

Glimpse of New Woman in ManjuKapur's Difficult Daughters

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment is the process of empowering women. Empowerment raises the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment allows women to take life-determining decisions. They may get the opportunity to redefine gender roles, which in turn provide them more freedom to pursue desired goals. Women are taken as secondary to men in their social by many of the philosophers.

The purpose of this paper is to study the evolution of feminist power and the emergence of new woman in the novel *Difficult Daughters*. Manju Kapur is an eminent novelist who can be put in the category of those women writers who brought a remarkable transformation in the representation of women characters. As a woman she is concerned with the problems of Indian woman in the patriarchal family and deals with various feminist issues as gender equality, freedom from discrimination, right to education, marriage, abortion, autonomy, women's property rights, oppression etc. In the novel *Difficult Daughters* Virmati is a typical daughter to her mother as she opposes the patriarchal norms for self-identity. Women are discriminated and devoid of their basic rights in the patriarchal society. Her female protagonists are educated women with independent thinking who follow their own ideology. Her novels present the position of women and their struggle in the contemporary Indian society. As a woman, she successfully highlights the feminist struggle against patriarchy, exploitation. Her female characters reveal feminist power and represent the new women who are thinking, questioning and rational beings and raise a voice for basic rights, self-identity and survival.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminist Power, Struggle for Identity, freedom, marriage, education, social restrictions, personal fulfillment, self-realization, gender equality and women empowerment.

India has rich tradition of ancient tales and stories. The portrayal of women in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and tradition values of family and society has undergone tremendous changes. Women are no longer presented as passive character.

Seeking gender equality like the right to work for equal wages to have access to health and education as well as political rights are the prime expectation of Feminists. It is worth mentioning that feminists in India have also fought against cultural issues within the patriarchal society of India. The set of movements intending of define, establish and define equal social, economical, political rights and equal opportunities for Indian women are the typical elements of feminism in ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughters*.

As a feminist writer, Manju Kapur's novels raise strong protest against the male dominated Indian society. Manju Kapur's novels portray the New Indian woman's voice. A "New Women" in search of self-identity, seeds liberation in all walks of life and replaces the traditional image of Indian women. In her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, it is very much evident that a stereotypical women character is transformed into "New Women" by replacing the tradition image of Indian Women.

Manju Kapur projects a new vision of Indian women in her novel, *Difficult Daughters*. She denounces the persistence of traditional idea that marriage is essential for women. She depicts deliberately the character of two girls of two different attitudes. In her novel *Difficult Daughters*,

she portrays her women of traditional and new modern outlook. Virmati, protagonist of *Difficult Daughters* represents the former category and Shakuntala, her cousin is an example of the latter category. Kapur draws a strong contrast between these two women characters.

Women are considered as an oppressive people in this novel. Kasturi gives birth to eleven children. This makes her health weak. Her husband does not take care or consider her health. She is denied of enjoying equal rights. So she is thrown into a situation where she cannot reject giving multiple births. She does not get a chance to speak about equal rights to her husband.

Difficult Daughters is the story of Virmati who is born in an Arya Samaji Punjabi family in Amritsar. Being the eldest daughter in the family, she has the pressure of household works and other family responsibilities. She has eleven siblings and she was sixteen years old when her mother conceived the eleventh child. Since childhood she remains busy in looking after her siblings and helping her mother Kasturi in other household duties. Here Kapur presents the picture of an Indian family where the eldest girl child is supposed to support her mother in performing domestic duties and other household tasks and the same is the case of Virmati as she is supposed to do the homely tasks and other responsibilities related to her siblings. The novelist calls Virmati the second mother to her siblings. She has a keen desire to study and to do a job but her mother Kasturi, a traditional woman is of the opinion that a girl should have study only to read and write as her basic need is to learn knitting, sewing and cooking and other household works. As both Virmati and Kasturi have different opinions, the rising conflict is quite obvious between the mother and the daughter. Virmati has a dream to be educated like her cousin Shakuntala who is a progressive independent woman. Manju Kapur accepts the fact that women's higher education makes them more confident and ambitious as educated women emerge more successful and prove their individuality. Shakuntala is a new woman who opposes family tradition of early marriage. She has done M.Sc. in Chemistry and is teaching science in a college in Lahore. Virmati is much impressed by her dressing sense, activities and modern life style. Through Shakuntala, Manju Kapur presents the image of an empowered woman who is leading a free life of her own choice as her outlook is modern. As a new woman, she is assertive and defies the patriarchal restrictions and fights for her rights. She is bold, outspoken and determined and inspires Virmati to study and to look outside to education, freedom as time has changed. Virmati is so much influenced by her that she realizes that education is a great weapon for freedom and thinks that being educated is a way to get freedom and happiness. The novelist presents Virmati as the embodiment of liberation. Virmati wants to study further, and even she is prepared to fight her mother Kasturi who opposes her idea to continue her study further. Kasturi believes in the ancient popular Indian myth that a girl is Parayadhan and it is the destiny of every girl to get married and to follow the family traditions. She doesn't like the life style of Shakuntala who defies the family traditions. As a mother, Kasturi has the responsibility of the marriage of five daughters and is worried for them.

