

A NEW WOMAN IN MANJU KAPUR'S 'DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS'

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Abstract:

Feminism criticizes the pre-existing social and cultural conditions which debarred women from the pre-dominating social or political pursuits and also the male ideology and culture. In the emergence of the new women writings the concept of modernity is clearly evident. The present paper efforts to make a study of the changing roles of women in Indian society by taking into consideration Manju Kapur's '*Difficult Daughters*' who have very skillfully presented the unpleasant situations which are imposed upon them and their struggle against this system that how they come out of their traditional roles as a wife, mother, daughter, sister and acquire various new roles like teacher, social worker and activist, business-woman, corporate personality and so on.

Most commonly female characters are fixed by gender specific roles and this is the main reason that their attempts to change this pre-existing position often questioned. In general, female characters are silenced in the face of their suppression under a dominant patriarchal ideology and setup. Even the existence of females always questioned by the system and never consider them as main family member and always consider inferior to men in the family as well as in the society and also deprived from the opportunities to give expression to their feelings.

Key Words: Patriarchy, feminism, gender roles, liberation, self and identity, new woman.

In Indian English fiction the image of woman as the silent bearer and the upholder of the religious and traditional values or moralities of family as well as society has undergone very huge changes. Now, in contemporary literature women are no longer described as merely passive characters. The typical elements of feminism in the novel are the set of movements that define and establish equal social, political, economic, and equal opportunities in career for Indian women and so forth. Kapur's novels raise a powerful protest against the male authorized Indian society and give voice to the 'New Indian woman' who is in search of self, freedom in all spheres of life and also replaces the old silent and subjugated image of Indian traditional women.

In this novel, a stereotypical woman character is changed into 'New Women' by replacing the old submissive image of Indian Women and here Kapur projects a new vision of Indian women. She proclaims the traditional idea that marriage is essential and aim of life for women. In this novel women are considered as an oppressive and subjugated people in the family as well as in the society. Kasturi gives birth to eleven children and is denied for equal rights. Even she does not get a single chance to speak and demand about her equal rights. Virmati, the second wife of Harish gets pregnant by him. In her pursuit of identity and due to Harish's insistency

she refers to abort the child. At every stage she loses respect but even after that she make efforts to find space for herself on her own behalf.

Virmati also treats her daughter Ida in the same manner as her mother did to her, with the strict patriarchal rules and systems. Even she fails to be a justifiable and understanding mother for her daughter. All this attitude forces Ida to suffer from being an independent girl and she also fights for dignity, identity, and confidence which her mother also lacked throughout her life. She rejects the family norms and male dominated society and becomes a typical daughter. There also present the instances of male dominance over the family or economy in the novel. Kasturi suffering from the disadvantages of socio-economic and cultural in the male authorized society. Virmati also deprived of her rights and ambitions to find out her individuality and freedom.

It is the impact of western thoughts and the impression of Shakuntala that now she thinks differently and craves to have an independent and meaningful life and existence. This inspired her and she moves towards the education rather than playing the traditional and typical roles that forced a woman to remain in the imprisonment of the four walls of the house. The early part of Virmati's life and her mother's experiences presents the early stage of 20th century in India before the Independence. Women's existence state and the decolonization, the two different phenomena both developed parallels into the fiction of India. Her rejecting attitude towards the established social code for females brings new changes in her life and she struggles to find out new forms of life which aspires her to live a life which is free from all the colonial patriarchal values. This causes a sense of not belonging and isolation which finally finds sublimation in her marriage to Harish, a married man whom she loves.

Socio-historical situations experienced by Virmati can be accounted a very important feminist position in this context. Virmati's understanding of life and experiences, such her feminist aspects can be learned from her departure from an established concept of femininity. The education of women emerges as an important form of feminist position. In the social context, education was considered a very powerful means of women's liberation from all social taboos. Education versus marriage is also an important theme of the novel. In the novel education is treated as a direct way to freedom which makes Virmati conscious about her suppressed existence and also the confidence in her to go outside and lead a life of her own choice.

The image of 'New Woman' is powerful, ambitious, rational, revolting and the combination of modernity and tradition and this image of woman has generated a breaking point in family and also in society that has shaken the roots of traditional institutions. Kapur describes that a woman should be aware, strong will, self-control, rational, self-reliant, and also having strong belief in the inner strength of womanhood because a meaningful change can be brought only from within. Virmati wants to break her dependence but in doing so she finds herself trapped between the pressure of modernity and ancient outdated traditions. Kapur reproduces a world where tradition binds the ties of family and woman's life is confined to domestic chores.

Virmati awfully looked for an escape from her unworthy life and thought that getting higher education might enable her to do it. She wants to forget the professor and being away from her home but suddenly she

realized that she had become pregnant and abortion was the only alternative left to her. She knew very well that the professor would not support her in her crucial time. When she became the headmistress of a girl school at Nahan was the only better and successful phase of her life. At this phase she almost achieved the authority of her own over her life, which she had yearned all through her life. But Ida could not accept her mother's decision to abort and terminate the life growing within her. She had put an end of the relationship with her husband Prabhakar because he had forced her to abort the fetus. It was totally the conscious decision of Ida to be different from her mother.

Virmati challenged her mother's ideologies and Ida could not accept even Virmati's. There is no doubt that Virmati represents the spirit of a new woman with her education and individuality, but she fails to show her strength of mind in matter of love. There is a struggle between the traditional and modern, physical and moral, mind and the heart. Ida is clearheaded and also a strong woman who breaks up her marriage for the life of her child. Ida, an educated woman, a divorcee and have no child, on the surficial level lives a free life but inside her she feels, some of the same anxieties as her mother felt. The title of the novel indirectly refers to the patriarchal contract that a woman, who has an urge for individual self, is labeled as a difficult daughter by the family and society. Virmati grows up from a native girl to a woman matured by experiences and sufferings. She was successful in breaking the old traditions of a patriarchal system in a tradition bound society at the cost of mental torture and struggling all the time but failing to remove the label of being the 'other'. Here her character presents the rebellious nature and psychic distress of women. It is not only the story of Virmati but also refers to the several other difficult daughters who leaving the boundaries of their household and engaged themselves in the national fight for independence. The female characters in this novel are divided into three generations regarding their relationship, values and mindsets.

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