
**REALISTIC OUTLOOK OF MANJU KAPUR WITH REFERENCE TO INDIAN
WOMEN AND SOCIAL CONTEXT IN ‘DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS’**

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Abstract: Manju Kapur is one of the most famous contemporary Indian English novelist focusing feministic concerns of Indian society in colonial and post colonial eras. Her realism is all pervasive in her novel ‘Difficult Daughters’ with the portrayal of different colours of Indian women. As a feminist, Manju Kapur lays stress on the concept of individual human rights and celebrates the search for personal freedom.

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As a realist Manju Kapur presents the real aspects of life and she deals with Satyagrah Movement, partition problems, the sufferings for freedom etc. in her novels. In ‘Difficult Daughters’ she reveals her political interest as she presents how women participated in freedom struggle. She capture the period of Lahore when conferences took place there and important persons arrived to inaugurate them and exhort girls with their speeches. The whole atmosphere is charged with zeal and self- awareness. Virmati also attends the Punjab Women’s Student Conference and feels surprised seeing women nationalists. These women are intellectuals who explain the meaning of the flag, freedom and the development to the listeners. The novelist presents her own views through these women nationalists. During the Women Conference many women addressed the whole meeting and exhorted women to take part in the freedom struggle as the traditional view of women is changing. Now women and girls are taking keen interest in political movement along with other volunteers. Leela Mehta, the guiding spirit of Women Conference remarks:

... we want not only degrees but constructive work.
.....Then indeed you are the true wealth of our nation.
(DD 143)

The novelist presents how women discuss politics, religion, academic freedom, war, peace, rural development, mass consciousness, price-rise, the medium of instruction, the Congress Committee, the Muslim League, Imperialism, and Independence Day Movement etc.

As a realist Manju Kapur presents the fact that education empowers women. It is due to their education that these women develop their own thinking and are capable enough to take the individual decision. She presents the new women who do not follow the age-old belief and they are aware of their fundamental rights.

She confirms the fact - Educate a woman, you educate a family. It is an accepted fact that women's education has changed the face of life. Swarna Lata and other women nationalists belong to the class which has a special concern and veneration for nation. Like Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi and Kasturba Gandhi etc., these women devoted their life to awaken women folk in their surroundings. Swarna Lata addresses the conference and presents the view of the novelist:

As a women, it is our duty, no, not duty, that word has unpleasant connotations. It is our privilege to be able to give ourselves to the unity of our country. Not only to the unity between Muslim and Hindu, between Sikh and Christian. Artificial barriers have been created amongst us to gain power over insecure and fearful minds. Let the politics of religion not blind us to this fact. (DD 145)

As a feminist, Manju Kapur lays stress on the concept of individual human rights and celebrates the search for personal freedom. She presents her female characters as new women who are free to choose and decide their tenor of life.

The novelist presents a gap between Virmati and her mother. Since childhood Virmati yearns for the love and care of her mother but alas! Her mother has no time as there are other children in the family:

The language of feeling has never flowed between them and this threat was meant to express all her thwarted yearnings. (DD 12)

Psychologically Virmati is devoid of love and concern of her mother and never shares her experiences with her. The novelist presents the theme of education versus marriage and shows how Virmati struggles to fulfill her desire. When she passed her F.A., her parents think that it is enough for a girl but she insists on studying further and enters A.S. College, the bastion of male learning. She is the seventh girl in class of four hundred boys. Professor Harish Chandra falls in love with her and Virmati falls a prey to his desire and transgresses the laws of the home and gets involved in an illicit affair with the Professor. It is due to lack of communication between her mother and herself that she becomes an easy prey to the professor. If her mother had tried to understand her passion for education, there would have been harmony between them.

As a woman Manju Kapur deals with the mother daughter relationship in her novels.

