

MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS* AS A FEMINIST DOCUMENT

S. C. Jakati, Asst Professor of English, Smt A. A. Patil College of Arts and Com for Women, Chikodi, Dt: Belagavi-, Karnataka

Manju Kapur is an Indian writer of fiction. Her novel *Difficult Daughters* won her the 1999 Commonwealth Writers Prize for South Asia. Manju Kapur, born in Amritsar, India, graduated in English literature. She married Gun Nidhi Dalmia, and she works as a professor in Delhi University. Manju Kapur's literary works are as follows:

1. A Married Woman (2003)
2. Home (2006)
3. The Immigrant (2011)
4. Shaping the World (2014)
5. Brothers (2016)

Manju Kapur has received DSC Prize (2011), Commonwealth Writers Prize (1999) and others.

Gantasala Symala, in her PhD thesis on Manju Kapur thinks that, "Manju Kapur has attained the position of a bestseller with her maiden novel *Difficult Daughters*." (Gantasala 147) The author took lot of years and pains to write this novel. As Manju Kapur says, "Nothing is planned in a big way, but eventually things may take a grand shape. Writing this novel was not very difficult for me, but it took eight long years before the book finally saw the light of the day." (Kapur 113)

Indian life is uneven as the western people speak of. India is still a patriarchal society. Muslims in India are more so. Manju Kapur's worry is about how to emancipate and empower this Indian woman.

The author's present heroine Virmati belongs to a period around 1950s. As the time denotes, her society is patriarchal and she, as a woman, has been oppressed by the man-made injustices and humiliation. Virmati is the eldest daughter born to Kasturi and Suraj Prakash in a respectable 'Arya Samaji' business family at Amritsar. Her grandfather, Lala Diwan Chand, is a reformer and famous landlord who gives priority to the education of women. Virmati's father, Suraj Prakash and his brother, Chander Prakash take care of the jewellery business. The family has a strong faith in Swami Dayanand Saraswati's doctrine and education of women. Virmati comes from a large family of eleven children. Being the eldest, she is burdened with family duties because of her mother's consecutive pregnancies.

Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* presents the story of this young woman Virmati, who, with a strong desire to get educated, rejects the marriage proposal arranged by the family. In the process, she gets into a relationship with her neighbour, Professor Harish Chandra, who is already married and settles as his second wife. The subsequent part of the novel focuses on the challenges Virmati faces after her marriage. The novel begins with Virmati's death and Ida sets out to rebuild her mother's past in a bid to fathom their connection since a warm and friendly relation did not exist between them. She moves to her familial home at Amritsar to unravel the saga of her parents. The opening statement of the novel by Ida "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (*Difficult Daughters* 1) sets the tone of the story and Ida's dislike to take her mother as a role model in life.

Manju Kapur discusses the role of motherhood in *Difficult Daughters*. Motherhood is given much importance and is celebrated in Indian culture since the mother is considered to be an epitome of love and sacrifice. Kasturi, the mother of eleven children is well-loved and respected in the family. She is given

more importance than her sister-in-law, Lajwanti who is the mother of two children, Shakuntala and Somnath. The number of childbirths makes Kasturi very frail. She has filled the house as her in-laws wished but gradually, she becomes worn-out. When she conceives for the eleventh time, she conveys her debility to her aunt-in-law: 'I am going to die, Maji, this time. I know it.' (*Difficult Daughters* 8) Thus Kasturi fails to have a control over her mothering-affair.

On the other hand, the major character Virmati as a mother fails in her life. Modern readers think that this Virmati, an educated woman, commits the act (crime) of polygamy though neither poverty nor father's family oppressed her. She is stupid simply.

Bad people are ready to misguide people as is the professor of a college. The Professor Harish Chnarda insinuates himself into the heart of Virmati by poisoning her mind about the canal engineer, Inderjit, whom she is supposed to marry. In his letter he writes: "Of the canal engineer I say nothing. Anybody who digs in canals all day must have a soul as dull and uninspiring as the mud he deals in. What pain will he suffer? He does not even know you, has never tried to know you. 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." (*Difficult Daughters* 56-57)

Virmati who always aspires for liberty does not educate her child to assert herself instead she attempts to implant in her mind how to "adjust, compromise, adapt." She makes sure that her daughter Ida's every effort to be an ideal daughter. Ida does not inherit academic leanings of her parents. Top priority is given to outward appearance by her father who preferred her "looking pretty, neat, and well-dressed, with kajal and a little touch of oil in my sleeked-back hair." (*Difficult Daughters* 279) He also expected her to do well at studies, read classics of literature which would enable her to show her "accomplishments graciously before his assembled guests at parties." (*Difficult Daughters* 279) As Ida grows older, Virmati enforces limitations on her but Ida constantly looks for "escape routes."

Virmati embarks on a journey to self-realization but she accomplishes only to a certain degree since she had to move against the tide of prevailing customs and traditions.

Manju Kapur portrays the inner and outer confrontation between tradition and modernity through an examination of characters, circumstances and temperaments, and assigns a foremost position to her protagonist amidst complicated incidents "In Indian writing (also observed in regional literature) the crux of feminism is the Indian woman caught in the transition from tradition to modernity." (Srilata qt by Symala 77)

References:

1. Gantasala, Syamala. "Feminist Perspectives Manju Kapur," Acharya Nagarjun University PhD Thesis, 2018.
2. Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1999.
3. Srilata. *Qt* Gantasala, Syamala. "Feminist Perspectives Manju Kapur," Acharya Nagarjun University PhD Thesis, 2018.