

TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN MANJUKAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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Abstract

Manjukapur is one of the most influential women novelists of current Indian literary area. Her novels seek to explore the condition of women in modern India. She portrays the marginalization of women in all aspects of life and projects the jeopardy caused by the all pervasive patriarchal system in our Indian society. Manjukapur's first novel the *Difficult Daughters* was set in the turbulence of historical partition in 1947. The story happens in Amritsar and Lahore; and deals with the issues like women education and women emancipation. This paper investigates Manjukapur's portrayal of the psyche of Indian women in a joint family, in a patriarchy dominated condition. She exposes the multidimensional experiences of female characters and their various crisis. The female characters Kasturi, Virmati and Ida; live in a conventional patriarchal world and were taught to believe that marriage is the ultimate destiny of a woman. Shakuntala, Swarnalatha and Ida are the female characters Kapur presents as the modern woman with an ardent zeal to establish the self identity and resist the all the imposed gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Marginalization patriarchy oppression self identity.

India has rich tradition of ancient tales and stories. The portrayal of women in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone tremendous changes. Women are no longer presented as passive characters. Manjukapur's novels raise strong protest against the male dominated Indian society. Manjukapur's novel portrays the new, Indian women's voice. A "New woman" in search of self-identity seeks liberation in all walks of life and challenges the traditional image of Indian woman. In her first novel *Difficult Daughters* it is very much evident that a stereotypical woman character is transformed into "New Woman" by questioning the traditional gender role imposed on Indian woman.

Manjukapur projects a new vision of Indian woman in her novel, *Difficult Daughters*. She denounces the persistence of traditional idea that marriage is essential destination for woman. She depicts deliberately the character of two girls of two different attitudes. In her novel *Difficult Daughters*, she portrays a woman of traditional new modern outlook. Virmati, protagonist of *Difficult Daughters* represents the former category and Shakuntala, her Cousin in an example of the later category. Manjukapur draws a strong contrast between these two women characters.

Manjukapur projects the marginalization of women in this novel and explicates this state with Kasturi. Kasturi gives birth to eleven children, which makes her health weak and imbalance. Her husband does not take care or consider her health. She is denied of enjoying equal rights so, she is thrown into a situation where she cannot reject giving multiple births. She does not get a chance to speak about equal rights to her husband, Virmati gets pregnant by Harish. She is the second wife of Harish. He compels her to abort the child. She loses her respect and position at every stage but struggles to make space for herself on her own. Her rebellious attitudes fade whenever, it has to be strong to refute the professor's sexual oppression. "The professor's desire to possess (Virmati) had entered to her heart and mind" (D.D. 15)

Virmati, like her mother treats her daughter Ida with the strict patriarchal norms. She fails to be an understanding mother of Ida. This forces Ida to suffer from being independent. Ida being daughter of Virmati, fights for her identity, dignity and self-confidence which Virmati also lacked. She rejects the family norms and male dominated society. Ida becomes a typical daughter of Virmati. Virmati's life pressure of domestic duties and mother's restrictions observation of social institutions like family and economy being characterized by male dominance is evident through certain instances in the novel. Women like Kasturi were seen to be suffering from the economic and socio-cultural disadvantages, in the male governed society. "The patriarchal process of naturalization and normalization of unjust social norms leading to the subjection of women amply visible in the traditional gender role assigned to them in various conventions of family life" (D.D.P.4)

The society was patronized by particularly people like Virmati were deprived of their basic rights and aspirations to ascertain their individuality and self-reliance. The differential attitude between Harish and Ganga makes their match totally inharmonious. Harish is a progressive husband and wishes to have a good intellectual companion. Ganga is negligent in studies and suffers from lack of awareness where as Virmati is an intellectual woman whom Harish wishes for and becomes Harish's second wife. Virmati's passion for learning attracted Harish. "Virmathi too dreamt" education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges" (D.D.15)

Harish represents the patriarchal society. His dominant role oppresses virmathi. He compels her to abort their Baby. The unequal and oppressed role of woman can be observed in Virmati when she suffers loveless life through her mother and dominant life through her husband.

