriage against her will by her parents. Meanwhile, in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, we witness the challenges faced by a humble labourer who marries the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Both narratives are set in early twentieth-century India. Numerous pieces of Indian literature illustrate transition, such as Chetan Bhagat's *Two States*, which explores the cultural

conflicts that arise when a Punjabi young man and a Tamil young woman, deeply in love, decide to marry.

The novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy explores the breakdown of a marriage involving individuals from different castes. In contrast, *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai portrays the strains between siblings as they grapple with their personal histories and relationships. Moreover, select works of Indian literature in English have delved into the transformative influence of marriage on individuals' personal development. Numerous Indian authors have illuminated how people evolve and change as a direct consequence of their relationships, a significant aspect given that marriage is often seen as a defining life event. For example, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* follows the journey of a young man as he seeks his identity in the face of familial expectations, while Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* examines how marriage shapes the life of a woman wrestling with issues of self-worth and independence.

Indian literature composed in English delve into the changing aspects of marriage within contemporary Indian society.The increasing prevalence of individualism and globalization has led to a growing trend among young Indians, where they are choosing to forgo the conventional custom of arranged marriages in favour of forming their own romantic relationships.Within Indian literature, marriage has been explored as a possible arena for conflicts to unfold.The complexities within relationships, coupled with the variations among individuals, can give rise to disagreements and miscommunications that threaten the stability of marriages.Many Indian writers have portrayed the conflicts that couples may encounter and have depicted how these disputes can impact not only the immediate family but also the broader community. Deepak Chopra in "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams", claims,"In India, marriage is not just the union of two individuals, but also the union of two families" (56). Marriage and literature are intertwined in Indian English literature as authors use storytelling to delve into the intricacies of marital life.

Shobha De is a prominent and influential figure in the world of Indian literature, journalism, and social commentary. Known for her fearless and candid writing, she has made a significant impact on the literary landscape of India. De's works, spanning across novels, columns, and essays, have often pushed the boundaries of societal norms, challenging traditional conventions with a sharp and unapologetic pen. Her ability to tackle contemporary issues with wit, wisdom, and a

unique perspective has earned her a dedicated readership and a place of distinction in the realm of Indian writing.

In the novel *Starry Nights* (1989), Shobha De portrays the life of an ambitious woman, Rozy, who navigates her way through love and marriage in the glamorous world of Bollywood. The novel delves into the complexities of Rozy's marriage, where her husband's infidelity challenges her sense of commitment and self-worth. Through Rozy's character, De explores the themes of betrayal and marital discord, shedding light on the challenges faced by women in the entertainment industry.

De in *Second Thoughts* (1984), follows the life of Maya, a woman who faces societal expectations and marital pressures. Through Maya's experiences, Shobha De highlights the tension between individual desires and societal norms in the context of marriage. The novel portrays Maya's journey as she grapples with personal choices and strives for independence within the confines of a traditional marriage.

Sarah Jones in her work *Understanding Marriage Conflict*, argues that "Marriage conflict is a common phenomenon that arise due to differences in personality, communication styles, and expectations from the relationship" (24).

In her work *Strange Obsession* (1992), Shobha De explores the theme of infatuation within the context of marriage. The protagonist, Meenakshi, finds herself entangled in an extramarital affair that challenges her commitment to her husband. De's narrative delves into the complexities of desire and the consequences of forbidden love within the institution of marriage.

These textual examples from Shobha De's novels demonstrate how she uses storytelling to examine the concept of marriage in modern Indian society. Her characters navigate love, commitment, infidelity, and societal expectations, providing readers with a contemporary perspective on the complexities of marital relationships. Through literature, Shobha De invites readers to reflect on the evolving dynamics of marriage and the intricate web of emotions and choices that define it.

In Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*, marriage is portrayed as a 'transactional relationship,' where a spouse's economic and social status significantly influences the success or failure of the partnership. This concept is central to De's perspective on marriage. The novel

explores the challenges that women in Indian society encounter, including cultural pressures and limitations on their independence. It emphasizes the societal expectations placed on female characters to conform to established norms. De's narrative suggests that marriage is not primarily driven by love but by convenience, aiming to find a partner who seamlessly fits into one's life, as expressed in the quote, "Marriage is not about love, it's about convenience. It's about finding someone who will fit into your life and make it easier" (De 67).

