

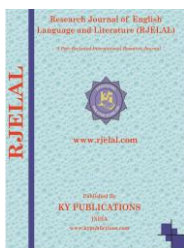


PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Manju Kapur's First novel *Difficult Daughters*. It focuses on the problems faced by women in the upper class Punjabi family in Amritsar. In this novel Kapur express how a woman fighting for her rights in the Male dominated patriarchal society. This novel is the story of three generations dominated patriarchal society. Manju Kapur portrays each and every women character in this novel effectively, particularly Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. Through the characters of Shakuntala, Swarnalatha and Ida, Kapur expresses modernity in the novel. Right from the birth woman's heart is filled with traditions. Only a few like Virmati tries to break traditions with the help of their education. The image of women in the novel experiences many changes right from the beginning especially female flexibility the boldness of Virmati has gone when she loves Harish. Kapur clearly shows the importance of education and freedom for women.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror of life which reflects the society. Manju Kapur is the post colonial writer who perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of woman. She is one of the greatest writer in expressing the female sufferings and cause. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* receives tremendous achievement and won the Common Wealth prize in 1999. Her writings reflect man –woman relationship, human desire and protest. She goes deep into the minds of every Indian woman and expresses each and every corner of their life through her writings. She successfully reflects the conflicts of family society and relationship in her novels. The stereotypical image of a woman is still passive though they got education. The aim of this paper is to understand the readers to know about the female struggles faced by the heroines of this novel.

The story of the *Difficult Daughters* revolves around Virmati who is the protagonist of

the novel, lives in a joint family with her eleven siblings. Her conduct with her brother-sisters is very hard, rigorous and fast. She has heavy responsibilities on her shoulders and never enjoys according to her own wish like other children. "She was only sister, but she acted bossy. we are scared of her. She never rested or played with us, she always had some work. She was so keen to study, *bap re*. First FA, then BA, then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an MA to Government College, Lahore"(DD 5).

Virmati, longs for love and affection from her mother Kasturi, but she never has the time to express her love towards her daughter Virmati. She is always busy in her pregnancies. In this novel the mother Kasturi does not realize that her daughters longingness for love, if she doesn't get from home she shares her feelings from the outsiders. So, this is the main cause of Virmati to fall in love with an already married man. For Kasturi 'A womans shaan is her home'(DD 16). For her marriage is the

ultimate destiny of a girl, but Virmati's negation of arranged marriage makes the whole family suffer. Virmati is locked in godown and the family makes arrangements to marry Indumati to Inderjit so as to maintain the family's reputation in the society.

Kasturi is an educated woman but totally depends upon husband for her identity. Kasturi wants her daughters to be educated not because to rebel against the traditional values but wants them to withstand all circumstances in the society. Though Kasturi is educated, she curses all the systems of education when her daughter rejects arranged marriage. She and her husband Suraj Prakash believe only in the basic education of girls so that they can take care of their house and children.

Manju Kapur focuses on the sufferings of the women in Indian society with the portrayal of Kasturi in 1940s. She always faces unwanted pregnancies resulting in continuous illness. "Her life seemed such a burden, her body so difficult to carry. Her sister-in-law's words echoed in her ears 'Breeding like cats and dogs; Harvest time again' (DD 7). Kasturi feels tired and weak, her legs and feet always ache.

Virmati has an illicit love with Harish, and she spoils her future. She cannot help herself to fall in love with Harish because she does not have any attention from her mother or any other relative. None of her relative makes her feel that she is special but Harish does. Thus she completely surrenders to his love. Virmati loses her path to liberation just because of him. Soon she has realized her mistake when she is told about Ganga's pregnancy. In the mean time she decides to study B.T. from Lahore. Whenever Virmati requests professor to marry her, he ignores. As a result of her secret meetings with Harish, she is pregnant. She tries to contact him, but he is not there. She finds herself alone at such a crucial time. "Like Lady Macbeth, she had murdered her sleep. How Harish's face had glowed as he murmured, tasted almost the multitudinous sea incarnadine making the green one red; so that the stretched-out vowel sounds seemed to contain the mysteries of life. Given all that, she might as well wander around Lady Macbeth" (DD 162). Virmati feels so much trapped in situation

because Harish is not letting her marry Inderjit by emotional blackmailing. Virmati tries to commit suicide because of her parents' pressure for marriage and they rescue her from the canal of Tarasikka.

The happiest period in Virmati's life is that she is appointed as the Headmistress of a girl's school. She starts working at Nahan after completing her B.T. Virmati finds it easy to administer because from a very young age, she shouldered responsibilities of her younger brothers and sisters, now it is the responsibilities of the students. Her performance wins her a deserved respect. The repeated secret visit of the professor results in losing her employers' confidence. She has decided to quit her job, her school and house.

The other option opens for Virmati decides to go to Shantiniketan to avoid open talk from others. She can change her mind towards spirituality. On the way of her journey to Shantiniketan, she meets professor's friend. There her fate changes and she marries Harish.

Virmati doesn't realize her fate after marriage. Though Harish concerns towards her, but the family never. After all the struggles from her family Virmati expects that a new family may console her. But the situation is quite opposite. The first wife of Harish does not allow her to be free with the family and even she is not allowed to enter into the kitchen. She does not secure any space for herself in the family. The treatment of Ganga makes her to feel a lot. Virmati is heart broken when she analyses the society's view on woman as well as a man who marries a second wife. When Virmati's family bond is broken she is not allowed to attend her father's funeral ceremony, whereas her husband has accepted everywhere.