Virmati plays a prominent role in Manjukapur's *Difficult Daughters* by taking care of her family. Virmati becomes a second mother to her siblings. So, all the burden of the household work and raising younger sister and brothers conditions Virmati's susceptible childhood. She divides her time between helping her anemic mother with the house hold chores and her studies. She yearns to lead a cheerful life and aspires to become an independent woman in her life. Virmati is understood by the readers as a strong woman who struggles to establish her identity. In the process of her realization of a "New woman" her abilities to lead an independent life is questioned by dominant men power.

Shakuntala, a cousin of Virmati leads an independent life in "Lahore". Her way of dressing, life style, and activities disturbs Virmati and Virmati strongly decides to lead an independent life. Shakuntala's visit plants the seed of independence in Virmati. She wants to live like Shakuntala. Virmati gets caught between traditional and modern way of life. "Manjukapur articulates the nature of female desire in *Difficult Daughters* she subverts the rigid social gender norms and explores her protagonists struggle for self identity and self determination" (D.D.18).

Shakuntala encourages Virmati to be independent and encourages her to demand equal rights for woman thus epitomizing the post colonial emancipated "New woman" New woman breaks the customs of traditional bound society. Since the establishment of the society, woman is empowered based on social security, political awareness and economic tradition. Shakuntala has leadership quality to lead

her own life. Manjukapur portrays Shakuntala a rational character imparts her feminist attitudes and ideology of life to Virmati. Virmati wishes to become one such new woman but Ida is the one who really becomes such.

Kasturi, mother of Virmati follows the ancient rules and accepts patriarchal dominance without retaliation so, there is a long debate between Kasturi and Virmati regarding marriage and study, Virmati and Shakuntala break the old customs and traditions of family. Virmati is impelled by the inner need to find love as an 'individual' rather than as a responsible daughter. They want to be a modern woman. The world is full of love, affection, selfless devotion and all that is soft and sweet and noble in human nature. All the time Virmati yearned for sign of affection which she would treasure ever. However when she put her head next to the youngest baby fed in her love, affection and wants her mother to love her and understand her thoroughly.

All the children yearn for affection from their parents when such emotions are not shared their feelings, passions, enthusiasm will create a complex which lead them to search someone else. Virmati finds answer for all in Harish and falls in love with a married man. Manjukapur's novel reveals the life of woman, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival through sensitive portrayal of three generations of women and their problems. In *Difficult Daughters* feminist learnings can be a little sensuous at the outset through the portrayal of Shakuntala and Virmati who make their own choices in life, only with Virmati's death is the ghost laid to rest and Ida becomes free to lead her own life, no longer threatened by the shadow of her mother. *Difficult Daughters*, portrays issues of a female protagonist whose private emotions struggles through domestically and academia so blatantly and the political tensions that surround her. "By thus probing daughter – family relations, Virmati's story retracts the divisions between mothers and daughters as correlations for the political position in the country at large. Virmati in her wrangling with tradition and authority reflects the turmoil in the public political world, though she is also positioned, paradoxically, as peripheral to national debates. Daughterhood signals "difficulty" therefore, not only in so far as it denotes rebelliousness, but do because daughterhood traditionally subordinate and dependent – itself represents a difficult or painful position.

Neither Virmati treads comfortably on the path of political struggle or academic life. She is constantly blocked by Harish's incessant interferences. It is nevertheless remarkable that Manjukapur deliberately chooses two female figures – Shakuntala and Swarnalata involved in non-violent activism against British occupation and who will exert a definite influence on their development as an individual. Virmati is criticised by her in-laws and deeply hated by Ganga, her husband's first wife, who bears a permanent grudge against Virmati's prospective role as a wife, not allowing her to pursue her studies without hindrance becomes her additional burden.

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