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## MARITAL RIFT IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

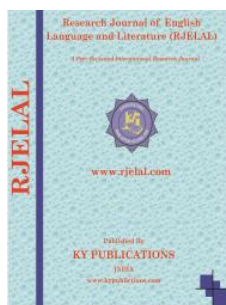
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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary society one of the latest burning issues is, various crisis in the family. Today both men and women adhere to free modern life style and so they hate to live under marital roof. Both are also conscious of their personal salvation and individuality, so to attain an independent status they shatter the marital norms and run to seek their roots. In this way, the main intention of this conceptual paper is to bring out how Manju Kapur, an outstanding Indian literary writer has brought out the issue of today's marriage, with particular reference to her novel *Difficult Daughters*.

Manju Kapur is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. Her protagonists find themselves entrapped in the roles assigned to them by society, but achieve self-identity and independence within the confines of their marriage. The present study, based on the select novel of Manju Kapur deals with the complexities of man woman relationship especially in the context of marriage, the trauma of disturbed adolescence with reference to five novel of *Difficult Daughters*. Marriage is a central theme in all her fictional works. Kapur's every novel opens with a live discussion on marriage - the topmost significant issue in the life of the female protagonist.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Marriage, Family, Crisis, Individuality

Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar, a town in the northern Indian state of Punjab in 1948. She completed her Bachelor of Arts from Miranda House University College for women. She earned her M.A. from Dalhousie University in Canada and she further did M. Phil from Delhi University. She is currently a professor of English in Miranda House, an Arts and Science College for Women under University of Delhi. Her novels are about women living a life of marginality.

The theme of marriage holds a great fascination for Manju Kapur. The theme of marital

discord in Manju Kapur's novels reveals her consummate craftsmanship. She sincerely broods over the fate and future of modern women particularly in male-chauvinistic society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. The novelist, however, does not challenge the futility of marriage as an institution but discloses the inner psyche of the characters through their relations. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* is about three generations in a single family. The novel is about a search for identity in a different environment as Sudha Shree contends, "Manju Kapur deals with the theme of

travails and self identity vis-a-vis socio-cultural identity in *Difficult daughters*" (Sudha Shree 165).

*Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and her longing for education, affection, and freedom. There are different perspectives between the female characters about their exciting culture and norms. When Kasthuri, the mother of the protagonist, Virmati, compels her daughter to accept the marriage as a traditional norm, Virmati refuses to accept it; instead she seeks knowledge. The narrator of the novel, Ida, is Virmati's daughter. Through her voice the novelist distinguishes the women from three generations. Manju Kapur takes Virmati as a weapon of her writings and through her she highlights of marginalization suffered by women who are primarily concerned about their individuality and dignity.

#### **Marital Rift in Kasturi's Life Journey**

Kasturi is Virmati's mother. She is repeatedly reminded that she is born to work and please her in-laws. Since her school days, "...it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued at home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by impeccable nature of her daughter's qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws (Kapur 58). She has been described in the novel as a mother whose duty is to give birth to children as many as she can.

When Kasturi gets married, she becomes the victim of this unrestricted birth. She is married in a traditional family. She gives birth to six daughters and five sons against her wishes, "There had been eleven of them. The girls: Virmati, Indumati, Gunvati, Hemavati, Vidyavati and Parvati. The Boys: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishanath, Prakasnath, and Hiranath" (Kapur 4). When she is going to give birth to eleventh child; her pregnancy symptoms were like an anemic, mal-nutritional and restless women, "For the eleventh time it had started, the heaviness in her belly, morning and evening nausea, bile in her throat while eating, hair falling out in clumps, giddiness when she got up suddenly. How trapped could nature make a woman" (Kapur 7)?

She all the time prays to god to abort this child and aspires not to get pregnant ever in her life, "Her sandhya started and ended with this plea that somehow she should drop the child she was carrying and never conceive again" (Kapur 7). During her gestation period she is not free from her other children and due to strenuous schedule she feels always exhausted, "Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache" (Kapur 7). When Kasturi delivered her eleventh baby, she was not allowed to take proper rest. Thus Kasturi life is fully ramshackle with the rift in her marriage.

#### **Marital Rift in Virmati's Life Journey**

Virmati life is not much better than her mother, Kasturi. Virmati's parents are also hasty for her marriage like her mother. She remarks, "They want nothing from me but an agreement to marry" (Kapur 100). Women in that time were made to think of nothing else but marriage and that's why marriage becomes a problem in her life also. Her mother is always worried about her marriage and she does not understand her mental turmoil. Her mother fails to understand that Virmati is a very sincere girl since her childhood who has her self-respect. She is the real mother for her siblings whom she takes care when her mother gets aside from her duties after giving them birth. It is only Virmati who tends them. Virmati was the eldest of Kasturi's all children. So her role in the family is less of a child, a sister and more of a mother. Her mother wanted Virmati to do something all the time for her siblings and this habit of her mother irked her. She at such occasion gives a flat refusal to her mother. She is a girl of high aspirations. When she is thirteen years old and her mother was ill at Dalhousie, she comes to know the independent life of her cousin Shakuntla and she is then motivated to live a new life for her like Shakuntala. After that she makes good future plans for her life, "First FA, then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage she went for an M.A. to Government College, Lahore; you know-very good college, not like now a day. The Oxford of the Earth they call it" (Kapur 5).

