

QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is one of the most distinguished of the contemporary Indian women novelists writing in English. So far she published five novels: *Difficult Daughters* (1998) *A Married Woman* (2002) *Home* (2006) and her fourth novel *The Immigrant* (2009) and so far her last novel is “*Custody*” (2011).

The main objective of the paper is to analyse the ‘self’ identity in the fiction of Manju Kapur. ‘Self’ means something about me’. It is a psychological phenomenon. ‘I’ refers to something about ‘oneself’. The present paper aims at analyzing ‘oneself’ in the social scenario. Manju Kapur is closely observed the craving of woman for her identity. Her work expressed the plight of Indian woman in present scenario. *Difficult Daughters* reflects the struggle of woman for identity.

Difficult Daughters focuses on the woman’s need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, independence individuality and self-actualization. Located primarily in India of the 1940’s, Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence – independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and independence yearned after by a woman. Among the writers who have portrayed the ‘new woman’ who is inclined to take the ‘road not taken’, and walking on their ‘own road’, Manju Kapur undoubtedly arrests attention. Kapur says that she is interested in the lives of women, whether in the political arena or in domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupations in all her books is how women manage to negotiate both inner and outer spaces in their lives – what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home.

The woman today has her own quest for self-discovery and self-fulfillment. The male, as representative of the patriarchal society has, at last, been jerked off the centre of woman's gravitation. Woman is preparing now to be her own gravitational force, beyond the pull of patriarchy. Woman in contemporary society have become aware of the fact that the inferior position accorded to them is not pre-ordained. Women are trying to emancipate themselves from subordination. In this rapidly progressing world they are redefining their proper place. They have revolted against their exploitation, victimization and marginalization. They are questioning the sexual politics in which they are always victimized. They are busy reshaping themselves in a more humanistic mould, emphasizing thereby the need for a thorough re-examination in depth of marriage and man-woman relationship for a better understanding and sharing of mutual love and respect.

A woman is 'new' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman. Seen from this angle, even a rebel or a revolutionary woman cannot be called a 'new woman' on this account alone. The woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflect upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields.

The emergence of the 'New Woman' in Indian society and its concept in the Indian English novel has to be seen as a noticeable, if welcome, change. The significance of the woman awakening into a new world around her has not really made much difference in her realization of her place and position, in Indian society. But then, it is at least a new realization of her place and position, her individually and a sense of urgency about her rights as a human being. The early image of woman in Indian English Novel as a silent sufferer, an incarnation of patience and endurance, the main source of sustenance of Indian family life and culture, has gradually been eroded. The woman portrayed by the Indian women writers is a picture of an independent free-thinking individual claiming her life to be her own. She is no more seen as the compulsive victim of the social roles assigned to her of a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister complimenting the male in every role that she plays.

The Indian women novelists are blazing a new trail worldwide, winning critical acclaim and international recognition. Novelists like Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Bharti Mukherjee, Gita Mehta, Jhumpa Lahiri have been crowned with literary glory by winning international accolades and awards like the Bookers Prize, the commonwealth Writers Prize for Debut Novel, the National Book Critics Award and bookers Prize respectively. With English as a medium of expression, these novelists communicate with their own society as well as the global readers. These literary artists have succeeded in affirming their position and identity. Unlike the writers of yesteryears, today's women novelists are an interesting group of professionals, housewives, and mothers, yet a force to reckon with. The primary task of Indian Women novelists has been, to attempt an Nitasha Grewal, American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women but because, as Jaidev puts it she "has understood a woman both as a woman and as a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts". Kapur has taken profound insight into woman's inner turmoil to find a place, an identity and individuality of her own in society. For centuries, women are always back staged by patriarchal world.

The novel is the story of a young woman, named Virmati who is born in Amritsar into an austere and high minded household. She is an educated middle class girl expounds her rebellious ideas against this male-dominated society and tries to gain her identity. She experiences a journey to her inner self. She falls in love with a neighbour, the professor a man who is already married. This story tells how she is torn between family duties, the desire for education and illicit love. This is a story of sorrow, love & compromise. The novel spans three generations of women and unveils their sense of disillusionment. The three generation of women (Kasturi, Virmati and Ida) symbolize the three stages of Indian independence. Through these three female protagonists,

Manju Kapur has revealed the life circle of a woman who is devoted from beginning of her life. As a child, a girl has to do domestic, house hold activities [as Virmati does], after marriage, she has to bear pain to give birth to child [as Kasturi's condition is revealed after having 11 children] and after being mother, her whole life is dedicated to her whole family. Kasturi, the mother represents the pre-independence and is shown as a victim of the offensive control of patriarchy. Kasturi is being presented as an epitome of motherhood who bears pain and suffering. Virmati, the daughter, symbolizes the country's struggle for independence on macro level. Psychologically, she reveals her rebellious nature against deep-rooted conventions of morality especially for a girl. She undertakes her journey to the path leading to one's individuality but to her, it leaves in the midway with no achievement. Ida, Virmati's daughter is the product of post-independence era and establishes herself as an independent woman. She breaks up her marriage as she is denied maternity by her husband. The forced abortion is also the termination of her marriage. Ida by severing the marriage bond frees herself from male domination and power and also from conventional social structures which bind women. She has that strength which Virmati lacks. She starts her journey to find an insight into her mother's past, denies her and revolts against the ways and follies. A constant sufferer Virmati, nurses a desire of being as independent, defiant and assertive as her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala sows the seeds of freedom in Virmati. She symbolizes modernity as not following the conventional norms which limits daughter to an early marriage and then home and family. She encourages her for independence and for equal rights for women, thus epitomizing the post-colonial emancipated „New Woman“. New woman breaks the customs of the tradition bound society. Since the establishment of the society, woman is divided social security, political awareness, and economic liberation.

Kasturi is an example of the typical feminine attitude—to procreate in order to bring about life and pleasure. To run her home, first a joint family and later her own, is happiness for her. Like Kasturi, for Ganga the Professor's wife, marriage is a religious and a social institution, where love is not the basis of marriage. She too has a superb domestic sensibility. However in Virmati, there is a struggle between the head and the heart, the physical and moral; Virmati gives way to her heart and body. Whereas Swarna Lata, Virmati's friend, is a clearheaded, strong woman. She too experiences tension with her parents over the issue of marriage but unlike Virmati she channelizes her energy into a new direction which gives her a sense of group identity.

Through Ida's admiration for Swarnalata, who enters into a wider sociopolitical sphere, the novelist seems to be saying that a woman can maintain her individuality and pursue her interest without threatening the family structures. Thus a woman should basically strive towards a fine interdependent partnership in *Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughter's* imaginative mediation

between the traditional forces of Indian Patriarchal joint family system and the new demands of modernity. They further seek to reconstruct the socio-cultural values from a women's view point. Among the writers who have portrayed the "new woman" who is inclined to take the 'road not taken', and walking on their 'on road', Manju Kapur undoubtedly arrests attention. She is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* received huge international acclaim. This novel was published in 1998. It was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the best first book (Eurasia) and was a number one best seller in India.

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