

THE CONCEPT OF 'SELF' IN MANJU KAPUR'S '*DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*' AND '*CUSTODY*'

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ABSTRACT:

It is belief about feminism that all people across the world should be treated equally in social, religious, legal, and economic fields. In the defining features of feminism includes the view that a person's gender does not define who she or he is or her or his worth. In starting phase, it is a social movement sought to correct the imbalance in the society regarding women with same opportunities and rights as men, in order to justify their actual worth and place in the family as well as in the society. Economic expression, intellectual starvation, domestic subjugation, commercial exploitation, physical harassment and abuse, deficiency of individual freedom and sexual assault continued to affect the lives of women related to various social strata. In this regard feminist writers and critics were forced to re-evaluate and re-access the existing socio-cultural system looking for hints to explain the whole mechanism of patriarchal system. The present analysis involves a basic definition of self or feminism and what it means in the context of India. Particularly it shows the direction in which Indian feminism in English fiction has developed and basically the kind of feminism Manju Kapur, a prominent Indian English writer adopts to examine the major problems of Indian women.

Key Words: Feminism, patriarchal mechanism, oppression and subjugation, stereotypes, globalization, individualism, self fulfilment.

Kapur's female characters are characterized by the agreement of a clearly reflective and critical attitude that raised question regarding their position and as an effective fling to re-define social and cultural values and stereotypes in order to create an area of their own 'self', which invokes a new definition of their individual identity and also a confrontation to the society and the pre-existing patriarchal setup. She illuminates those factors which restrains the female's freedom to live freely, the ways of their own to grow and establish their powerful position. She highlights the ways in which rigid traditions and orthodox concepts of religion are misused to justify women condition into an approval of their secondary position forced them to lead confined lives. In her novels female protagonists oppose and defeat the rigid ideologies and the suppression and give a new form to values and ideals so that they newly invent themselves in a meaningful and valuable way.

In the matter of finance, although women are allowed to work outside the house, on any household matters their rights have always been denied. It has generally seen in Indian society that a woman has to take

charge of the kitchen, even if she is an earning member of the family and holds a job outside the house. According to law it is legally recognizing that daughters and sons have equal rights regarding their paternal property, but those rights are never exercised. Even today, as in past generations, familial ownership changes hands from father to son or husband and the rights and values of a daughter or a daughter-in-law are always denied.

It is very important to understand the miserable situations of women and to do so Indian feminists have to do more efforts to examine and evaluate the whole situation thoroughly. The need of this hour is to rise above the limitations and to deconstruct patriarchal structures through individual questionings. It is possible only when women rise above the limitations and try to deconstruct the pre-existing patriarchal structures through individual questioning. With the help of such process as interrogation and reinterpretation new images and history will be created.

Manju Kapur's first novel *'Difficult Daughters'* is a story of protagonist's tussle for self and career against the pre-existing dominant ideology. This story set around the stormy years of World War II and the partition of India and in the story she naturally describes three generation women focusing on the second generation difficult daughter, Virmati. It is the story of a woman who torn between the self fulfilment and the family duty. The major thematic element in the novel is search for control over one's circumstances. While there are freedom fighters in India fights for freedom similarly, Virmati fights for the freedom to live life on her own accord.

Virmati is the character who presents the actual situation of a female faced in Indian society at that time or we can say that even in the present time many women across Indian states faces same difficulties regarding their identity and self. Through the story it is very clear that she is a girl with new ideology, but her family circumstances and even her own mother Kasturi's attitude does not allow her to live life freely or even to raise her voice regarding her own wishes and life. Throughout her teen age she tries to find out new ways of her life but always faces failure due to the lack of support. It is possible only when her cousin Shakuntala inspires her to live life accord her own and make her able to find out the new ways of living beyond the traditional and rigid system and also recognize her 'self'.

To find the self fulfilment she arguing with her family particularly with her mother and finally succeed to leaves her house for higher education. Throughout her life she craves for self and identity but always faces the double faced and also double minded personalities. In Lahore she falls in love with an already married professor Harish, who was not happy with his illiterate wife Ganga and connected with Virmati for the perfect match. But later he refuses to divorce her first wife and tries to console Virmati anyhow by justifying himself and also forces her to abort the fetus. She finds solace and identity nowhere, not by her own family nor by the person whom she selected as her partner. Nobody cares about her identity, self and emotions.

In the novel 'Custody' Kapur presents not only the social commentary, but also the universal nervousness of modern marriage, with its confliction with individualism. It describes the upper middle class of Delhi in the mid-nineties. In this novel Shagun is a modern woman who gets her individuality and her ambitions instead of familial bondage. She is an ambitious woman and presents the life of a changing woman during the time period of increased globalization. It accounts the many complexities around the separation of family and marriage in the changing society of modern India. Through the character of Ishita it shows that a childless marriage is considered worthless and the blame is imposed on the female. Infertility of a female is considered the root cause of the separation and divorce.

The concept of self is clearly evident in this novel through its major characters Shagun and Ishita. Both characters present the situations where they fight for the self but Shagun is the character who finds some place for self. She tries to find out her proper place and fulfilment of the self. To find out the new meanings for her life she breaks all the family taboos and restrictions. Ishita in real sense the victim of the patriarchal society. When her in-laws from her first marriage got the news of her infertility they didn't support her any more even her husband avoid her and force her for divorce. Raman accepts her as his wife only due to the lack of harmonious relationship with his wife Shagun and also for the sake of his children.

According to Shagun in modern times a woman can achieve all the success that she wants in her life without the dependence on others. She thinks that human life is precious and it is not the right thing to spoil this life. She is ambitious and always fulfill her desires according her own and didn't care her family and society. Modernity reflected in her every step of life and proves herself a modern and new woman who recognize her 'self' and draw a new picture of her life.

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