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Marginal condition of Virmati in Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters'

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Abstract

Manju Kapur deals with the position of woman as a daughter, a wife and a mother. All her female protagonists hailing from middle class status challenge the existing socio-cultural patriarchal system. Manju Kapur as a writer of new generation, have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. Her novels depict human relationship in a new light, she presents mother-daughter relationship, sister-sister relationship brother-sister relationship, and man-woman (husband-wife) relationship. Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughter' is set in a socio-political framework with reference to the turbulent events of pre-independent India in the 1940's. The main concern of Manju Kapur is to present the character of Virmati, an assertive and bold woman based on patriarchal culture and the relationship between Virmati and Professor Harish a married bachelor with two children. The novel characteristically opens with the frank declaration of the narrator daughter named 'Ida' meaning a 'new slate' and a blank beginning. Throughout in the novel Ida's declaration echoes that she does not want to be like her mother.

Keywords: subjugated, marginalised, suppressed, subordinated, patriarchal

Introduction

Indian writers both male and female have significantly contributed in the recent past through their masterpiece novels and other literary creations. Indian English literature has been enriched by various women novelist. They have portrayed the predicaments and conflicts of the contemporary Indian women. In the course of presenting the plights of these women, these women novelists have attempted to analyse the socio-cultural modes and values.

Manju Kapur is one of the most distinguished Indian writers of the contemporary times. She has created her own place in the galaxy of the Indian women writers with her master piece of writing. She is one of the leading woman novelists of the modern era in Indian English literature. She has successfully presented the problem of Indian women in a joint family in male dominated society like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. Through her novels Manju Kapur tries to portray the struggle of Indian women of the present time as they move between tradition and transition, duty and desire, family and self, suppression and independence. Her novels are the Saga which successfully treads through the complex terrain of family, society and relationships. She has beautifully presented the women's problems and the challenges they have to face in their personal religious and socio-political levels.

Manju Kapur deals with the position of woman as a daughter, a wife and a mother. Being a writer of new generation Manju Kapur has depicted the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more brunts and social ostracism. The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society is reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Her novels create a space where the issue of women and modernity can be discussed openly.

Her first novel 'Difficult Daughter's' is set against the historical background of Indian partition. It is debut novel of Manju Kapur. It has won the prestigious Commonwealth writers prize for Best First Book (Eurasia Region) in 1999. The novel covers the different issues of life which emerges in the life of a middle class. Manju Kapur has tried to evolve the impact of patriarchy on the Indian society. The novel has partly based on the life of Kapur's own mother.

"Difficult Daughter's" discusses the life history of the heroine Virmati and the history of Indian politics. The theme of partition is the prominent theme of the novel.

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The trauma, agonies of partition has been presented in number of novels written in that period. Manju Kapur also planned to entitle her novel as 'Partition' but due to the pressure of the publishers, she had to change it as 'Difficult Daughters'. In this novel Manju Kapur has referred the word 'Partition' in two senses.

'Difficult Daughters' is simple story told in an artistic manner to appeal the human emotions. This tale is full of grief and struggle, love and lust, compromise and defiance. This novel is the story of three generation with their values, mindsets and relationships. Kasturi, Virmati and Ida-grandmother- mother and granddaughter represent the three generation respectively. These three different generations represent the attitudinal changes with the passage of time. Virmati-- the difficult daughter belongs to the second generation. Kasturi --the grandmother Virmati's mother represents the total assimilation of conventions and acceptance of tradition. Ida, the only daughter of Virmati is representing the third-generation. She is a lady of total non-adjustment and disrobing and dismantling tradition.

The novel characteristically opens with the frank declaration of the narrator daughter, named 'Ida' meaning a new slate, and a blank beginning. Throughout the novel Ida's declaration echoes that she does not want to be like her mother-Virmati. Virmati, the central character of the novel is torn between familial duties, the desire for education and elicit love affair. The life of Virmati shows that more education and economic independence are not enough to break the patriarchal norms. Determination and strong will power are necessary to assert one's self- identity. She rebels against tradition and is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. The title of the novel 'Difficult Daughters' is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries to search her identity is labelled as difficult by the family as well as society.

Virmati is born in the simple and high minded Punjabi joint family. She is the eldest child of Suraj Prakash and Kasturi. They have ten children. Suraj Prakash and Kasturi represent two different ideologies. Suraj Prakash is of the progressive, revolutionary mind-set, whereas her mother is conservative, traditional woman. The family believes in Swami Dayanand Saraswati's ideology. Being an elder one, Virmati is told by her ever pregnant mother to look after her young siblings, to nourish all of them. Due to this Virmati could not enjoy her childhood as she has spent her entire childhood only looking after her younger siblings, yet she does not lose her heart and keeps her moral high for the further higher studies. It shows that she has been assigned the duty of the 'second mother'. She belongs to the typical traditional family conventionally bound to the age-old orthodox values where the basic qualification is only housekeeping. And after getting this basic qualification, a daughter has to get married. Education is no longer required for such an orthodox family. Virmati's conservative minded mother Kasturi pressurises her to get married and she is now expert in the household duties.

