



DREAMING BEYOND DOMESTICITY: FEMALE ASPIRATION IN MAMTA G. SAGAR'S *THE SWING OF DESIRE*

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Abstract

*This paper analyses women's dreams and desires in Mamta G. Sagar's *The Swing of Desire* through a close textual analysis of Manasa's Language of aspiration, dance, dream, desire, and self-definition. The play centres on Manasa, an artist whose dream to dance directly challenges the patriarchal-marital expectations attached to marriage, motherhood, husband, and domesticity. Existing analyses of the play have mainly focused on women's subjugation, bodily autonomy, freedom, independence, and Manasa being the "New Woman". All past approaches establish the feminist significance of the play; however, this paper examines Manasa's dream as the textual language of female aspirations. This paper argues that Manasa's dream to dance is not merely about her independence, but a stand to create a creative and artistic identity and self-expression. It becomes a language of self-recognition. In the play, Manasa's language is expressed through her love for dance and passion, images of movement, resistance, aspiration, personal fulfilment, and the creative future. On the contrary, Pratap's language is a direct resemblance of the patriarchal expectations, honour, accusation, possession, marital responsibilities, duty, bodily availability, and sacrifice. This paper briefly draws on Adrienne Rich's theory of "re-vision" and "the institution of motherhood", a feminist emphasis on women's bodily autonomy. This paper establishes that Manasa's choosing her dreams challenges the imbued patriarchal marriage system. Thus, the study concludes that *The Swing of Desire* presents dreams not as an escape from domestic contentment but as an active practice of self-definition, affirming individuals' right to retain creative aspiration, dignity, and autonomy within and beyond domestic life. By emphasizing women's art, the play also questions the patriarchy that treats male ambition as legitimate and gives the centre in the marriage, while women's dreams and desires are expected to remain secondary and called a selfish move. Manasa's struggle therefore reframes personal fulfilment as a question of gendered equality and recognition.*

Keywords

Dream; Domesticity; Self-expression; Identity; Dance; Self-definition; Revision; Motherhood; Marriage, etc.

Full Article

Mamta Sagar is one of the distinguished figures in Kannada theatre and an active, rebellious voice who exposes social inequality and women's experiences through her plays. Moreover, she is widely recognised for her paper on 'Women in "Surabhi": Negotiating spaces within patriarchy', discussing the women actors of 'Surabhi', the oldest theatre group in Andhra Pradesh. She has also received the 'Best Poet of the Year' Gudibande Poornima Award 1999. Mamta Sagar's renowned play *Mayye Bhara Manave Bhara*, translated into English as *The Swing of Desire*, appeared in Tutun Mukherjee's play anthology named 'Staging Resistance'. As the study works with Tutun Mukherjee's English Translation, references to Manasa's language concern the translated text rather than Sagar's Kannada Original.



The protagonist of the play 'Manasa' is an educated, self-aware woman who stands up for herself and can challenge patriarchal norms to redefine herself. Manasa chooses her dreams over the expected patriarchal identity in marriage and motherhood. She is deeply connected with her art. Her conflict is not merely against the domestic expectations of marriage but also with the patriarchal assumption that obligates women to choose motherhood, wifehood, self-sabotage, and self-sacrifice as the only identity for them. In this context, Manasa's language of aspiration with the domestic demands of duty, sacrifice, and obedience presents dreaming as an act of female self-definition beyond restrictive marital roles.

Ongoing deliberations of *The Swing of Desire* examined the play from the perspective of subjugation, freedom, desire, marital disagreements, and the representation of Manasa as a "New Woman". All the existing approaches examined the play through Feminist critique; comparatively limited attention has been given to the textual expression of Manasa's aspiration. Therefore, this paper scrutinizes Manasa's dream of being a dancer as a language through which she establishes her own identity and resists the patriarchal roles assigned to her.

