

## LOATHSOME AFFECTION IN FEMININE RACE: A QUEER TRUTH IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses loathsome affection in feminine race from Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters*. Do all the women have affection and love one another? Despicable love is found among women even though there is mother and daughter. The novel exactly shows the same theme. Kapur's novels deal with women's liberation from exploitation, dehumanisation, degradation, injustice, suppression and depression, subjugation, superstition and communalism. The article focuses on feminism and the ideas of women among women.

Feminism attempts to study and solve a variety of gender based problems. It deals with gender discrimination, sexual exploitation and domestic violence on women in the society. It studies construction of masculine and feminine identities and of course the construction of heterogeneous sexuality and homosexuality. Woman is more important than man in the society. She is the first teacher of a child. She has as same mental power as man has but she is not recognized as men. Her identity is lost at home as well as in the male dominated society. She becomes a wife, mother, sister and home maker. Every woman is compared to Sita, and Savitri in every aspect. The modern women who have to deal with a lot of things at home and working places cannot be as Sita or Savitri because Sita or Savitri does not have hectic schedule such as cleaning house, taking care of uncle, aunt and children, working in multinational companies and so on. Though there is development in many fields, the idea of gender is same in the minds of men and women. Many women think themselves that women are not as equal as men because they do not have physical strength. So indirectly women are treated as sex symbols in some of the religions in India. They are not allowed to go out to work. They started to depend on their fathers or husbands. A literary text has emerged to show even some of the solutions for all these. It is called feminist literature which "highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women" (Kumar, N. Prasantha, 1998: 9). The feminist literature should deal with the sufferings of women. It is not important whether it is written by male writers or female writers. Though male writers bring out the problems of women, they could not satisfy up to the

point but a women writer can greatly elucidate her problems because it may be her story or her sister's or her mother's story. Kumar N. Prasantha (1998: 12-13) rightly remarks: "As a woman judges herself through her body, the female self is always identified with the female body in women's literature."

In the modern era, there are umpteen women writers in Indian literature. They have got worldwide recognition after 1980s. Women writers started to write the problems of women through the female characters in their fictional writings. They have articulated women's aspirations. Feminists such as Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anitha Desai, Kiran Desai, Gita Hariharan, Namitha Gokhle, Manju Kapur, Shobha De and Jumpa Lahiri raised their voices against the male domination over the women in their writings. They focus on the potential of independent selfhood of woman with all its agonies through their fictional women protagonists and other characters from their works who symbolizes the modern women. They aimed at portraying realistically Indian women's sense of frustration and their alienation.

Manju Kapur is one of the famous Indian English novelists. Her writings reproduce man-woman relationship, human desire, sex, gender discrimination, marginalization and exploitation. She has written five novels so far. Those are *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The Custody* (2011). All her novels point out a lot of the things that are related to the middle class women. They want to protect themselves from the male chauvinists. Many Indian women's quest for identity is the most important aspect in these days. Manju Kapur has joined the "growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact." (Kumar Ashok, 2006: 194) Kapur as a novelist mainly concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class. The female protagonists of her novels protest against male domination and the marginalization of woman. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification. Women are discriminated by her man, her family and also another woman. She is the one who is suppressed and oppress other women too. Kapur also supported the idea that a woman is not observed as a human being. In this regard, Beauvaur (1988: 11) says: "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 her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential." Women's passions, opinions and feelings and affections are not identified. Kapur has brought everything in her fictional works. Kumar (2006: 165) says: "Manju Kapur has exposed a woman's passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance. With passion to revolutionize the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. She is stunned at the intensification of fundamentalism and the augment of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity." In an interview with The Hindu newspaper, Manju Kapur (2011: 2) also accepts that her novels "centre on women. It's about how women negotiate with the outside world."

*Difficult Daughters* is about difficult mothers and difficult daughters. It is about mothers who do not catch their daughter's ideas and about daughters who do not understand their mothers. Regarding the novel, Azhar (2012: 3) says that the novel is a "skilful, enticing first novel by an Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism." It is her first novel and a feminist communication because she is a "woman writing about women's issues, but because she

tries to understand a woman both as a woman and as a human being pressurized by visible and invisible contexts.”(Jaidev, 1992: 68) As a teacher and female writer, she has understood the problems of younger generation and also older generation. Kapur (2011: 2) about the novel says that “It’s not just a family drama or story. It’s about the processes that influence these women and men and how it plays itself out in the most intimate of places. Actually when I was teaching, I didn’t think that there was a connection between what I taught and what I wrote but now when I look back....The story comes as I write. I don’t have an idea of the story beforehand.”

## II

The novel *Difficult Daughter* opens with: “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I stared at the fire that rose from her shrivelled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept (1).” The first protagonist is Virmati, the eldest of the eleven children in her family of traders and jewellers business, says above line. She does not want to like her mother, Kasturi because her mother was too conventional. Virmati is a young Punjabi girl who belongs to an ascetic family of Amritsar. Her mother always reminds her that it is the onus of every girl to get married. When Virmati is asked to marry an engineer, she rejects him. If a boy rejects a girl, the society will not ask anybody but when she rejects the engineer, she is scolded by many people. Her dreams were influenced by her cousin, Shakuntala who survives as a liberated woman. She criticises that her parents do not have knowledge about her inner life and they are unable to understand what she wants. She says: “They want nothing from me but an agreement to marry.”(100) Her desire is to pursue higher studies like Shakuntala. When she unfolds about her education, her mother, Kasturi tells her: “When I was your age, girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age...” (111). But Virmati is ‘strong to bear the pain, silently, without anyone knowing’ (101) She loves Professor Harish and writes a letter: “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. I thought of what you taught us about Sydney carton, and how noble and fine in seemed at the moment of his death. His last words echoed in my ears all that day. So you of all people should understand my actions!” (92) In deed the professor had already married and has a wife. When she was neglected by Harish, she says: “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, study in peace...and why? Because I am an idiot. (149) She has understood that the professor would not render any support to her in the crisis.