The writer dives into the darker aspects of urban life and the experiences of its inhabitants. Through the protagonist Karuna and her circle of acquaintances, De provides a contemplative view of the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of modern Indian cities. What stands out in this work of art is its portrayal of the opulent and privileged lives. While De's characters may appear beautiful and accomplished on the surface, they are not devoid of flaws and challenges. The author utilizes characters like Karuna and her friends as a lens through which to examine the moral and ethical quandaries faced by individuals living in a culture of extravagance and decadence.

Manju Kapur is a renowned Indian author whose literary contributions have left an indelible mark on the landscape of contemporary Indian literature. Born on May 27, 1948, in Amritsar, India, Kapur's literary journey has been characterized by her insightful exploration of the intricacies of human relationships, particularly within the context of marriage, family, and societal norms. Her works have earned critical acclaim for their candid examination of these themes, offering readers a window into the evolving dynamics of Indian society. Kapur's writing career is distinguished by her ability to capture the nuances of everyday life and the complex interplay of tradition and modernity in India. Through her novels, she delves into the lives of her characters, revealing their dreams, desires, and dilemmas with remarkable empathy and depth. Her storytelling is characterized by its engaging narratives, finely drawn characters, and a keen eye for social and cultural commentary. Over the years, Manju Kapur has produced a body of work that resonates with readers not only in India but also internationally. Her novels often revolve around the theme of marriage, shedding light on the various dimensions of this institution in the context of Indian society. Kapur's exploration of arranged marriages, love marriages, familial expectations, and personal desires within the framework of marriage has garnered widespread acclaim for its realism and authenticity.She has earned a reputation as a sensitive and thought-provoking storyteller, capable of

addressing contemporary issues with grace and insight. Kapur's contributions to Indian literature have not only earned her literary awards and accolades but have also sparked meaningful conversations about the changing dynamics of family, marriage, and gender roles in India.

Manju Kapur in her novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998), introduces us to Virmati, a young woman who defies societal norms by engaging in an illicit love affair with Professor Harish. This rebellion against the conventional expectations of arranged marriages prevalent in her Punjabi family and society exemplifies Kapur's exploration of love's transformative power in the face of tradition. Virmati's difficult choices and the ensuing consequences offer a poignant example of the clash between personal desires and societal expectations within the institution of marriage.

In *A Married Woman* (2002), Kapur takes a bold step by narrating the story of Astha, a married woman who embarks on a passionate relationship with the artist Aijaz. Astha's journey becomes a powerful representation of the struggle to balance individual desires with familial and societal responsibilities. Her infidelity challenges the traditional concept of marital fidelity, inviting readers to question the boundaries of commitment and the price one pays for pursuing personal happiness.

Home (2006) presents another facet of Kapur's exploration of marriage. The novel follows Nisha, a woman married to a man settled in Canada. Nisha's story delves into the complexities of long-distance relationships, cultural clashes, and the impact of geographical separation on marital bonds. Through Nisha's experiences, Kapur underscores how modern marriages often transcend geographical borders, necessitating adaptation and compromise in the face of distance and cultural diversity.

The Immigrant (2008) continues Kapur's exploration of the theme of marriage within the immigrant experience. The novel centres around Nina, an immigrant in Canada who grapples with the challenges of an arranged marriage and her efforts to assimilate into a new culture while preserving her Indian identity. Kapur adeptly portrays the tension between tradition and assimilation that many immigrant-couples face, making *The Immigrant* an illustrative example of the impact of cultural shifts on marital dynamics.

Custody (2011) marks another significant work by Kapur. This novel delves into the tumultuous divorce of Raman and Shagun, examining themes of custody battles, infidelity, and the

emotional toll of divorce on families. Kapur's storytelling exposes the vulnerability of marital relationships and the profound effects of marital dissolution on children and parents alike. *Custody* offers a sobering portrayal of the harsh realities of modern marriages, where personal and familial interests often collide, leading to painful decisions and consequences.

In each of these novels, the writer masterfully weaves intricate narratives that illuminate the diverse facets of marriage in Indian society. She does not shy away from portraying the conflicts, dilemmas, and transformations that occur within the realm of marital relationships. Kapur's storytelling is marked by its sensitivity to the complex interplay of tradition and modernity, love and duty, personal desires and societal expectations.

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