Virmati wants to be free like a bird to fly in the open sky. She fights against the conventional male dominance in the society. Sanjay Kumar says:" on the surface though Virmati seems to represent the women of 1950 who, in a patriarchal society of that period were subjugated to manmade injustice and indignities". Virmati wants to enjoy the free life like her cousin Shakuntala. She is M.Sc. in chemistry and working at Lahore -"The Oxford of the East".

She is vibrant sophisticated and intelligent independent girl. Once Shakuntala visits her aunt's house and she influences Virmati. In Shakuntala's company Virmati realises the importance of the freedom. They both used to talk on the subjects like education and freedom. Shakuntala advises her to continue her education. She says,

"Times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?"¹⁶

These words of Shakuntala planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. She wants to be free like Shakuntala.

Virmati is engaged at the age of seventeen with a canal engineer-- Indrajeet. She cannot oppose her mother and accept this marriage proposal submissively as a normal event of a girl's life. But when she meets her cousin and hears her, she wants to break the shackles of the society in which she is living and wants to be free. Suddenly a twist comes in her life when she falls in love with an Oxford returned Professor of English, Harish who is a tenant of her parents and living with his family. He inspires Virmati for higher studies and appreciates her beauty and intelligence. Virmati lost in the whirlpool of the misplaced passion for the Professor Harish. Harish encourages her to take higher education. She is ready to sacrifice everything for continuing higher education even the principles of the male dominated society also.

The major part of the novel deals with the problems of Virmati as a difficult daughter for her parents. Her life is in difficulty standing between "education versus marriage". When she passes her F.A. exam, she denies to marry with Indrajeeth. When there was a death in Indrajeet's family and their marriage was postponed for two years, it is a golden chance for Virmati to continue her education. Virmati is mentally disturbed and drowns herself in a strong current of water. But fortunately, she is saved by the servants of her grandfather. The reason behind her suicide is that she does not like Indrajeet and wants to study further.

For higher education Virmati come to Lahore to prove herself, to widen her horizon. But instead of doing all these constructive things, Virmati involves in useless love, doubtful marriage and ultimately to the unwed pregnancy. The intimate relationship with Harish makes Virmati pregnant. All the time she asks him when they will marry, every time Harish very cleverly denies her proposal. When she comes to know that unmarried mother will not be accepted by the society, she decides to abort the child with the help of her roommate Swarnlata. She falls a victim of Harish false love, he betrays her she holds him responsible for whatever she has suffered in her life.

After returning from Lahore, she is offered a job of headmistress in girls school at Nahan, the capital of Sirmaur. There she gets respect and economic independence. She is enjoying her life forgetting the past. But here also Harish come and stay with her. A lady staying with a man without formal marriage is not tolerate by the management and they dismiss her from the job. On her way back to home, at Delhi, she happens to meet a close friend of Harish and narrate the entire story. He arranges all the rituals of sacred marriage of Virmati and Harish. He returns home with his 'new' wife. But at home, Virmati is not welcomed happily. She is denied the status of a' wife. 'Ganga, Harish's first wife does not allow her to prepare food and all the things in her home. So, the angry Virmati raises her concerns and ask Harish:

"And what? As your wife, am I to do nothing for you? just

be in your bed?"²²⁷

All this shows that, Virmati is marginalised, subordinated, suppressed in her own family. Her individual existence is not approved by the other members of the society. She is just like an outsider for them all. This 'otherness' 'outsider' status creates the feeling of frustration, subordination, subjugation in her mind. She doesn't only difficult daughter but difficult daughter- in- law also.

After her marriage with Harish, first time she goes her parental house but nobody pay attention to her. When she visits her parental house after the tragic assassination of her father Suraj Prakash, her mother does not heed at her. People says that she has killed her father. She wants to run away from the world of reality to the world of dreams. Nobody cares for her. She has done a lot to her family, for her siblings, mother. They all have now forgotten her sacrifices. Her mother curses her and calls are as 'badmash', 'randi '.

Conclusion

She is psychological shocked. She feels subordinated, subjugated, marginalized and suppressed at that every stage of life. Nobody is interested to understand her feelings, emotions. All these circumstances and the experiences she receives even at her parental as well as in- laws house compels her to feel as she is subordinated, marginalized. She, in short, feels subordinated though she is highly educated.

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