This paper argues that Manasa is not a passive victim; instead, she plays an active role in defining herself. By contrasting Manasa's language of dream, desire, and aspiration with the domestic vocabulary of duty, sacrifice, obedience, and accusation, the play restricts women from choosing her future. Hence, Manasa's dream challenges the idea of wifehood and motherhood as the sole identity.

In *The Swing of Desire*, Manasa's dream is not only a wish to fulfil, but a space of her recognition and identity. When Manasa croons to herself during the word play game,

"My dreams, the dreams of my life
Rise from the depths of my self
Oh! My living passion
Come as beauty
Come as a gesture" (Sagar, 243).

For Manasa, the dreams are not externally imposed by an outside force; they originate from deep within, like rising to the surface. Her dream is a way of self-discovery. For Manasa, the dream that grows with her is active and ongoing. The passion she has for her dance is not just to be felt but to be expressed with beauty and gesture. Her dream, therefore, allows her to see herself as a person with an artistic aspiration, rather than to fulfil only duties that come after marriage and motherhood. Thus, the play gives a female dream a productive meaning that is not selfish but the beginning of seeing herself.

Manasa's attachment to her dance is an artistic aspiration. For her, it has become a way of self-made identity, satisfaction, and choosing whatever she wants. Moreover, a way to step out from the stringent fetters and to emancipate. The dream of dance becomes the weapon for Manasa to stand against the authoritarian stance of Pratap and the ills of patriarchal society. As Manasa stated after her much-awaited performance,

"Now I am back to what I love most-my dancing. I dance to forget
the bitter moments of my life. I dance for my satisfaction. I dance
because I wish to" (Sagar, 246)

This statement clearly indicates how Manasa has been imbued with her dream of dance. It is not merely an escape but a way out from the dire plight, just like for other women of society who are suffering in marriage and couldn't get a chance to fulfil their dreams. Dance becomes a language of creative and desirable expression. It has also become a possibility to be more than the conventional roles assigned to a married woman. Thus, for Manasa, coming back to dance is not



merely a comeback to a profession, but a re-entering from domesticity to her dream, which has turned to reality.

Mamta G. Sagar has also penned aspirational imagery to describe the importance of the dream in Manasa's life. The imagery exceeds the limits of prescribed domestic identity. As Manasa speaks dreamily,

“I want to be independent. I want to be a star ... a butterfly
dancing in the sun. I want to fly away, spreading my wings far and
wide. I want to be a song, to step to the tune, to dance and sway and
twirl ... I want to chase my dreams!” (Sagar, 243)

This statement clearly signifies Manasa's urge to be free from the present and to defy the antediluvian regressive expectations fixed by society. Manasa's language symbolizes the desire to grow, to fly, to move, and to be someone. This image is important for seeing the possibility of another future: a future of creativity and personal recognition without any patriarchal social milieu. Furthermore, the image shows the yearning to step out from the endless struggle for liberation and recognition, which Manasa did not get from her lustful husband and marriage. Manasa finds herself trapped in the vicious game of lustful yet dominating marriage that rips away her every shred of feminine dignity.

Manasa's dream is not only personal but also political, considered significant to challenge the societal expectation that a married woman has to sacrifice her desires and dreams to fulfil the duties of domesticity. As Manasa resisted it through her language from time to time,

“But my art is more
important to me. How would you know its worth?” (Sagar, 234)
“I am ready to face anything for my art! I'm desperate now, I'll
do anything!” (Sagar, 234)
“And I am not ready to strangle my dreams! That's not easy, as
you should know!” (Sagar, 234)

The constant resistance through her language clarifies that the importance of art gives her enough strength to outmanoeuvre the chains of centuries-old patriarchal traditions and customs. Her dream is a weapon to imagine herself beyond the compulsory domestic sacrifice. As can easily be understood from the concept of “re-vision,” an act of survival of Adrienne Rich, “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Rich, 35). Manasa's dream allows her to look again at the old creeds and conditions of women in marriage with an aspirational mind, to unencumber herself from it. The revisioning of Manasa is itself a journey that leads her from domesticity to her dreams. Her aspirations get her professional success and allow her to define herself beyond domestic expectations.

