

An Overview of Short Stories of Manju Kapur

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Manju Kapur is the contemporary popular writer in English literature. She entered in writing fiction at the end of the 20th century, on the eve of the 21st century. She is a feminist writer who writes with experience and honesty. She has created women centric literature and explored different aspects of women's issues.

Manju Kapur is known for her portraits of her female characters that are bold and struggling for autonomy and freedom. She has created an image of 'New Women' through her novels.

Manju Kapur's five novels have become much popular. Her novels have won prestigious awards and prizes and were nominated for different awards. Her 'Custody' has become much popular through T.V. serials in different languages in India. Her novels have got international fame and are translated in Indian as well as foreign languages like Spinach, Italian, German, Dutch, Greek, Portuguese and Hebrew etc. She is often compared with the classic British writer Jane Austen.

Though, Manju Kapur is greatly known for her novels, she has worked in different forms of literature like editing, essays, articles, poems and short stories.

Short Stories:-

Manju Kapur has written four short stories which are (i) The Necklace,(ii) Those were Roses and That Were Her Eyes, (iii) Chocolate and (iv) In The Backwaters.

All her short stories show the different moods and present different kinds of theme. Her style of narrating the story is also different in different stories. She uses few words to say the meaningful matter. She sometimes deals with very private, sensitive and more open feelings and emotions and man-woman relations, but uses very controlled and cultured language. Her stories include curiosity, drama, psychology, romance, philosophy, love, passion, traditions, humor, satire, feminism and much more.

Here Manju Kapur's four short stories are reviewed.

The Necklace:-

It is not a story of any particular person or any particular event, but it is an unique tale of some incidents of communal clashes and mob acts and reacts arise due to the theft of a necklace of Lady Blake, the Governor's wife in Calcutta during British rule in 1944. The Necklace has only significance that was the ornament of a British lady who was Governor's wife. The theft of necklace is only a cause of arising the events in the story.

The story starts with a dramatic scene. In the residential wing of Government house a door burst open and a woman emerged, pale and frantic with disheveled hair, bulging eyes, her bosom heaving with huge undulating heaves.

She shrieked, "It's gone!"

The lower staff asked what has gone.

She speaks, her necklace.

The necklace was a wedding present to the lady by her husband, George who is now Governor at Culcutta (in 1944).

It was wartime, the Second World War was on its final stage and the talks of self (Indian) rule were in the air. Governor has to find the necklace but with patience.

Direct actions were minimum and indirect methods were applied. Rewards were offered. Hindus were told that the authority has information about a thief who is a Muslim and Muslims were told vice versa. Prantiya elections were ached so Muslim League and Congress party were in the support of communal groups. Hindu and Muslim groups were in tense and each side sacred books were torn and desecrated. Stones, sticks and soda waters were thrown, people were stabbed, blood flew and women were raped.

Government tried balance by arresting equal numbers from both the communities. The committee was set up to investigate the cause of disturbance and to recommend solutions. Sir George Black was recalled to London to give a report on communal disturbance, as he was the Governor who may know the real situation!

The story focuses on the idiot mobs of Indians who fight for useless reasons and motivated by irrational hearsays.

Those were Roses and that were Her Eyes:-

The story is about illusionary love affection, fantasy of romance and a practical way to come out of sadness and impractical desire of an aged man who felt ill.

A lady friend of 57 year old man visits him to wish a recovery from his illness and presents him red roses. It was just a formal visit to perform the duty of friendship. The event of the lady's visit and presenting the roses creates fantasy of romance and desire for intimate relation with her in his mind.

He revives the past when she met her and he had ignored her believing that there shall not any fulfillment of any expectation. She was more open and free and has no close friend interested in her. Gradually he became more passionate in her love which was only one sided and never was disclosed to her.

When the red roses dead, the only thing she ever given to him, he could not bear to throw them away. He got attached with roses she had presented to him. He filled a jar with petals and added rum and sugar. He feels keen desire to see her and prayed god to let him touch her once before he dies. Then he will pass the old age calmly.

He takes a spoon of rum flavored roses every day. He was eating her hand touched, which creates a miracle!

The man makes dialogue with her in illusionary dreams.

“You have already eaten me... There is nothing left.”

“But I never had you.”

You did, she said

Never, he replied.

“You had me. I assure you. These roses ate were me, those fantasies you lived were me, that restlessness, that pain, that bliss, were all me,” she said.

The man replies that that is not fair. All he had trouble, a guilty conscience and an ageing libido where were she in all that? He asked her.

She replies that she was in the space between the seeking and the consummation. She tells him that she had given him the intensity of yearning, the vitality of desire, something to dream of. She further says him that for that suffering is a small price to pay. Then he never sees her again.

In the memory of his passion for her, he focused on red roses, surrounding himself with their huge, hush presences, the darker the better, till he becomes known as quite the rose fancier.

The story tells a message – give a way to some passionate feeling towards some passionate work, hobby, and occupation; which is a practical way to be freed from illusionary, impossible drama.

Chocolate:-

This is a story which centres around certain events in the married life of Tara, though chocolate is in the centre of some events of the story. The

narrating style of the story is humorous and entertaining. The story raises some serious issues of married life and self - respect of women.

