

Suffering of Female Characters in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughter



Bhavna Satapathy

Research Scholar,
Deptt. of English,
Berhampur University
Behrampur, Odisha
India

Abstract

This paper concentrates on Manjukapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* which will relate the individual and universal sufferings of women. The women's question today is therefore no longer an issue continued to the position of a woman within the family or their rights to equality with man in different aspects of social life. It is set against the historical back drop of partition. It presents the issues of an Arya Samaj Punjabi Family in Amritsar. Manjukapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with their problems. Her novels present the struggle of women to establish their identity. There are many aspects of a Women's life, she crushes and defies the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life. The novel manages issues like woman education and female flexibility. In this novel there are various types of women protagonists who belong to different generations. She plunges into the mind of Indian ladies living in joint families under male mastery.

Keywords: Position of Women, Pain, Suffering, Loneliness, Establishing Identity

Introduction

Literature is the reflection of the society. It provides a window to the past and its present through which we get the true picture of a society and its cultural practices. Manjukapur in her novel presents the sufferings and problem of the Indian women in the male dominated society. She depicts the importance of education and freedom for Indian women. Vimati is the central protagonist of the novel. The woman in her novel have explored themselves to establish their own identity imposed by the male patriarchal society. Manjukapur like many other Indian novelists have tried to bring out the self sacrificing nature of women and their sufferings throughout life.

Aim of the Study

The main focus of my study is to bring out the feelings and sufferings of the female characters in ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughters*. I have taken up ManjuKapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughter* (1998) to show the feminist instinct during the time of pre-independence. This novel is primarily located in the India of the 1940s. She speaks with great narrative eloquence of the idea of independence and the independence of woman during those times. The search for one's identity, to control one's destiny and to be free from all kinds of sufferings, is surely the key theme of *Difficult Daughters*. This search is not only refers to the independence aspired for and obtained by a nation, but also refers to the independence yearned for by a woman of that same nation. This independence is fraught with heavy price and fragmentation of the individual in the process. The fragmented and devastated soul is none other than Vimati, elder daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash, belonging to the Lala Diwan Chand family.

ManjuKapur is a feminist who lives in Delhi and teaches in Delhi University. Her novels are concerned with the pain and suffering of female characters and how they relate it to feminism. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* focuses on the theme of suffering and freedom, at one level, for one's country and for oneself. It is also about the relationship between the mothers and daughters who belong to different generations. It is the story of a woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and her aspiration for education, affection, and freedom. There are different norms of Indian culture related to females. The mother of the protagonist Kasthuri compels Vimati to accept marriage as a traditional norm, she refuses to accept it instead she seeks knowledge. Looking of the distinctive feminine aspect of this piece of work, one is struck by the narrative

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organization of the book that it is a story of a woman, narrated by another woman. It is Ida Vimati's daughter who is the narrator of the novel. Through her voice the novelist distinguishes the women from three generations. Vimati acts as a weapon in Kapur's writings and through her she brings forth the problems of marginalization suffered by women who are primarily concerned about their individuality and dignity.

Vimati, the protagonist of the novel, is the difficult and eldest daughter of a family, who has many responsibilities towards her siblings. Kasturi mother of Vimati is busy delivering a child year after year, it is the responsibility taken by Vimati to bring up her siblings. She is the next mother to her siblings. Amidst this hectic schedule Vimati is unable to recognize herself. Her time has been lost by taking care of the family. Vimati has denied the age-old tradition of getting married. She has a dire interest in education. Her goal is to complete fine arts. She longs to have independence, she is keen to have her own space and freedom. She wants to create her own identity.

Vimati gets a lot of inspiration from her cousin Shankuntala who is an epitome of modernity. Shankuntala is portrayed as an independent, defiant and assertive woman. She is distant from family relationship and marriage. These thoughts can be seen through Shankuntala's own voice that is "These people don't really understand you, 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".¹⁷

Inspiring Shankuntala had made Vimati taste the wine of freedom, encouraged her to fight for her rights in this patriarchal society. Vimati eventually fails in her studies due to her extra burden of responsibilities towards her family. Vimati gets involved into a scandalous relationship with her married neighbour, Harish, a professor. She has a deep sense of guilt but she thinks that this might be the goal of existence and identity in the society to live in. This marriage is a public acceptance for her. This marriage helps her to be free from uncertainty and insecurity.

