

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*: A Realisation of Power Patriarchy

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Abstract: It is clear that the predicament of women in the 21st century is mainly due to the patriarchal power politics of the male dominated Indian society. Manju Kapur, the Indian feminist writer through her path breaking novel *Difficult Daughters* redefines the traditional lines and morality code drawn by the male-dominated society in order to 'tame' women. The perseverance and courage with which *Virmati*, the central protagonist chooses to pursue her dream forms the main crux of the novel.

Key Words: Women, Patriarchy, Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, *Virmati*.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In Indian culture and heritage, individualism, quest for identity, protests and concepts of rebelliousness have often remained alien ideas, as far as women were concerned. Women were not supposed to raise voices against violence, already existing customs, rituals and superstitions. They are fated to subject themselves to the patriarchal system. Even the preceding Indian women novelists have portrayed women as the silent sufferers, the upholders of traditional values and ethics, women without identity, unfortunate human beings etc. Recently, by the influence of Western Radical Feminism, Indian women writers have brought incredible transformation in their works. They try to unveil the hidden patriarchal patterns and subjection in taboos and customs thus enlightening the womenfolk to rebel against their oppressive fate. A whole band of women novelists beginning with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Kamala Markandaya, Arundati Roy and many others have portrayed women being rebellious against their traditional role, breaking their silence, awakening with a sense of identity to raise their voices for their rights. Their female protagonists display a psychic transformation evolving gradually, from initiation of tradition, protest and advocacy of rights, to self-discovery. Their novels speak about dowry related problems, workplace harassment, early marriages, women's frustrations, refusals, and their role as mere sex objects. Thus, Indian women novelists identify the roots of the problems and illustrate it with examples i.e. through female protagonists and this awareness has led to the protest against the patriarchal structure.

By inculcating the features of Second Wave Feminism, Indian women novelists have explored mainly the female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. This struggle for an identity needs support from outside the family to enable women to survive. Another important issue treated by Indian feminist writers is the justification of women's material privatization in a complex ideological expressions attributed by India's cultural heritage. Female subjectivity is one of the most regressive elements in a male dominated society. The women long for love, dependency and the material and emotional comfort of fixed class identity. At the same time there is a deep desire for freedom, so she is torn between the two. Therefore the Indian women novelists draw the picture of female characters who oscillates between reason and desire, autonomy and dependent security, psychic and social identity. Indian radical feminism is trying to reveal the truth that, real 'woman' is absent in literature and culture, therefore the voice and image of the women should be heard and seen. Thus, the women novelists encapsulate the inner thoughts and desires of their female characters in their novels and portray the tragic experiences or self-imposed subordination of female protagonists. On the other hand, the language adopted acts like a sword that breaks all the traditional bondages. The interpretation of these novels provides ample occasions to defend women and protest against the patriarchal practices. These novels trace the patriarchal myths and tradition embedded in the fabric of every society thus providing the scope for a social revolution.

By analyzing Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* we can conclude that the ideology of power politics is dominated in the private and public spheres equally. Women have to confine themselves in the four walls of male supremacy. Feminist writers are on a quest to make women aware of their predicament as well as gather the strength to fight for their individual freedom. Patriarchal power structure is imprinted in the society therefore the task of change is more difficult. This study helps to throw light upon the contemporary feminist issues and enables women to unite and fight against discrimination through self assertion. They should realize that family acts as the chief agent of patriarchy and deconstruct the norms and laws that are mainly focused on male motives. There are various areas of private and public areas which should be explored. The contemporary issues must be discussed as the continuation of this feminist point of view.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: Manju Kapur : An Indian Feminist

Manju Kapur a remarkable women writer in India has presented a vivid portrayal of the women of 1940 s and the events revolve around the backdrop of Indian Independence. Her novels deeply analyse the image of the suffering yet stoic women who succeeds in breaking traditional bondages. Kapur draws the picture of rebellious women in a culture where individualism often remained alien idea and marital bliss and female role in family is the central focus. The women under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society and the importation of tradition are reflected in her novels. Her novels raise the slogans of autonomy and freedom and her female protagonists crush the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert their identity and achieve self satisfaction and self-fulfillment in their lives. Her novels highlight the struggle of women to achieve self identity and to create a space in social and familial relationships. She presented her female characters as being successful in their goal, thus they retrieves themselves from the social norms. That means Kapur's attempt is to portray the picture of Indian women and their struggle within the male centered society and thus the women in India awake with a full-fledged potential and desire.