Therefore, Manasa's dream of dance is the resistance to her lustful marriage and the foundation of her artistic yet independent self. Through the language of her dream and desire, she illuminates a future in which her identity is not limited to her domestic life and patriarchal social milieu. Her dream helps her to protect herself from the shrewd nature of her husband, Pratap, and allows her to see the inner self, artistic capability, and the right to imagine a self-directed future. In this form, Manasa's dream becomes an instrument to dismantle hegemonic masculinity and entrenched societal norms. Her language of dreams enables Manasa to step out from the stringent fetters of society into an artistically congenial atmosphere. At the same time, Manasa's dream comes into direct conflict with the domestic expectations of society of a married woman, revealing



how a woman choosing herself can cause tensions, judgments, and problems in the marriage and the society. The following analysis shows how patriarchal norms try to regulate women's desires for an independent artistic life.

Although Manasa believed that the marriage with Pratap was for love, as time passed, she realized it was more about lust; the attachment was not with Manasa but with the possession of Manasa. As she has mentioned in her piercing soliloquy,

“I married him, believing his words of love and loved him
wholeheartedly too But, in no time his love showed itself as a
possessive demonic lust that completely destroyed me. How could
I guess that it would turn out like this, that a corrosive lust would
ruin my life? Right from the beginning he loved me like a madman.
Not my talent, not my success, just my body” (Sagar, 232)

This statement reflects the movement from love to possessiveness; it signifies the relationship dependency and vulnerability to male dominance. Manasa's words clearly state the lack of emotional availability from her husband and how brutally he persecuted her through his ownership over her body; he has failed to recognise the importance of Manasa's dream in her life. Pratap is only concerned about the availability of Manasa's body to reduce her to an object of male desire. Therefore, perpetual marriage became the threat to her lost identity and dream. She realized this by the time she was ineffectively living in the marriage. Pratap's love does not support the woman Manasa wanted to become. His ignorance and dominance rendered Manasa between her identity and the expected roles of domesticity, which eventually killed her dreams.

Pratap's behaviour towards Manasa's dream demonstrates how the ills of patriarchal society attempt to regulate both domestic roles of women and their desire to achieve meaningful identity and artistic self-expression for themselves. That choice is considered a harrowing image for the orthodox society. For a man like Pratap to have a wife like Manasa is nothing less than a contemptuous remark in the society. As Pratap mentions quite a few times,

“I can't tolerate the idea of your being just a dancer to me,
even after our marriage.” [Sagar 233]
“You've staked my honour for
a pittance! Tell me, what more did you expect?” (Sagar, 233)

Pratap's hostility towards Manasa's dreams and her choices exemplifies that the agents of patriarchy do not acknowledge the path that discovers women's identity; instead, they put it secondary to the requirements of domesticity and marriage. The war of words not only shows the conflicts between husband and wife but also reveals the husband's assumptions about deciding the life of his wife. Pratap sees himself in a position where he can decide not to legitimise the desires of Manasa. Manasa's dream to dance gives her recognition, self-expression, and a future beyond domesticity; Pratap's constant resistance to that and demands to give up all her availability towards the family and domestic life. In this sense, the play presents the constant regulation of women's dreams and desires as a mode of patriarchal control. Adrienne Rich's feminist understanding of *the institution of Motherhood* shares a useful framework for this control, “We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body” (Rich 285).

This idea reflects the conflict between Manasa's autonomy to choose her body for artistic expression and, on the other side, Pratap reduces her body to an object to fulfil male desires and dominance.