After some years, professor accepts her and marries Virmati in Delhi at a friend’s house. She does not know that it is going to turn to be a disaster. Like many Indian women, she too feels that she has lost independence that she had before the marriage. Her problems were started as she was staying with her husband’s first wife. Virmati loses her identity and searches for love and affection. She realizes herself that it is a very difficult task to take a decision herself. And she doubts his love: “Now you want to prolong the situation. Why don’t we get married? You say your family makes no difference. But still you want to continue in this way. Be honest with me. I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right. Men do take advantage of women!”(149) After some days, she goes off to Lahore where she wants to do M.A. in Philosophy and meets her old friend Swarna who was already married. Swarna continues her

political activity in post-marriage and expresses herself on the matter to Virmati as follows: “We have plenty of married women working with us. I’m married, aren’t I?” (252). Virmati gives birth to a baby girl called ‘Ida’ – meaning ‘a new slate, and a blank beginning.’

Virmati’s daughter Ida, who is the second protagonist, is strong and fully conscious regarding the socio political game. She breaks up her marriage as she is denied maternity by her husband. Of course the forced abortion is also the termination of her marriage. A modern girl, she has modern ideas and left her husband to survive without anybody’s domination. But Virmati does not have the strength as Ida has. Ida had broken her relationship with her husband Prabhakar for he had forced her to go for an abortion. Ida (156) says: “Prabhakar had insisted I have one. In denying that incipient little thing in my belly, he sowed the seeds of our break up’ and she continues that “confessed how the death of the foetus haunted her and how she had endured the trauma of her loss alone, Mother, I never told you this, because you thought Prabhakar was so wonderful, and I was glad that in the choice of my husband I had pleased you. Why should I burden you with my heartaches when you had enough of your own?” (156-157) Virmati likes Prabhakar very much. She does not know how the relationship between her daughter and son-in-law is. One day Ida tells Virmati about Prabhakar: “He was what you respected, a successful academic, a writer of books, a connoisseur of culture, a disseminator of knowledge. Like my father...My father was on a pedestal so high that to breathe that rarified atmosphere was an honour. (156-157) Ida too thinks what her mother thought in the beginning is “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother” She wants freedom and doesn’t compromise as her mother. At the end of the novel, Ida says: “This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama and leave me be, Do not haunt me anymore.” (259)

Every mother is a difficult mother to her daughter and every daughter is a difficult daughter to her mother because ideas are different from one to one. Although many people do not agree, it is true. When the daughter is young, mother warmly receives her although her daughter does any kinds mistakes. Till she gets adult age, there is no problem but the views and feelings are suddenly changed from both sides when she comes to fifteen years old. The daughter wants to see the modern tastes and to be modern girl in attitude and dressing. All mothers are always conventional. Sometimes they are not conventional but they won’t accept their daughter’s ideas. The mother can’t remember that she was once upon a time a young girl. The daughter does not realize that she will become mother after some years. But the arguments are very common between them about the unrelated views. In the novel, Kasturi thought that Virmati is a difficult daughter and Virmati thought that Ida is a difficult daughter. Affection will be always among them each other. Milhoutra (2005: 164) says: While in the generation of Kasturi, women’s role was confined to childbearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati took some bold and radical steps in joining the political movement for India’s freedom, asserted the need for women education and independence.” In every house, one can see that loathsome affection is found among women. It is not that no mother hates her daughter and no daughter hates her mother but ideas are dissimilar. They have fondness each other. When Virmati was a young girl, she never pays attention what her mother Kasturi says. Though Virmati was objected to do the things such as marrying an engineer and doing the small tasks in home, she had done as she likes. When she became a mother, she was too experienced similar negligence from her daughter Ida so it is a common thing between two women. One can strongly say that most of the times it belongs to women because they have jealousy on one another. Men may accept and agree with other’s ideas

if there are any controversial opinions but it is a different issue in the case of feelings of women. In deed Virmati is not a fictional character. Kapur constructed the Virmati character from her life which was told by her mother. Kapur (2010: 01) says about Virmati's character as: "It is my mother's tale that later became much more important for me to tell in my first novel. She was not very forthcoming at first, as she regrets being a source of trauma for her parents. There was also the trauma surrounding the events of partition. Most of my older relatives were not very keen on raking up the past, but I felt it was necessary to share these stories and talk about the grief left in their wake." There is no doubt that the conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable in all ages. Manju Kapur says: "I suppose I was a difficult daughter myself. The conflict carries on through generation because mothers want their daughters to be safe. We want them to make the right choices 'right' in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married; I want my daughters to have good jobs." (Bala, 1999: 107) Kapur highlights those issues of feminism that one can easily observe them in India. It helps us to understand how women are facing the problems in the society.

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