



PROTAGONIST'S STRUGGLE FOR SELF- IDENTITY AND EDUCATION IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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Abstract: *A renowned post-colonial novelist Manju Kapur presented woman's emancipation and striving for some space in such a manner that we read not just with our eyes but also with heart, her novels. She presented problems related to self-identity and education of the newly emerging urban middle class woman. The female protagonists of her novels protest against domination and marginalization of women.*

The woman writers as Kamala Markendaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukharjee, Gita Hariharan etc. have also presented the world in a different perspectives, through which one can understand the aptitude of human accomplishment. They have discussed the role and status of women in Indian Society and their questions and difficulties of different phases of time. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification but never has he desired to elevate her to her genuine rank.

In our society it is often seen what is pleasure for a man is a sin for a woman, what is desire for one is a disgrace for the other, what is fun for one is a scandal for other. On looking it many of the novelists, Journalists and Social reformers move ahead for woman's emancipation. Even today thousands of girls sit within the four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to choose their own lives, decide for themselves whether they went to be homemakers or more. The image of struggling for self identity and education is pertinent in the works of Manju Kapur. Her protagonists transcend the threshold of their homes; they do all which are considered taboos in the present social fabric. She weaves together bodily experiences of woman like pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, abortion and divorce, and the emotions attached to these phenomenon like uncertainty, stress, disappointment.

Her renowned first novel "Difficult Daughters" was published in 1998 and it has been bagging many laurels since then. It won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best first book category in Eurasia region and was also shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award in India. Other characters like Virmati's divorced and childless daughter Ida belongs to the post independence generation she is very strong and clearheaded. Kasturi, the mother of Virmati is an example of the typical feminine attitude. She considers marriage to be religious and a social institution, where love is not the basis of marriage. Swarnlata and Shakuntala also are seen destroying the shackles of patriarchal society.

The novel Difficult Daughters is based on the experiences of her own mother and it mainly deals with the domestic life of women who live at the turn of the century. The book takes us from the early 1900s to the 1950s and while chronicling the history of her mother, as well as the family and friends around her. This research paper will analyses the protagonists' miseries, efforts and success in the way of being self identified and educated.

Keywords: *Feminism, Malcontent, Volition and Suppression.*

Feminism now includes the struggle against woman's subordination to the male within the home; against their continuing low status at work in society. In present, feminists are not only fighting for the parity of woman but for a just and equitable society – for both man and woman-to establish self-identity and opportunities in various fields as education, Health, Supervision etc. Manju Kapur did a lot in

this movement as she highlights on how woman in the Indian society are bereft of proper education in the name of tradition. Lack of education makes them dependable and vulnerable to both the inner and outer world. The woman of India have, of course, gained success in half a century of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, much remains to be done.

In a multi-cultured post-colonial nation like India Feminist theory began with eighteenth century and continues in present. Most of Feminist theories are adventures. They try to bring about a revolution between readers and texts. Once in 1928 Virginia Woolf, the famous novelist, said about women in her 'A Room One's Own':

They are simple. So much has been left out.

Unattempted (1)

Her speech gave new power and inspiration to the struggles of women for self identity, Education and social status. Simon De Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949-50) developed the aforementioned theory in large context. Theme of feminism is that women should have same rights, opportunities, power and place that men have. Paying attention towards it the women are struggling for it.

With the rise of feminist movement, Indian writers too began to come out into light with their abundant talent of writing. Famous Indian English writers began to write like R.K. Narayan., Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya etc. These writers presented life and its problems from the point of view of women. The twentieth century writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy etc. have directly plunged into the world of politics, Social problems, the problem of east-west encounter and the dimensions of man - woman relationship with confidence, Sincerity, courage and with remarkable felicity of language. These writers did their best to destroy all barriers in making women self-identified. Manju Kapur, a Professor of English teaches in Miranda House College Delhi in present, writes with vigour for women's parity in patriarchal society. Her maiden novel 'Difficult Daughters' was published in 1998 and won Commonwealth Writers' Prize for best first book in Eurasia region. It was written on the pre-independence background of Indian Society that was facing long violent confrontation for freedom. The novel, primarily located in pre-partition India, presents three generation -Kasturi-Virmati's mother, Virmati, Ida-Virmati's daughter. It presents the

turmoil of a woman who tries to overcome her culture, identity and scope for education. It is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writer, writing about woman but it is another thing. To understand better this factor, it will be significant to quote Jaidev in his 'Problematising Feminism: Gender and Literature':