Her female protagonist Virmati in the novel *Difficult Daughters* represents the women in a patriarchal society subjugated by the man-made injustices and indignities. She exerts herself to realize and experience social freedom in a patriarchal basement. Kapur unravels the reactive mind of Virmati who is totally destroyed by the betrayal of her lover. In her quest for identity she rebels against tradition. Through this character Kapur recapitulates how a woman is denied all the opportunities to realize her social freedom in a patriarchal set-up. Virmati represents the Indian women who were not given any voice to assert their rights. The novel draws the picture of the exploited, troubled life of a woman who has been victimized by a man-made society.

Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to be independent thinking by which their family and society grows intolerant towards them. They wholeheartedly struggle between tradition and individual talent. Her fictional world portrays the pain and sufferings of the bewildered feminine creatures who find them selves oscillating between desire and deprivation.

Kapur realizes the fact that the independent India is not at all aware and have almost no concern of its women's independence. Sexual discrimination, patriarchal pressure and control over women are the basis of oppression and exploitation. Her novels protest against male domination and marginalization. Manju Kapur's heroines fight against the patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, and crave for individual freedom and social traditions but are bold, determined and action oriented. In India's male dominated society women is assigned the roles of wife, mother, sister, and homemaker and they are expected to have the virtues of service, sacrifice, tolerance and submissive mind. Her characters are mainly brooding over their past and the past traditions of their family. The role of women in the family that is designed and directed by male-supremacy for their benefits should be deconstructed by the "new women" emerging out of self-recognition and revelation. The control of patriarchal power leads to the exploitation and violence against women in family and society. Physical and psychological trauma experienced by women is justified in the name of their weakened behavioral nature and that is a product of patriarchal ideology. As Indian radical feminist writer, Kapur analyses and examines these roots and exposes the effect of patriarchy through the tragic situations of her female characters.

3. ANALYSIS: *Difficult Daughters* - A Discovery of Patriarchy:

Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* published in 1998, set against the background of India's Independence struggle, tells the story of a young woman named 'Virmati', who tries to search her identity by the family as well as society. This novel elucidates the tale of a woman's sorrow, love and compromise. The female protagonist, Virmati, is caught between familial duties and the desire for education and freedom. The novel deals with her love affair with a professor, named Harish and also describes her quest for realization and achievement of her independence. She denies marriage and continues her education, there she faces problem with her love affair. Her sincerity contradicts with the male treatment of her as mere object, so she tries to commit suicide but is saved. She is partially successful in her fight against male-supremacy, because she gets married to the professor and gives birth to a girl child Ida, but she becomes the victim of tradition and patriarchal ideology.

Ideology of Power Politics: Social, Biological & Psychological:

The novel revolves around the situation during the Independence struggle and the issues of women's education and feminine freedom. The novel presents larger issues of patriarchy, which denies women's voice and freedom set around at the time of partition. Her female protagonist Virmati, raises the main issues of modern women and their problems. The norms of the society and its regulations are completely dominated by the patriarchal politics. There are various instances in the novel which can prove these observations. According to the social norm, the girl should be married off as early as possible.

"Still, it is the duty of every girl to get married" "She lives for others, not herself..... And with all this reading writing, girls are getting married late" The family

always advocates the social thinking. “And once she finishes, it will be time to get her married.

Already people are asking.”

Virmati’s lover, Professor Harish writes about the mechanical nature of marriage and the egalitarian male treatment of woman as mere objects.

“For him, you are a woman that his family has arranged he should marry. For such men the individual is unimportant. It is the institution they are concerned with. If not you, then someone else.”

As Virmati resists getting married her father theorizes the social role.

“I don’t want to marry. “But why? You know every girl has to go to her own home. This is your right and our duty.”

At the fundamental level, it has been argued that woman should behave like a doll in the hands of the society, the society will not give any attention to her mental agony.

“Then, the confusion in my mind was terrible . I couldn’t think, and all I heard around me was talk of my marriage. If I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn’t want to live”

Kapur presents the three generations of female characters thus tracing the development of the feminine thought pattern and their awakening. Kasturi, the representative of the first generation advises her daughter to submit herself to the social ideology.