Thus Virmati proves a difficult daughter in this novel as she does not follow her parent's advice

and tries to find a different avenue for her, "It is only Virmati who is the difficult daughter in the prosperous merchant family of Lala Diwan Chand. While in the generation of Kasturi, woman's role was confined to childbearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women. When she wants to go to Lahore like her cousin Shakuntla, at this Shakuntla says, 'Arre', exclaiming her cousin patting her on the back, 'times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, why not you' (Kapur 18). Virmati tells her mother that she wants to go to Lahore for higher studies; then her mother Kasturi reproaches her saying, "When I was your age, girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age..." (Kapur 111).

In Amritsar, a Professor of English comes to live as a tenant at her aunt's house with his wife. The professor has been married with his uneducated wife in his childhood. When she goes to college, this professor falls in love with her, and he gradually keeps a full control on her heart and mind. Virmati, even knowing that he is already married, fails to deny him as Sudha Shree contends, "She reciprocates the infatuation and love of the Charming Professor, for she, who was, tuned to neediness, reciprocated to the professor's need" (Sudha Shree 165).

Virmati turns down the marriage proposal of Inderjit, a Canal Engineer. But she dares not tell it to her mother, Virmati's contact with the English professor named Harish Chandra brings a turning point in her life. Virmati listens his lectures with rapt attention. She rebels against her family to get her love. Virmati is deeply in love with Professor and refuses to marry Inderjit. She tries to end her life by drowning. Ultimately she shifts to Lahore. But this professor is a great manipulator. He is not satisfied with his previous wife as she is not educated like him. Another thing is that their thoughts don't match. He does not accept Virmati socially and keeps continuing his illicit relationships with her. Virmati is now a highly educated woman and gets a job in a girls' school as a headmistress run by an enlightened maharaja. This is the happiest period in Virmati's life.

Virmati hates this kind of life and takes refuse in Shanti Niketan to save herself from professor's tortures. But professor understands the demand of time and he hastily marries her. Then Virmati becomes his bride and now finds some solace as she considers herself a part of society by wearing red bangles like other girls when they get married, "The only thing she said she wanted were the red ivory bangles that the women of her family wore when they married" (Kapur 186). But this marriage leaves her more disturbed, disposed, dissatisfied and perplexed. "Though married, she was dispossessed. Well so be it. She would walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had carved out for her" (Kapur 196).

Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not married Harish, "I should never had married you" (Kapur 212). She is accepted now neither in her own home nor in her husband's home. The step-wife/co-wife does not allow her into the kitchen or to do household jobs of carrying for family members. The mother beats her up and abuses her, when she attempts to come home and visits her sibling" (Sudha Shree 166). She is considered a woman of nowhere: she is neither accepted in her husband's home nor in her parental home. Even at the time of death of her father, she is not allowed to cross the threshold of the house while the son-in-law is warmly welcomed. Thus she is forgiven by none and she has to suffer a lot by her own mistake, "She realizes she isn't forgiven by the maternal and paternal family for the mistake of trying to put her own needs first above others' need" (Sudha Shree 166)

Virmati's and Kapuri's unsuccessful married life can be compared to Astha Vadera who has done M. A. in English. The novel is related to her life and she gets a loving and caring husband and better surroundings to live in Delhi. Her husband is a businessman who sells South Korean TV sets. She starts teaching in a school to run her home just after her marriage and she has to get up early in the morning. She has to complete her official duties as well as domestic duties. She develops headache and has to undergo an operation. She is hospitalized for four days. Her husband is dissatisfied from his life and his boss. He often comes home late and Astha

keeps on waiting to spend some time with him., Not only this her husband, Hemant expects a boy from her and he tells her that he would not stop until he gets a boy as his son, "But Hemant's desire is to have a son and his insistence that he would not stop until he has one makes Astha dissatisfied and uneasy. She cannot fathom her man" (Kapur MW 61). "When Astha's son was finally born she was felt a gratitude as profound as it was shamed...Her status rose...She was fulfilled" (Kapur MW 68). They both are so busy in their lives that each complains to other not to have time for him/her and thus live a dissatisfied and like-incomplete life.

In the novel the women are found at marginality level in the society. This novel does not approach the women of a family or a single state of Punjab; rather it has wide dimensions. Kasturi, Virmati, Astha or Ida are victimized of the rotten-rules of the patriarchal society. Kasturi's role of a procreation tool and Virmati's position of a dispossessed emerges the key theme of this novel and Ida's role strengthens the mother-daughters relationships though outwardly she does not want to follow her footsteps. While reading the novel one gets the impression that a woman's life is like the life of a nation which is passing through various Trials and tribulations. "Thus *Difficult Daughters* represents the turmoil of a woman who tries to overcome her cultural identity and forges 'a self identity', an attempt which leaves a woman hard-hearted and dissolute.

The protagonists of Kapur enter into marriage with the hope that the marriage would provide them respect security and status in the society, unfortunately, they get disappointed and subsequently disillusioned. But at the end of each novel, Kapur makes her protagonists ready to face the reality. Her women neither seek divorce nor commit suicide in spite of their trauma and plight of their married life. But in this novel, Virmati and Ida emerge ultimately as strong women who claim and achieve independence. They learn to live harmoniously in society neglecting neither the family relations nor the modern aspirations for autonomous self.

"A great marriage is not when the 'perfect couple' comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences."-Dave Meurer

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