She has understood a woman both as woman and as a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible context. (68)

The search for control over one's identity is the key theme of the novel. Ida, the divorced and childless daughter of Virmati, is the narrator of the novel. But this novel is not completely in third person as Christopher Rollason in 'Novels of Manju Kapur: Women of the Margins: Reflections on Manju Kapur's *Difficult daughters*' says:

'Difficult Daughters' is not a pure third-person narrative. Virmati's story is told mostly in the third person with some recourse to the epistolary mode, but is rained by the first person narration of a search. The search is that of Virmati's daughter, Ida as she seeks to reconstitute her mother's history. (8)

Virmati's tale is told, from a present day perspective, by Ida, her only daughter, who seeks to reconstruct her late mother's life story, against the background of the independence movement of the 1940s, and the subsequent trauma of Partition. Virmati, the protagonist, is born in Amritsar in Punjab in 1940, of a father of progressive ideas and a traditional mother. She always tries to get out the four walls of a patriarch family where no right of education is existed. She is not a silent rebel but is bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. She is a woman who never agrees with Alfred Tennyson's lines:

Men for the field and women for the hearth
Man for sword and for the needle she. (The Princess, V. 427)

Virmati is a symbol of new woman who struggles for her identity and Education. But Kasturi, the traditional mother of Virmati, is instructed by her

mother to be good daughter-in-law and never raise her head for self identity.

Kasturi's mother prepares her daughter to be taken, after marriage, to her own home. The same is done by Kasturi for Virmati, but her disagreement to marry, the only purpose of her mother's choice, the valuable affection of her mother is diverted upon second daughter, Indumati, on account of. This indicates that a daughter is an alter ego of her mother. The mother wants to realise her unfulfillment through her daughter. It will be apt to quote Dr. Shilpi Rishi Srivastava in her 'Novels of Manju Kapur: A Quest for Identity in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters about Virmati's character:

Virmati is a new woman of colonial India and stands as a metaphor to explore the possibilities for modern woman in education and economic independence who experiences humiliation and disillusionment in their colonial matrix. (19)

Role of second mother for eldest girl child proves very destructive when their innocent childhood spends without joy like Virmati's. She is the second mother of all those children, born by ever pregnant mother, Kasturi. When she is seventeen and preparing for FA exam, her mother gets pregnant thus all burden of household and care of her mother falls upon her shoulders. This causes her a failure. Virmati has to face different twists and turns due to her desire of higher education. She presents her feelings:

She too had to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over. (17)

She Joins As College, the bastion of male learning, to do B.A., where she falls in love with Harish, the teacher and tenant in her uncle's house, known as the professor. She has deep desire for education and individual identity. Harish strikes the desire that is why she loves a married Professor. The condition of Virmati was very sensitive because despite of her refusal from being married, she is engaged to a canal Engineer named Inderjeet. But she gets more stimulators love of Harish than her would be husband. Lala Diwan Chand, The grandfa

of Virmati, makes her locked when he finds her making love with the Professor. Indu Swami in 'The Woman Question: Crossing Patriarchal Threshold' presents the condition of an educated woman:

Here is the predicament of a young educated woman who is enlightened enough to want to reach beyond the boundaries of her home and long her own space, Yet not liberated enough to know how to go about it without hurting others. (65)

Virmati's struggle for personal identity and education is carried ahead by her lonely daughter and the narrator, Ida, a woman of polished thoughts and ideas.

She never agrees with her husband Prabhakar, who wants her to be aborted, but she pays it at the cost of breakup. Ida recalls how her mother used to say if she would get a good husband like her father, she would had enjoyed whole life. But she knows well how much her mother enjoyed. She tried to achieve self-fulfillment, but she proves to be a loser, fails to create a space for herself for that she had been striving all along hence Ida says:

The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. (01)

The novelist seems to be saying that a woman can maintain her individuality and perused her interest only not making hurt the rules of patriarchal society. Thus, a woman should basically strive towards a fine interdependent partnership. But if there she feels totally suffocated, then voice should be raised and she should break all chains like Ida. But merely transcending social norms is not enough. A woman should be aware, self-controlled, self-reliant and rational, having the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only by being free in the deeper psychic sense.