“A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings when I was your age girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age...”

Eventually, Virmati is exposed to the examples of bold women characters such as Swarna Lata her roommate. She dares to speak against the social politics which tries to dominate women. She prefers physical bondage than domestic duties and wanted to take part in the social activities of the country as a powerful citizen with all identity. Influenced by Swarna Lata Virmati also gets the fire of revelation, and she readily places herself before the social norms. Kapur suggests that the collective thoughts and deeds of female individuals will lead to the enlightenment and freedom of women in this male-dominated society

The representative of the third generation, Ida, speaks about the mental struggle of her mother Virmati, in the midst of this male-oriented society. As the traditional Indian woman she had to submit her disturbed mind to the male supremacy and handed it over to her next generation with all its strength and domination. Ida thoughts about the mechanical process of traditional training of women in their family,

“She couldn’t have, because when I grew up I was very careful to tailor my needs to what I knew I could get. That is my female inheritance. That is what she tried to give me. Adjust. Compromise, adapt.”

Kapur tries to reveal the fate of women which is to be always considered weak and fragile. This biological discrimination made them to suffer a lot in their domestic as well as social life. They are considered as mere tools for the creation of new generations. The body of women is considered as mere object for pleasure and therefore the novelist always shows her frustrations about this biological politics. The physical and mental agony that a silent woman should undergo in her life , is vividly portrayed here in these lines. The male oriented society assigned certain duties to both male and females. The physical nature and psychological behaviour are the destining factors of male or female responsibilities. The psychological torture which women have to face in their lives because of the male-domination is clearly depicted in the novel. Kapur, compares her female protagonist Virmati to Lady Macbeth, thus she is able to draw the traumatic mind of woman under male suppression.

Developing patterns of patriarchy in private and public spheres:

Kapur’s novel *Difficult Daughters* explores the humiliation and disillusionment of modern women which are experienced from the patriarchal social set up. As a true feminist revolutionist Kapur unravels the patterns of patriarchy that serves as the impediment in the development of female independence. The female role in the family as well as in the society is assigned by the male-originated rules and that too for their own convenience, and these traditional norms are imprinted through the customs and practices of traditional family. Virmati, the female protagonist has been considered as a mere object for work in the family. “Sometimes she tried to be in gentle, but it was weary work and she was almost always tired and harassed.” Women are supposed to bind their life in the four walls of family and they are considered as the makers of home. Virmati realized that she will not get any answer for her question inside the home, because it is the fundamental base of patriarchy. By which she has the realization that education is the only way to be free in her thoughts, words and actions. “It was useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges” The soothing experience that Virmati got from outside the house is suggestive of her freedom and self realization. Home suggests a traumatic space where patriarchal domination rooted with all its strength and power. Women are caught between their desire for education and employment as well as their household duties. No one is ready to understand the problems and struggle that the women are facing in their home. Male dominated patriarchal society has treated women as mere the slaves to men and therefore without him she has no identity and uniqueness. They are the shadows of men at

home, and should be satisfied with the familial relationships and duties. Education, customs and practices, literature all serves the purpose of male domination and therefore women are not allowed to come out of familial sphere to the public space of the society. Ida, the representative of present generation, is against the traditions and practices of the family and she is in search of her mother's life in the dark wholes of the male dominated society. Traditional family is against women's education and employment. Women are meant to be the makers of home therefore their study should benefit for the development of the family not for their freedom and self-assertion.

Shakuntala, the icon of female identity urges Virmati, to break the traditional bondages, and come out adopting political activities and public responsibilities.

"These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else."

She is the spokeswoman of Kapur, and is heralds the awakening news for women in this feminist generation. Virmati is encouraged by the influence of Shakuntala and she admires the bold woman character.

"Shakuntala's visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati..... It was possible to be something other than a wife. Images of Shakuntala Pehnji kept floating through her head, Shakuntala Pehnji who having done her MSc in Chemistry had gone about tasting the wine of freedom."

For the traditional family, educating girls is a waste of time. The patriarchal ideology is framed in such a way that women should be primarily occupied within the familial duties. Generations after generations they are handing over these imprinted practices through rules and regulations. The patriarchal society never expects women to be educated because they realize the fact that education lead them to self revelation and thus they will be able to fight for their freedom from this male-oriented rules and norms. Viru's mother has a simple question for her which is obviously coated by the thoughts of her subdued nature;

"What good are Shaku's degrees when she is not settled. Will they look after her when she is old? At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother."

