

A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF WOMEN DEFYING PATRIARCHAL NORMS IN MANJU KAPUR'S 'DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS'

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Abstract

In post-independence India, the archetypal image of woman is changing rapidly and now she is trying to lay claims for more space within the familial bonds. The problems of women in a patriarchal structure where men are the dominant sex, the cultural construction and social mechanism perpetuate gender inequality with reference to Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters*. It reflects various facets of the struggle of woman's autonomy. Kapur has vividly painted the sufferings of the patriarchal society. Simone De Beauvoir in her treatise, *The Second Sex* (1949-50) further nurtured the feminist ideology. The core idea of feminism is that women should have same rights, power and opportunity that men have since then women have actually been struggling to achieve a racial, social and economic equality with men. Feminism essentially fosters the idea of an egalitarian society where men and women are considered equal and the idea of male dominance is discarded. A major preoccupation in recent Indian Women's has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship. They have to merely exist subjected to the patriarchal system. Manju Kapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Her novel presents the yearning struggle of women to establish an identity. She has tried to make a space that women have to occupy in domestic relationships.

Keywords: Archetypal, Patriarchal, Mechanism, Autonomy, Treatise, Feminism, Egalitarian, Dominance, Preoccupation, Intuitively and Yearning.

Manju Kapur, born in Amritsar in 1947, graduated from Miranda House, did her M.A. from Dalhousie University (Halifax in Canada) and M.Phil from Delhi University. She taught English Literature at Miranda House Delhi for several years and now is retired from her job. At present she lives with her family in New Delhi with her husband Gun Nidhi Dalmia. She writes

about the middle class woman and her psychological problems she goes through her whole life. She has given us an unforgettable picture of the evolution of the Indian woman's psyche over time, starting from the pre-independence period through the independence era up to the time of the post-independence.

Virmati (*Difficult Daughters*) being a positive and courageous woman of the pre-independent India opposes the tradition of arranged marriage. Her education though brought in hope of living her own life within her traditional limitations make her fall in love with a married professor Harish. The compelling circumstances which has driven Virmati to be his second wife. Virmati represents a woman torn between age-old traditions, individual views and bonds. Later she restrains herself from the precipitous action of felling from the domestic seen. Though she felt these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning gradually learns to endure them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture her family ties. At a point time, her realization that it could be wise to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and not to lose her identity.

The education versus marriage argument is reiterated many times in the novel but when Virmati gets permission to study further, one is forced to accept that the changing times have brought more and better educational opportunities for women. The conflict intensifies when Virmati begins to assert her independence. Marriage was no longer a cherished goal for her. The story moves further bringing in the daughter of Virmati, Ida, who reflects the image of woman's condition but by denying being like her mother, acquires her own self-identity.

If Kasturi, grandmother of Ida remains to be within the boundaries of tradition, Virmati moves further to realize her limitations, while Ida, is a full blown individual who seeks her own identity unbiased by any fears of patriarchy. Virmati is a new woman of colonial India and stands as a metaphor to explore the possibilities for modern women in education and economic independence who experiences humiliation and disillusionment in their colonial matrix.' Manju Kapur has raised the 'question of women' during a political and social movement in colonial India

Difficult Daughters is a maiden venture of Kapur. It is written against the historical background of the Indian Freedom Movement. Kapur's protagonist Virmati is not only portrayed as a revolutionary woman who fights for her right to educate herself but as one who manages her situations in moments of crisis. The struggle for freedom from British, the quest for identity and the sense of oppression has become a shared experience both for the nation and for women in India. Like Kapur even Desai and Mukherjee in their novels, *Fasting, feasting* and *Jasmine* have presented search for identity, hypersensitive problems like suicide attempt and alienation and loneliness by the women characters on the way of their lives. At the same time, Shobha De, Baldwin, Shashi Deshpande and Kavary Nambhisan have presented the problems of women such as alienation and loneliness in their respective novels.

The central focus is on the futile attempts Virmati makes to succeed. Every time she rebels to liberate herself and aspires to live a freer life, she is condemned because of the incredulousness of her family and of the man whom she loves and later marries. Her protest against the conventions is strong and it starts with her wish to continue her education after she meets Shakuntala, whom she immediately takes as an exemplar. Whenever she breaks away from her old prison, she is locked into the new ones. To liberate her, she believes that education is the only means but falls prey to the Professor's snare. While her relationship with the Professor provides an escape from the loveless marriage, it is itself furtive and claustrophobic. When he refuses to marry her she realizes that, "Men do take advantage of women."(138).

Education is the only source she can turn to in all her crisis, as a solution to her problems. She finds refuge as the headmistress of a girl's school in the hill station of Sirmaur. For the first and the only time, she has her own space. Yet, by encouraging the secret visits of the Professor, she again entraps herself into the sexual oppression and once for all loses the chances of liberation and identity. She contaminates her life and loses a beautiful life of freedom and dignity.

Virmati's marriage with the Professor turns out to be disastrous. Though she becomes the second wife legally, she desperately struggles for self-assertion. Lack of love and humiliation from the family makes her steadfast to uphold her right to self-assertion through education at Lahore and through economic independence by becoming a teacher in a school at Nahan. When she slowly withstands and gets accustomed, she again suffers miscarriage. Once more, she finds consolation by pursuing M.A at Lahore. At the end, the partition of India ironically unites Virmati with Professor. More promisingly, she acquires her coveted place of the wife and mother at Delhi.

In her pursuit of identity, she loses it at every stage and struggles to make space for herself on her own. Her rebellious attitude fades whenever it has to be strong to refute the Professor's sexual oppression. She becomes submissive and passive under the patriarchal shelter.

Manju Kapur has presented a vivid portrayal of the women of 1940s and the events revolve around the backdrop of Indian Independence. Women's emancipation perhaps has its zenith now but in pre-independence era the fight for autonomy and freedom was a combat in its early stages. So, Virmati's attempt to succeed in her fight to assert herself is to be esteemed for though she failed, she has made an attempt. The endless vicissitudes of life make her a matured woman. She tramples and defies the patriarchal constraints and expectations to assert her identity and achieve self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life.

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