Due to repeated meeting in secret places, Virmati gets pregnant. But the behavior of the Professor represents the behavior of all males that they have no feeling for their pregnant beloved. Virmati has to go to Amritsar to be aborted. All the money is managed by the sell of gold bangle given by her father. It is her urge to establish herself as an

individual that entraps her in the zig-zag ways of the corrupt world. Virmati rebels and establishes her right to higher education. She doesn't believe in arranged marriage:

Early marriage and no Education?

No Professor and no love?(50)

While going to Shantiniketan Virmati has to change the train so at the time of waiting she meets a person who is the friend of the Professor. This meeting leads her to be married. Now the condition becomes totally critical because now there is no identity of Virmati in Harish's house because he already has a wife named Ganga.

A man who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never give happiness to any woman. He is a worldly person caught in his own desires. (85)

It is a miserable condition that if a man shares his physical senses there is no problem, but if a lady does a little in this matter there are problems and problems, in some areas she is punished to death by torching her body. It means she is struggling for her own identity. Ganga and her mother-in-law regard her an evil eye but later changes her mind when comes to know about Virmati's pregnancy. But it is misfortune that the child is miscarried. Now Harish thinks that further study will improve her a lot. Virmati goes to Lahore to do M.A. in Philosophy. At any cost Ganga's suffering caused by Harish's nature, should not be overlooked. Simone De Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* portrays a clear picture of a married woman's miserable condition:

It is the duplicity of the husband that dooms the wife to a misfortune of which he complains later that he is himself the victim. Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed, he requires her to be wholly his and yet no burden, he wishes her to establish him in a fixed place on earth and to leave him free, to assume the monotonous daily round and not to bore him, to be always at hand and never importunate; he wants to have her all to himself and not to belong to her; to live as

one of the couple and to remain alone. Thus she is betrayed from the day he marries her. (497)

On seeing her miserable condition Swarna Lata makes an attempt to make her realise that she is wasting her valuable time in mistrusted relationship:

Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war, The Satyagraha movements because of all these things women are coming out of their houses- taking jobs, fighting and going to Jail- wake up from your stale dream. (139)

It is also clear that in several reasons lady candidates of the society are also responsible for the exploitation of woman. As Ganga's mother-in-law unexcited her saying:

In this life we can do nothing but our duty, serve our elders, our children, walk along the path that has been marked for us, and not pine and yearn for these things we can not have. (194)

Here Kasturi becomes unknowingly the agent of patriarchal society. She holds these values as ideal which patriarchy has taught her to be so. And when her daughter rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her ownself. Shakuntala's mother Lajwanti is also frustrated to have an unmarried daughter nearing thirty.

Virmati presents a woman who is neglected by both homes' laws and parents'. She has no right to enter into the house where she performed a role of enter figure but by selecting a husband of her own choice, she loses all her doings. She enters through the back door where cows are kept. Her mother rebukes her:

You've destroyed our family you badmash!.....you have blackened our face everywhere! for this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji; (221)

Virmati has no self-identity while falling the prey of Harish. Dr.Shaleen Kumar Singh in his *Novels of Manju Kapur: Tradition Versus Modernity in 'Difficult Daughters'* says:

In her conflict with traditional values, Varmati has lost more than she gained. Despite, her husband's unpractical, irresponsible, unethical and insincere attitude she tolerates him. (13)

It would be a mistake to devalue Varmati's struggle because she failed, for what mattered is that she tried to break that male dominated structure of society and had an inner urge for independent existence and in the forties it was her great achievement. The literary geniuses who were born

and brought up in the invisible shackles of customs and tradition, tried later on to break them and raised voice for their notions in a more liberated and outspoken manner in their literary works under the influence of modernism. The illustration of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari is always accepted to be followed by the common woman but it is noticeable that these ideal women were queens and princesses so they remained very far from the pain experienced by common women who have no identity. They live for others and breathe for others.

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