Education changed Virmati quite a lot but the male dominated family never wanted this alteration. They are dubious of the female strength and ideology.

"They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. Now what will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name?"

Family becomes the training centre for a girl to be an obedient, submitting wife and sacrifice their whole self for the wellbeing of the family. The girls unconsciously merge into the duties of tradition. When Virmati was exposed to the feminist meetings and their public activities she is suddenly made aware of her role as a citizen in the country. She begins to think far beyond the gender discrimination and dare to be a woman with self-satisfaction. Leela Mehta's speech is an enlightening one for her and this is an awakening speech to the whole women in India by Kapur.

"We want not only degrees but constructive work. We demand the right, the privilege of doing something for our country. Friends, comrades..... That is the real Inquilab. Not slogan shouting. Not posturing and empty speech making. If you, the hope of the future generation, can achieve some difference in the lives of your fellow men, then indeed you are the true wealth of your nation."

As a true Indian radical feminist Kapur explores the underlying patterns of patriarchy in the family environment and public areas such as education, tradition as well as customs.

Exploitation through violence:

The novel evokes basic concerns over the problems of women in a male dominated society especially with regards to mental struggle and torture. Men consider women as mere object for their physical needs. They never thought about women's mental struggle and social status. Kapur presents Virmati, as a woman deeply attached with Professor Harish. She undergoes all types of mental and physical torture for the sake of her love, while Harish is not ready to loose his prestige in the family. Despite being so sincere, she realizes that Harish acts exactly like the symbol of male-dominated society and she is not able to control herself in her utter bitterness;

"I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace..... And why? Because I am an idiot."Be honest with me. I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right. Men do take advantage of women!"

Women are considered as emotional beings and that is why their constant love and sincerity reduce them to the status of fools and idiots. Virmati, also realizes her tragic situation and this agony and mental torture make her retaliate with such violence.

Virmati, the dedicate lover, is left to face all the violence of male supremacy. Virmati loves professor with all her heart, mind and body but she realizes that he is the one torturing her all through her life. Virmati desired for a blissful a married life with Harish, whereas after marriage she realizes with a surprise that she is not at all satisfied and settled. Kapur asserts that woman has to suffer till the end of their life by the male dominated society. Kapur expresses

her deep feminist feelings in the novel and clearly portrays the picture of Indian women and their agonies and sufferings. As a radical feminist, she presents her female protagonist as a female figure awakened to the world of freedom and determination;

“Still, with every mile she travelled she felt stronger. There was a life of dedication and service ahead of her, and in that she would forge her identity”

As a radical feminist Kapur asks a fundamental question towards the last part of the novel; “Is there no end to this needless violence and stabbing?” Ida, the symbol of third generation is ready to fight against the prevalent male assumptions;

“Ida refused to show any signs of intellectual brightness. ‘There are other things in life’ she told her mother. ‘Like what?’ asked Virmati. ‘Like living, you mean living only for yourself. You are disappointing your father. Why is it so important to please him?’ I grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure: pressure to perform day and night.”

4. CONCLUSION:

Manju Kapur’s heroines fight against the patriarchal notions which enforce women towards domesticity, and crave for individual freedom. Kapur’s female characters attempt to redefine the cultural and social stereotypes and rules and assert their individual space. Thus, it is clear that, the predicament of women in the 21st century is mainly due to the patriarchal power politics of the male dominated Indian society. Manju Kapur is aware of all the shades of suffering, a woman, especially the middle-class Indian woman, has to face in her life. In all her novels the daughters are difficult and the delights they finally get after a great deal of struggle and suffering do not give them happiness. She tries to reveal the traditional concept of the wife as a secondary person, a source of sexual satisfaction, a house-keeper and an obedient creature to the husband and his family through her novels. She portrays the picture of family as the mirror of the power-structured society. The novel is a sort of social map, which hints at the construction of masculinity as power figures. The novel examines the family as an agent of patriarchal society. The chief contribution of the family into this male dominated world is the socialization of the young into patriarchal ideology’s prescribed attitudes towards the categories of role (sociological), temperament (psychological) and status (political).

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