Through the portrayal of Virmati, the novelist presents a woman of unyielding will power who has a zeal to live a free and meaningful life and decides to break her relationship with the professor. She informs the Professor that she is going to Lahore for further studies as she desires to be a teacher like Shakuntala. As an optimist, she has great hopes for her future. So she decides to end her relationship with the Professor and burns all the letters he has ever sent to her. She is termed as the difficult daughter to the family as she challenges the family tradition. The family was against her study but they have to yield to her wish and finally she is sent to Lahore for further

studies. Here her life takes a positive turn and she starts a new phase of her life. As a strong woman, she possesses the strength of mind and decides to give a new turn to her life. In Lahore she came under the influence of strong independent women like Shakuntala and SwarnaLata who constantly motivate her to take part in social and political movements. She is much impressed by her roommate SwarnaLata who is an active participant in the freedom struggle movement. SwarnaLata, a new woman, is a clear headed committed activist who follows her own ideology and fights for women liberation and the upliftment of the social values. Through the character of SwarnaLata, the novelist depicts an assertive, dynamic, modern woman who emerges as the stout champion of womanhood. As a committed feminist, she is firm advanced, and action oriented young lady.

However, Virmati emerges as a bold self-reliant woman who has a positive vision of life. She adjusts herself in the new surroundings and shows remarkable courage and power to control her life. As an educated woman, she possesses the sense of self-worth and finally succeeds to find a proper place in society. As a rebel, she challenges the social practices and breaks the shackles confining women within the four walls of home and gets a proper identity of her own. Though she is happy and satisfied with her free life here, she has no desire to live a lonely life. As a woman, she feels the need of a man in her life as she wants to fulfill her life with love. Unfortunately she develops her relationship with the professor again and loses her job as the school authorities come to know about her illicit relationship with the Professor. In spite of losing her job, she has courage and goes to Shantiniketan. She decides to marry the Professor and becomes his second wife. But she is still restless as she feels herself alienated in the family. His family does not welcome her and the latter has to bear insults in his home. Virmati has married to get love, happiness, peace and security but it seems that her life is devoid of the desired peace and happiness. Though she succeeds to get the marital status she has to bear opposition in the family and thus her search for identity and proper place in her law's home restarts. To her, the only comfort is the love of her husband, Harish who always wants an educated companion. Actually she knows it well that being the second wife she has to bear some opposition in society, as her family is also against her marriage with the Professor. She is sure that her family will never accept her relationship with him as she has disgraced family in the past and her mother and family curse her yet she is happy with the man of her choice and promises herself a blissful marriage. She accepts her marriage as her husband is everything for her. Thus she takes a bold step by marrying the married professor. As a bold woman, she succeeds to show the society that women can defy the patriarchal dogmatism and conservative taboos in society and can bring a revolution in the society.

Ida, Virmati's daughter is also portrayed as a rebel who revolts against social conventions. She is not prepared to become a puppet in the hands of her husband Prabhakar who was approved by her parents for marriage. She married him to please her parents as Ida says: "because you thought Prabhakar was so wonderful and I was glad that in the choice of my husband I have pleased you." Prabhakar denies Ida maternity and forces her to have an abortion. As a result, Ida breaks up her marriage as he does not want a baby from her. As a new woman, she rebels against the deep rooted family norms of male dominated society. Ida is the product of post-independence era, she establishes herself as a new independent woman. She transcends the social restrictions and fights for her identity, dignity and individuality.

Thus it becomes clear that ManjuKapur is a committed writer who has firm faith in the female strength. As a feminist writer she has successfully presented the concept of New women and

their struggle to freedom in patriarchal society. Her female characters Ida, Shakuntala, Virmati, SwarnaLata are assertive, self-reliant progressive women who show remarkable will power and transcend the age old social restrictions. Through their portrayal the novelist portrays the female desires, ambitions and expectations. They are high-spirited women who fight to be free from the stale social restrictions and attain freedom. They are aware of gender discrimination, women liberation and their empowerment and raise voice against social injustice and gender inequality and get victory over it by establishing their identity. As new women, they participate in social and political movements for freedom struggle. They are aware, strong-willed, self-reliant beings having faith in the inner strength of womanhood.

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