

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

THE PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on predicament of women in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Prize for First Novels (Eurasia Section) and was a number one bestseller in India. This study primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class women. The female protagonists of her novels protest against male domination and the marginalization of woman. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification but never has he desired to elevate her to higher position in society.

Key Words: Predicament, marginalization, identity

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INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Prize for First Novels (Eurasia Section) and was a number one bestseller in India. The novel focuses on the struggle of an educated young woman against the norms of a family that cherishes old values of arranged marriage. It is thus the search of the protagonist for self determination and selfhood. The political and social issues are effectively woven in the story with the issues regarding women, education versus marriage. It's the story of 20th century Punjabi family deals with the longing struggle of women to create a space. The novel revolves around the central character or protagonist Virmati. The novel depicts two types of women, Kasturi and Ganga as traditional and Shakuntala and Suwarnalata as modern. The novelist depicts the story of a young woman, named Virmati born in Amritsar into an austere and high minded household. Virmati is torn

between family duties, the desire for education and elicit love. In this novel Kapur projects the problem of women's education. Virmati's mother Kasturi never bothered about her education. Virmati's grandfather thinks that basic education is necessary for girls. But he too agrees with the societal norms that higher education should be prohibited for girls. So Virmati rebels against her mother to do higher education, which reveal her rebellious character. Kothari says "Her rebellion against her traditional Arya Samaj family in postponing her marriage and then refusing to marry the person she was engaged to, suggest a radical rebellious act, and provokes the reader to assume that she will succeed in carving out a niche herself" (106). As a woman, she never gets affection, love, care and attention from her mother which she expects as a child.

Her predicament begins when Virmati falls in love with a married Professor Harish Chandra, who is returned from Oxford and lives as a tenant in

her aunt's home with his family. His deep love with Virmati makes the matter so worst. She even decides to commit suicide by drowning herself in the canal but is fortunately rescued by the servants. Harish succeeds in providing her a false feeling of woman's liberation. She tries to alienate herself from the professor but his constant attempts at reconciliation leads to physical intimacy between them and as a result she becomes pregnant. Virmati has no other alternative but to go in for an abortion with the help of her roommate Swarnalatha. This incident further aggravates her agony because she wants to achieve something meaningful in life but hopelessly wavers between her practicality and emotional dependence on Harish. Virmati, fights for her rights at every stage of her life. She successfully manages her situations in moments of crisis.

Kapur portrays how women suffer after marriage. When Virmati marries Harish she is unwelcomed by his family members as well as her husband's family. Harish first wife Ganga and his mother Kishori Devi treat her in bad manner. Virmati later realize that "I should never have married you ... and it's too late now. I've never seen it so clearly. It's not fair." (212) Virmati's marriage with Harish makes her proud, but she fails to secure any space for herself in his family, "She wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life."(215). When she becomes pregnant her mother-in-law takes care of her, but, unfortunately she suffers a miscarriage and this incident further aggravates her agony, so Harish sends Virmati to Lahore to study M.A which will bring her out of her depression from that incident. Virmati realized that even her voice is gone after marriage, when Harish wants her by his side she does not think of education but when he thinks that she must pursue studies further, she does it without raising her voice. Unknowingly she has become a puppet in his hands.

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification but never has he desired to elevate her to higher position in society. When Virmati give birth to Ida, she suggests that her daughter to called Bharati but her husband named the child Ida, a Persian name. Virmati seems to have a distress feeling that she is not given the importance which she deserves. Kapur has

portrayed the protagonist as a woman caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. Under the shades of a friend Swarnalata, she joins in freedom struggle movement and attends the Punjab Women's Student Conference.

Virmati faced many problems like abortion before her marriage and after marriage Similarly Ida, Virmati's daughter is also forced for abortion by her husband and it resulted into trauma of divorce. Kapur presents the existential predicaments of women and their identity crises, aspiration, frustration when they try to achieve self identity in life. In this novel kapur shows that protagonist Virmati, her mother Kasturi and daughter Ida as difficult daughters and other minor characters like Shakuntala, Swarnalata also consider as difficult daughters. Christopher Rollason writes, The pages of Difficult Daughter speak not only of Virmati, but of other 'difficult daughters', who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggles for independence in their lives. At the centre of the narrative, we confronted with a woman who fights but falls by the wayside; but at its edges, as its no doubts less representative but still symbolic figures, we encounter-as will be seen below-other women, whose relative success points the way to the future(Rollason,3).

As Virmati grows up, rebelling against her mother Kasturi, on the same trodden path, Ida too grows up rebelling against her mother Virmati. So she also turns out be a 'difficult daughter' like her mother. After Virmati's death, her longing for the admiration and she wanted to keep her own identity safe on funeral fire. The respect and honour which she could not earn in her lifetime from both the family members, society and now after death she received full respect and honour. Ida stands before her mother funeral pyre and revives her memory, into her past, she tells Ida that, "When I die ... I want my body donated. My eyes, my heart, my kidneys, any organ that can be of use. That way someone will value me after I have gone." (1).

Ida goes to Amritsar and other places to meet her friends and neighbors to search the past of her mother. She is haunted by the memories of her

late mother, her quest for identity begins when she search her mother. She begins it with a rebellion proclaiming that she would not be like her mother but as the story unravels she finds herself identifying with her mother. Her search that started as alienation ends up in complete identification. She understands that "adjusts, compromise and adapt."(256) is the real female inheritance that she has to adopt from her mother.

Kapur presents three generations of women suffering and their problems and unforgettable picture of the evolution of the Indian women's. It starts from the Pre-Independence period through the Independence gear up to the time of the Post-Independence. The story tells the tale not only of Virmati but of other difficult daughters who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggle for independence in their lives. To end, *Difficult Daughters* gives us the autobiographical life of Virmati who is shown as a strong, independent and an ambitious lady. At the end of the novel, she says:

This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore. (280).

Conclusion

The novel evokes the problem of women in male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix. Woman proves her strength through her suffering. Manju kapur's through her protagonist reveals the life of women, and their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival, who struggle to throw off the burden of inhibitions she has carried for ages. They crave for self-sufficiency and separate identity. Kapur's protagonists are mostly educated. Virmati's education leads her independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant. Her struggle between tradition and modernity, encourage them to plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as an ideal woman. Kapur, being a novelist primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class, her female protagonists of her novels protest against the marginalization of woman. Thus, Kapur

attempts to deal with the difficulties in the lives of Indian women by exploring major issues and roles of women in her novels.

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