

QUEST FOR FEMININE IDENTITY IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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Search for feminine identity is a Post-Independence social phenomenon in India. The emergence of women writers in the last quarter of the 19th century carried with it a double significance. It bore testimony to the birth of a new era of liberation for the Indian women, an era of increased opportunities and a more dynamic involvement in the social and intellectual life of the country ushered in by the great social reorientations which came at the turn of the century. Secondly, it was also an elucidation of the rise of individualism which is closely associated with the rise of the novel in India in the same way in which it was associated with the rise of the English novel. Feminism emerged as a universal movement for the welfare and betterment of women's rights on the one hand and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from male dominant society on the other. It focused on women's struggle for feminine identity and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. Gayatri Spivak writes in her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Between patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation the figure of woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shutting which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third – World Woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (p. 80)

Simone de Beauvoir has very precisely exposed the condition of woman in her most famous book *The Second Sex*. Of course, the miserable condition of woman all over the world inspired the women of talent like Virginia Woolf to do something in this field and the result was the emergence of Feminism, a great movement in the western world in 1960. It is a movement for the emancipation of women and their fight for equal rights. The condition of woman is equally miserable in Indian society. The Indian society is basically patriarchal where a woman is given the secondary role.

The modern woman does not find any sense in such self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality and self-identity. She is trying to free herself of the dependence syndrome as says Chaman Nahal:

I define Feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome, where it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (p. 30)

Simone de Beauvoir expresses her own views on man – woman, nexus – man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. (Seldom, 1988: 534). A woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position.

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees –. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex... absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to essential. (Seldom, 1988: 534)

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* locates the life of Virmati against the backdrop of political happenings before and after partition. Located primarily in the India of the 1940s, *Difficult Daughters*, speaks with great narrative eloquence, of the idea of independence. Set around the time of partition, this is the story of Virmati, a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love seen through the eyes of her daughter Ida, from whom her mother's past had always been kept a secret. Virmati is a young Punjabi girl belonging to an austere family of Amritsar. A family she defies for the love of a married professor. Because of him, she comes to value education and the higher things in life. She realizes that life's horizons are much wider than those that have been shown to her.

Difficult Daughters is a story of young, independent woman and her life around the time of India's independence struggle and is based on the life of Kapur's own mother. It is a story of a woman Virmati is torn between family duty and the desire for education and also illicit love with a professor.

Virmati, a young, immature Punjabi girl, is belonging to an austere family of Amritsar. She comes in touch with her neighbor – a married professor – Harish. Because of him she comes to values an education and the higher things in life and falls in love with him. She realizes that life's horizons are much wider than those that have been shown to her. But due to her mother Kasturi's pregnancy, she cannot concentrate on her study. She caught by the family's responsibilities of her mother and her brothers and sisters. When she was seventeenth and studying for F. A. exams, she has to go with her mother to look after her and other children. With the intention that she rebelled against her mother with a thick lump in her throat by saying:

I'm tired of knitting and sewing,
Besides, I am here to look after you
I can look after myself,
Why did you bring me if you don't need me, Mati?

The language of feeling had never flowed between them and this throat was meant to express all her thwarted yearnings (p.12). She revolt to her mother not only for study but also for her childhood. She shows the feelings of the Indian typical women who has unwillingly to follow their elders.

Later on, she comes in contact with Shakuntala who has been studying in Lahore and is highly influenced by her thought, having royal manner and having her own views and wishes to run her own life. She struggles between tradition and modernity. It is her individual struggle with family and society though which she plugged into and dedicated effort to carve an identity

for herself as qualified women with faultless background. While India fights for freedom from British Raj; she fights for the freedom to live life on her terms.

Virmati is strong minded and refuses to go along with the plans her family have for her marriage, kids and the like. She falls in love with a married professor Harish who does not want to marry. With the help of Harish's poet friend, they marry. During her conjugal life she feels that it would have been better if she had not been married with Harish. It is also a fascinating description of the pain and suffering of partitions. At last, finally she found that love is truly mysterious. She is torn between her desires as a women and her wish to learn, however the object of her love does not really seem worthy of all her sacrifices.

At the end of the story she gave birth to a child Ida and died. In short her whole life shows us full of struggle against family duty, education and love. At the cost of her wants like to decide what to study where, whom to marry and earn, she is torn in two halves.

In depth study of women fighting against family her loves and her own nature in time where the later is meant to be worth for less than the other two. A historic tragedy is examined a middle aged women attempts to come of age as she searches through the relics of her mother's mistake and melancholy, all-in-all it was a bit of at tough read. But it did throw us into Punjab in the 1940s with the some bit of veracity. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter.

In Virmati's struggle for independence we see woman who is conscious, introspective, educated and wants to carve a life for herself and be her own mistress but ultimately ends up being divided within – one part of herself dying to live a dignified, decisive and action-oriented life and the other realizing the underlying need to be emotionally and intellectually dependent on a superior force, that is, Professor Harish. She suffers from what Chaman Nahal calls, 'dependence syndrome', which is the tendency to fall back on someone in times of crises.

She ends up being a loser whose acts alienate her from her own family. Besides, she fails to achieve self-fulfillment in her life and even gets rejected by her own daughter Ida who does not regard even her last wishes after her death. Her passion to taste the 'wine of freedom' leaves her divided sans self-control, strong will power and confidence. Badly confined in her self-centered desires and ruined by wrong choices, Virmati perhaps longs for a spiritual fulfillment after her death when she tells Ida:

"When I die she said to me I want my body donated. My eyes, my heart, my kidneys, any organ that can be use. That way someone will value me after that have gone" (1).

Thus Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* 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" (68). She presents feminism at its most same keeping in mind the Indian context.

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