Tara, a school girl interested in dance and music, is sent to a girl's collage after her schooling. She chooses Honors courses in English, good but of no purpose subjects. It was hard for her so she starts bunking the classes and enjoys watching films with friends. The college education was an ornament for her to get a good husband. She got married in the final year of her study. She had not prepared enough for examinations and when returns from honeymoon, she gets result showing pass in 3rd division.

Tara starts her married life with Abhay, her husband. After some happy times, the story takes a turn. Tara is not able to conceive and applies rational and irrational remedies. She visits a doctor for check up, who opines that nothing is wrong with her to conceive, her husband should get check up. But Abhay doesn't cooperate Tara applies divine measures, but all are in-vain.

Abhay has to travel often for his occupation and he brings various types of chocolates for Tara. She gets obese and physical relations are restricted only to rub around the fatty belly. Tara suspects and spies Abhay and finds his affair with a woman. Tara decides to win Abhay over other woman. She stops eating chocolates, controls diet and reduces her obesity and becomes thin. She wears salwar kameez and looks younger and beautiful again. She joins cooking classes and makes delicious food for her hubby. Abhay gets obesity due to tasty foods, which break - ups his affair with other woman.

Tara has won her husband over from the other woman. Tara gives her revenge a grand finale and makes an affair with Abhay's best friend. As she knows that she conceives, she smartly puts an end to the affair.

Abhay is puzzled and suspicious about the child's paternity, but he has to accept the reality. Tara was happy she got a child and won her husband over other woman. She has taken her average smartly. She is matured enough and wishes to give her daughter a good education that would helpful in a career, making her daughter independent and self reliant.

Kapur's female character Tara is a very common woman, but she becomes firm and smart in taking revenge and winning the game. She fights for her self respect. The story tells a message of educating daughters which can help in making their career and achieve their self reliance.

In the Backwaters:-

The story is a mix of present and past of a married woman having sweet memories of childhood, adolescence and early young age with her neighbor and cousin Mukul. It is a well mix of affection, excitement, contrd on impermissible love, traditional values and family responsibilities. The story tells about the inner conflict of a woman when she meets a beloved person who comes to native after 15 years.

Mukul the NRI family friend is coming to India with his wife and parents after fifteen years from U.S. The story teller woman's husband, who had visited Mukul's home and enjoyed hospitality, plans to travel Kerala and backwaters.

After visiting Cochin, they go to Willington Island where they visit shops at Jew Town. Mukul buys a piece of art- dancing Natraj at the cost of 20000 rupees.

During boating in backwaters, the story teller woman goes in the past. She remembers the grownup of her and Mukul as next door neighbors. Their fathers were brothers running a family business jointly and their mothers were became friends. They were told that they were brother and sister. The brotherhood and sisterhood was emphasized because they were cosines and only children of their parents. They tied rakhis one another and shown blood-bond at every festival. Mukul was only two years older than her and was her best friend.

The love grew up with Deeping into one that taboo, impermissible by custom and culture. She was uneasy and felt restlessness with him or without him! She urged him to go and set a life away from her, so that she can get a proper life. She wanted to end up the impermissible affair with her cousin.

Mukul didn't want to leave her and pleaded for openness and argued that such love (between cousins) was the custom in other communities. But he respected the request of her and he went to U.S.A., studied, settled and married to a rich white American lady.

After 15 years comeback of Mukul, cause for caution and wistfulness again for her. She wanted to avoid and forget the affection she had in the past. She had controlled herself and became careful to her family and her husband.

She feels on the boat in backwaters that the sun dictates everything in the water. As sun sets, fireflies and stars come out. Mukul's wife went to bed early. Her husband was tired, drunk and disappeared. In advent she and Mukul both were alone. They went on deck of the boat.

Mukul says, Baby, with a deep breath showing his eagerness to come closer to her and she responses to the degusting and perhaps literal endearment with all her might.

Kapur keeps a limit in telling the eventual romance and says that they had done what they liked in the dark and the next day they did it in a bathroom. She asks Mukul while swimming in the open sea that what she will do when he leave?

The travel was over. Mukul's parents said that he has created more emotions than he could handle because he has returned after fifteen years. Mukul gives gift to her, an artistic memento- The Natraj, which he had bought from Jew Town- Kerala at the price of Rs. 20,000/-. Her hands are trembling to receive the gift and hopes that nobody may notice it, it was her sense of guilty.

She considers the incident occurred on the boat in backwaters, just an accident and tries to control on self. Even though his husband's sweet force, she

doesn't prefer to go to airport for a send-off and tries to forget the whole event happened in the backwaters.

The theme and style of the story are unique. The story touches a sensible subject of romance between cousins even after both are married to other partner. The title "In the Backwaters" is only symbolic where they both inadvertently were alone and they came closer and did what they liked to do on the deck in the dark. The memory of the backwaters was thus sweet as well as horrible for her.

The theme and style of all the four stories are different, interesting and entertaining. Those are as powerful as Kapur's novels. Though Manju Kapur is much known for her novels, she is a successful story writer.

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