In the play, sacrifice is considered to be a gendered demand. The ills of patriarchal society normalise the idea of giving up all the personal desires of the wife [Manasa], while the husband [Pratap]'s needs and authority take centre stage. As Pratap stated on Manasa choosing her dreams,

“What is your identity, your self-respect? Your pride as a great dancer? Without caring a damn about others? Is that what makes you forget the love-starved children of yours, deafening you with the applause? How inhuman can you be? Tell me, what kind of a woman are you, what kind of a mother?” (Sagar, 233)

Pratap tried his every bit of brutal masculinity to persecute Manasa by questioning the love she has for her children, the confidence she has for her dance, and, much worse, by relating her dreams to her motherhood. The language thereby reveals the unequal distribution of obligation: Manasa was expected to organize her life and dreams around domesticity, while Pratap's authority over Manasa's dreams and marriage remained unquestionable. Due to her non-supportive husband, Manasa had to choose between her marriage and her dreams; otherwise, she had to put her dreams secondary because domesticity doesn't survive on care alone. By emphasizing this, Mamta G Sagar challenges the entrenched beliefs that women's value lies in their capacity to sacrifice for others.

Ultimately, the conflict between Manasa's dream and the demands of domesticity reveals that domestic duties will pass judgement on the choices of women. It claims the authority to determine the meaning of a woman's life. It is crucial to understand the fact that Manasa's dream or any woman's desire to be independent is not a rejection of motherhood, love, care, and marriage. Instead, it could play the part of a support system to fulfil the dreams of every woman who is trying and fighting hard to do the same. On the contrary, Manasa's action is a refusal to accept the relations or authority that control her body, self-expression, and talent. Moreover, questions were raised about her motherhood and the duties she fulfilled as a wife. To discuss the difference between the languages used by Manasa for her dreams and Pratap's to accuse Manasa of choosing her dreams showcases the distance between the life expected of Manasa and the life she wishes to create for herself. And that journey to cover that distance is the journey of self-definition; A journey from domesticity to dream.

Thus, Mamta G. Sagar's *The Swing of Desire* presents Manasa's dream of dance as the significant challenge to the ills of domestic patriarchal society. Her dream is not only to be independent but to gain her own creative, self-directed, and embodied identity. On the contrary, her marriage expects her to do domestic service, maternal care, and honour all her husband's commands as the sole identity and the only reason for her birth. Through Manasa's language of dreams and dance, the play gives value to the female aspirations which patriarchal society questions and denies.

The play also examines the restrictions and questions that patriarchal society imposes on women's aspirations. Pratap, as a reflection of hegemonic masculinity and an agent of patriarchal society, at times acts possessively and insecurely about Manasa's dream and the success that comes with it. He wants Manasa to be known as his wife, not as a successful dancer; he calls that prostitution. He tries very hard to reprimand Manasa's choices and dreams. His language and taunts are nothing but brazen hypocrisy. His authority over Manasa's body and questioning her motherhood expose a dire plight of women in the patriarchal social milieu. The accusations he puts on Manasa reflect his perception of her dreams. For Pratap, after marriage, Manasa's dream is secondary, while sacrifice becomes the scale to measure her love for children and husband. Even after getting separated, when Pratap went to see Manasa's performance, he puts himself in a



position where he criticises Manasa over her dream and calls himself the one who left her. Moreover, he still sees himself as the authority to forgive Manasa for choosing her dream. And that's what Mamta G. Sagar critiques: the assumption that marriage and motherhood are considered to be the complete identity of a woman.

Nevertheless, at the end of the play, Manasa's determination and attachment to dance ultimately become the language of self-definition. It doesn't mean she escapes from the patriarchal structure; rather, she is finally able to create a life beyond that to live. As Manasa confidently mentioned living her life,

“Life means living every moment. Every moment is a step
towards fulfillment” (Sagar, 245)

The statement clearly states that fulfilling dreams is an active claim to artistic and personal autonomy. *The Swing of Desire* asserts that women's dreams are not a selfish deviation from domesticity but an essential expression of freedom and identity.

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