

QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN MANJUKAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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Manju Kapur's novel presents about the woman who fought against the suppression and oppression in forced on them by the patriarchal society. The novel *Difficult Daughters* portrays the position of woman in the society and their craving to get their own identity. Manju Kapur has penned down her work with the purpose of empowering woman against gender bias classism. Her novel tries to analyze the issues of woman and their effort taken by those to overcome that Manju Kapur's female protagonist are highly educated. Their education makes them too aware of their rights, independent which became an unbearable to the society as well as her family. Some women are come out of the hardship in the family and tried hard to attain their identity. But they too become a victim of gender bias society. They had their own aspiration to achieve but the surroundings destroy their aspiration and in reality they still become an object to the society. Most of her novel revolves around the quest for identity. Beavoir says, Manju Kapur like Roy, experiments with new themes such as gratification of sex from women's point of view along with the politics of the day. Feminism and contemporary history go hand in hand to give new dimensions to their fiction. (29)

Manju Kapur picturizes the story of three generation women in *Difficult Daughters*. Ida, the narrator who is a divorcee, Virmati, her mother who love and marries an already married professor and Kasturi, the traditional bound grandmother. Ida narrates the story of pain and pangs of Virmati. This novel is set during India's struggle for independence and is partially based on the life of Kapur's own mother Virmati. The story began her mother's funeral, filled with an eager of knowing about her mother's past life with full of emotional attachment towards her mother. Ida's grandmother had some

education and she was married to a traditional bound Hindu family. Her constant labour makes her eldest daughter Virmati managed to have her education too. But the visit of her cousin Swarnalatha makes a turning point in her career. She started to starve for her identity through getting her education. Defying the wishes of her parents, she keeps on studying and postponed her willingness to be getting married. Though Kasturi was married in a traditional bound society she insists the freedom and empowerment for women. So she gave freedom to study to her daughter. But Virmati misused the freedom and fall in the trap of love. When Virmati's aunt takes in a lodger, the U.K educated married professor, her life became jerked. She was torned between the education and love for a married man. Because of her blind love she tends to loss her craving for identity. Ida, the narrator of the book too has an unhappy married life and divorced from her husband quite after her marriage was taken and estranged from her family. At the time of attending her mother's funeral she collect the past life experience of her mother through her relatives. Kapur's novels direct in family background. In an Interview with Jai Arjun, Manju Kapur says,

Literature by women, about families, always has these larger considerations, with years of studying texts, it becomes almost second nature to look beneath the surface at social and economic forces, gender relationships and how they are played out in an arena that, in my writing happens to be the home. But then, all sort of thing happening outside do affect what is happening inside the home. (59)

Virmati felt happy to meet her cousin Shakuntala, who led an independent life through education who attained her own individuality in the patriarchal society. Her effort to attain individuality within her family and society and her yearning to get her identity as a well-equipped women with unblemished background and resolute efforts. Because of her desire for lust, she loses a part of herself, she lose her role and the faith of her family. She even loses her identity and the place in the society and this creates an unforgettable pain around her.

Virmati is the treason for her loss of identity. Though she is not allowed to have her education in the beginning, later her family trusts her and gave her a freedom to study in Lahore which was far away from her parents' residence. But she could utilize the opportunity in a well-versed way. She misused the freedom which was given to her and loss herself in the trap of Harish. She lost her identity in it. Virmati believed that the intellectual power of her and the professor makes them to be bound together but the

fact is that they are fond of the physical lust which overpowers them whenever they are together. She did not attempt to utilize the freedom and education which was given to her as her cousin Shakuntala did, Dr. Ruby Milhoutra says,

It is only Virmati who is the difficult daughters in the prosperous merchant family of Lala Diwan Chand. While in the generation of kasturi, woman's role was confined to child bearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati took some bold and radical steps in joining the political movement for India's freedom, asserted the need for women education and independence. As a non-chalant representative of the middle generation, Virmati breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women. (164)

Kapur presents Virmati's decision of marrying the professor was her blind love and impression towards his intellectual capability. But she felt alone after their marriage, the relationship looks like a mirage. Her own family disconnect themselves from her; they could not accept her daughter being married to an already married professor. All the relation from her family seems to be cold and barren to Virmati. She realizes that all the bound between her family is broke whereas in the family of the professor's she found aloof. She wonders about herself and her quests inside her own mind,

Am I free, I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. (142)

Kapur, has successfully picturized the wavering mind set of Virmati and her conflict of mind and body. According to her, body always won and mind defeat. For the secret of her identity, most of the time, she has willingly or unwillingly safe guarded her body. She cries silently. In every phase of her life she supposes to overcome the burden to attain her own interest in life. It is because of the lack of self awareness and bound with filial love. She allows the professor to use herself and thrown her away. She knows being a second wife is not a reputed one but she need to survive in the society as a wife of the professor. And her aspiration for getting identity wiped off because of her foolishness in the life.

Ida, on the other hand want to be her mother's polar opposite. Her marriage too is not a successful one she got divorced shortly after her marriage. But she does not want to tie herself in the useless tradition bound society. She wants to prove herself in the patriarchal society. She blamed her mother for her failure in marital relationship when she came to attend her mother's funeral, she recollect the words of her mother who's craving for attaining individuality in the society. Virmati's saga of quest for identity and aspirations in the life finally quenched with her eventual tragic and extinguished in the funeral pyre. Standing before the cremation, Ida recollects her memory, absorbing her past and reminds her mother's noble wish,

When I die... I want my body donated. My eyes, My heart, My kidneys, My organ that can be of use. That way someone will value me after I have gone. When I die, I want no shor-shaar. I don't want a chanth, I don't want an uthala, I want no one called, no one informed. (1)

Though by this noble wish, Virmati want to attain the admiration and individuality and wanted to keep it in the funeral fire and the honor and identity which she could not earn in her life time both by her family and society.

She lost her dignity in the family and fails to secure her parental love for marrying the already married professor without the consent of her family. Meanwhile, in the house of Harish, she seems to be an outsider. She is compelled to live a life of compromise with her ideals and there too lost her self esteem. The continuation of her education feeds no more dream of independence. In order to gain her education she lost her self thought. In order to gain her self-respect and individuality in the society as educated women she lost her pride, dignity in her valuable family. Thus she fails to create a space for herself, for which she has been striving for all long; she lost the already secured space too. Every moment and the future stand to be an unpredictable to her life.

Difficult Daughters' successfully recreates India's painful passage into a new world. This world is interwoven with Virmati's story of rebellion and her quest for identity. It shows how filial love and affection could be replaced by hate and bitterness. It also portrays, mother the epitome of sacrifice as a symbol of selfishness and resentment to her children. Every human being is in the pursuit of craving

one's own identity. It is not a bed of rose, all sorts of struggles and obstacles stand in the way. One has to be overcome all this and reach the ultimate goal. No one can determine the destiny. At times the destiny may not be fruitful as the plan, but everything has to be accepted as it comes. That has become the fate of women folk. No matter whatever circumstances one may face, one must be able to distinguish what is good and bad and its consequences. As Virmati lacked this notion her life proved to be a failure. She was able to fulfill her desires after struggles and conflicts only to a certain extent.

Virmati's life is not worth the struggle she underwent. Throughout she fights to get what she wanted. She has the will to fight too, despite the hurdles. This world belongs to men and so the wishes of women are secondary world has always belonged to men and is still in their hands. The real reins of the world have never been in woman's hands. They have no role neither in the society nor in the family. Manju Kapur through her novel *Difficult Daughters* depicts the struggle for women to get their identity.

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