The next phase of the problem arises when Virmati gives birth to her girl baby. In our society, man is the decision maker, woman has no authority to take her own decisions as Virmati cannot take. Ida means a new slate, a blank beginning for Harish, her daughter means a beginning of his new life with Virmati. Virmati suggests the name 'Bharati' for her daughter but Harish rejects her suggestion and names her Ida. "Bharati suggested Virmati as a name. 'No' said Harish. 'No? But why? I thought

with the birth of our country (DD 276). After marriage even the rights of naming for her own daughter is also completely ignored for Virmati.

Ida, the narrator of the novel, Virmati's daughter denies the male dominance completely and spends her life as a single divorcee woman. Ida cannot develop an understanding with her mother during her life time and after that she decides to go to Amritsar to know about her mother's past. On the way to Amritsar, she realizes how lonely she is being a divorcee and childless. Kapur clearly shows that in the very beginning of the novel how Ida hates her mother "The only thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (DD 1).

When Ida knows about Virmati's days in Lahore, she feels proud of her. Ida refuses to be what her father and mother want to make her. She refuses to compromise with her husband Prabhakar, though her mother insists her not to fight with him. Because for Virmati, he is a good man but Ida knows that he is not the person as he appears. He insists Ida to get aborted and she never conceives again in future. This makes her more hatred towards her husband and has got divorced.

Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin is of modernity whom Virmati inspires a lot. She does M.Sc.in Chemistry and a science teacher in a college in Lahore.Kapur portrays Shakuntala as an independent, defiant, and assertive girl. She does not have limitations towards the tradition of getting marriage and family relationship. This is shown through the voice of Shakuntala, "this people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction that can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are fighting for the freedom of the Nation, but women are still suppose to marry, and nothing else" (DD17).

Shakuntala appears modern and liberated women from the beginning. She studies, teaches and takes part in Gandhian movement. She shares her liberated life style with a group of friends, whose activities she explains to cousin-"we travel, entertain ourself in the evening, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars"(DD 15). All activities of Shakuntala are crawling over Virmati's head. She wants to be like her cousin and an Independent life.

Virmati wishes to be like Swarnalata, her roommate, who is doing M.A. she is a part of freedom fighter group and the captain of the college. Virmati is extremely influenced by her. She wants to be like swarnalata and Shakuntala. The following lines explain the conflict of her mind after meeting Swarna.

"Virmati stared at Swarna. What a girl! Her opinions seemed to come from inside herself. Her thoughts, ideas and feelings blended without any horrible sense of dislocation. She was committed articulate. Would the professor want her to be like swarna? She didn't want to do anything that would alter the professor's undying love for her. May be she could be like Swarna from the inside secretly" (DD135).

Through the voice of the character Swarnalata, Kapur says that women should also serve for the welfare of the society. In a college function, Virmati listens to the girls singing patriotic songs and Swarna's speech which is based on the need of women's participation in freedom movement. Swarna insists Virmati to come but Virmati thinks how Harish and others will react to her bold step and she has no power and strength to join her, she shows her helplessness-"I wish I could come Swarna, but I'm married"(DD 252). Swarna insist again by giving example that she is also married but still participating. She wants Virmati to join as it will increase the number of volunteers, but Virmati refuses to come.

Ganga is another disappointing character in the novel. Ganga is the wife of Harish who is not interested to introduce his wife in front of others. For him she is simply a wife, a caretaker, and a mother. She is uneducated and cannot take part in the discussion. Manju Kapur emphasizes the need for education for a woman through the voice of Harish. "I do what I can for everybody . however to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman with whom I have nothing in common. who can't even read. Who keeps a Ghungat in front of my friends" (DD 209). Virmati gradually knows the reality. She wonders how Ganga manages to do lots of work and even gets no appreciation. Ganga is not educated because her family never felt the need to educate her. They think that a woman should only

be an expert in household works. The second marriage of Harish shatters and humiliates Ganga that even after such a devotion towards him and his family. Thus she fails to attract and influence him. Kapur describes her devotion through these lines-

“From washing his clothes to polishing his shoes, to tidying his desk, dusting his precious books, filling his fountain pens with ink, putting his records back in their jackets, mending his clothes stitching his shirts and kurtas, hemming his dhotis, seeing that they were properly starched. Ganga did it all” (DD 216).

Woman is not provided with liberty to take her own decisions and she has to do everything according to the choice of the man. Ganga is not allowed to wear things of her favorite colour. Virmati suggests Ganga to buy blue bangles but Ganga says, “He doesn’t like blue. I wear nothing blue”(DD 42). This indicates that a woman must wear whatever her husband likes. The tragic part of Ganga is self-sacrificing and well accomplished in Household works, but fails to earn her husband’s love and attention.

CONCLUSION

In this novel *Difficult Daughters* Kapur expresses clearly about the tradition versus modernity, and also marriage versus education. Manju Kapur portrays modernism through the voice of the characters, Shakuntala, Swarnalata, Ida and Virmati. She portrays tradition through the voice of Kasturi, Ganga and Lajwanti. Through this novel, Manju Kapur proves that women suffer physically and mentally in the male dominated society. All the female characters of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all problems. Manju Kapur makes the society aware of women education through this novel.

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