Her fate after marriage turns everything upside down. Kasturi her mother blames her for all the pain and sufferings. Kapur recklessly says, "Ever since the visit home, Vimati had felt blank and dazed. She didn't know how to tell the professor what had happened, she could barely understand it herself. Where all ties between herself and her family broken?"⁽²²²⁾. Vimati is heartbroken to a greater extent and realizes despite all struggle for freedom and equality, Indian society has not yet attained its fulfillment in banishing patriarchal influence.

Vimati is unable to get freedom for even for trivial matters in the family like giving a name to her baby girl. Vimati literally fights for her self-identity. Her life from starting to the end is full of pain and sufferings, searching for self-identity, conflict between heart and mind. All hope of Vimati is lost when her daughter refuses to be like her mother.

Remarking An Analysis

Ida-Vimati's daughter is a daughter of the modern era after independence. She has a clear idea regarding modernity and tradition. She is totally unique from Kasthuri (grandmother) and Vimati (mother). Ida breaks up her marriage as she is denied by her husband. She is not ready to accept anything imposed by the society. She is having lots of mental strength and courage which Kasthuri and Vimati lack.

Manjukapur works out in her novels for the liberation of women. She has depicted independence in a patriarchal culture by making the women of her novel courageous against the impositions given out by the society. *Difficult Daughters* is a feminist work. It symbolizes a battle against culture, tradition, social limitations and artificially implicit rules in a conventional society. Manjukapur through her woman characters establishes freedom for them and makes them able to establish their own identity. She helps her female characters to battle for new conventions and social spaces.

Feminism shaped literary studies with particular reference to gender roles that women play. Feminism shows the gradual development of feminist movement or as it is termed as Women's movements of 1960's, its earlier instances in the eighteenth century were found in some writers. It was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action already possessing its classic books which has diagnosed the problem of women's inequality in society, and proposed solutions. The prominent feminist writers were Simon de-Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf. In modern context can be seen a host of feminist thinkers across the world such as Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Kate Millet, Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The main task of Feminist literary critics seems to stand guard against the curbing patriarchal norms which have been inherited perpetually. Thus marginalizations of women, their predicament, struggle for identity, finding their own pace, celebrating the female body are the chief subjects of this trend. The feminists also have adopted and adapted the intellectual insights from various schools of thought such as structuralism, post-structuralism, Psychoanalysis and Marxism. Owing to this fact we also find experimentation in their works. Julia Kristeva coined the term Intertextuality and Showalter proposed the terms such as 'gynocriticism' and 'gynotexts'.

Thus the readers come to the conclusion that Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is a story of Vimati's continuous struggle for her career and identity against the prevalent ideology of domesticity. The novel is woven around a woman who is torn between family responsibility, the desire to education and love. While India stands against the British Raj and its policies, Vimati fights for her personal freedom and finds that her struggle for identity has created unfavourable circumstances around her. The novel can be called as a journey of woman's inner suffering in order to get her suitable place in society.

The novel evokes some matters that affecting the issues of women in a man ruled society where laws for women are legislated by men in the social set up and a husband stands tall as a

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'sheltering tree'. Under whose shade and guidance, woman has to prove her abilities through her endurance. The novelist Manju Kapur has justified this through the portrayal of Vimati with an idea that.....

The start of feminist movement was a pioneering emancipatory force so as to bring clear focus to the discriminatory attitudes against women. Women have suffered various types of systematic mistreatment throughout history and continue to do so in the present. This mistreatment is unjust. Thus there is also oppression which women like Vimati suffer. It is gender oppression which Vimati suffers as self-suffering.

Vimati struggles hard to end her suffering and tries to create her own self identity. Vimati is a woman who is sensible, educated and desiring to end her suffering making a new shape for her life. This novel is a, stunning tale of motherhood, love, and finding one's identity in a nation struggling to discover its own.

Conclusion

All the female characters of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all odds. The strains of feminism are obvious in her writing. This is seen in the struggle of her woman characters, their vulnerability, struggle for identity, liberating attitude, the female psyche and the female biological world. The protagonist Vimati feels betrayed by the strong bars of traditional patriarchal norms. Vimati has been

Remarking An Analisation

brought up in a family where the woman has no identity of her own, no right to higher education. She wants to study and have career but is restricted by social conventions of the time and place. She rebels and insists on her right to higher education, Vimati life is a continuous struggle. She wants to establish an order through defiance. She rebels against the accepted and existing moral codes and social norms. Vimati asserts, feels liberated and makes no compromise in materializing her path and resolving the conflict.

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