She presents the fact that mothers like Sona and Kasturi have a conventional way while daughters want to follow the modern new way of thinking. Modern women have their own ambitions and want to fulfil them at every cost. They have strong will and courage to oppose the age-old patriarchal system and look for individual freedom and power. The novelist presents how the modern woman like Ishita wants to break these old shackles through education and job. In her first novel *Different Daughters*, the novelist reveals the picture of new women through Ida, Shakuntala, Virmati, Swarna Lata and other women leaders. Ida, the daughter of Virmati wants to know her mother's past. Ida was born during the time of partition and her family had shifted to Delhi. Ida, the narrator of the story is a difficult daughter and she has a purpose to explore her mother's past. The novel begins with Ida's remark-

The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. (DD 1)

As a feminist, Manju Kapur supports the education of women in all her novels and reveals how education helps women to take job and establish their individuality in society. Virmati has a great passion for studies and excels other girls in family. She wants to become a teacher and joins B.T. in Lahore. Education provides her a job and financial security. It is through her desire to learn that she comes in contact of the Professor. It is her education that leads her to independent thinking. Similarly Nina gets higher education and serves as a lecturer in Miranda House.

As a supporter of the rights of women, Manju Kapur can be put in the category of Margaret Atwood, Bapsi Sidhwa, G.B. Shaw, John Galsworthy etc. She raises questions - Why to deny women the right to education? Why to deny women the right of an individual? Why to deny her the freedom of speech, freedom of taking decision in family as well as other social matters? How long will women be subject to age-old shackles of patriarchal society? Is a man mentally and intellectually superior to woman? Can a woman not enjoy equality like a man? Through her women protagonists she asserts her feministic thought that a woman should be self- controlled and self-reliant.

It is true that her mother always insists on her being a model daughter and yet it is hard to her to grant rights for free thinking. Ida is independent in her thinking and breaks her marriage as her husband denies her motherhood. She never wants to abort her child but she is forced to do it on the insistence of her husband. But she is always haunted by the thought that she is killing something. She remarks:

Prabhakar had insisted I have one.feeling unloved, because he didn't want a baby from me. (DD 156)

Like Nina, Ida is a confident, independent and courageous woman and is not ready to become a puppet in the hands of her husband. She wants to live herself on her terms

individually.

As a modern thinker, the novelist supports female education as it awakens one's soul and mind and makes one realize the real aim of one's life. Education makes people rational and prepares them to make a difference between right and wrong. Professor Harish is an intellectual who inspires Virmati to get education. Through Harish the novelist presents her view regarding education:

One of the benefits of education is that it teaches us to think for own selves. Even if we arrive at the same conclusions that have been presented to us, our faith in those beliefs are stronger for having been personally thought out. If as sometimes happen, our education leads us to question some of the value system by which we live, that is not to say that we are destroying tradition. Even the smallest one of us has a social function, but that function is not to follow belief blindly that may not be valid. (DD 102)

To him, uneducated people are like earthworms as an earthworm inhabits a limited space and remains within the darkness of the soil. He compares uneducated person as an earthworm that can neither feel nor see. Those who do not develop their mind and intellectual powers, can not realise the purpose of life and waste it.

Through Harish the novelist presents the plight of a husband who is educated but married to a woman (Ganga) who cannot understand his intellectual motives. He admires his wife as she is a good woman, runs the house to perfection, and looks after his family as her own. But he tells Virmati that he feels lonely as they have nothing in common. Though he wants to share his interests with his wife, he is helpless as she cannot change herself. Though he regrets that she feels pain at his estrangement, and so he remains away from the woman he is married. Through him, Manju Kapur criticizes the age-old tradition of society as she asks-

Who is responsible for this state of affairs?I cannot be an adherent to stultifying tradition after this, but Viru, you must make up your own mind about these matters. You are intelligent and capable. (DD 103)

Manju Kapur feels sad seeing that the Muslim girls rarely joined degree colleges for education. The fate of girls belonging to backward classes was lamentable. Manju Kapur also refers to the quota system in the colleges and how people suffer. Through Shakuntala the novelist reveals how the good students suffer and this quota system is just a part of politics. She says:

In Government Colleges, the quota is high that good Hindu students have to wait until the Muslim quota is full, though of course their quota is hardly ever filled because those people don't like to study ... And only then are the Hindu girls, really very good students some of them, allowed seats ... the quota system is part of politics, and we mustn't get upset about something

we can do nothing about. (DD 119)

As a realist, Manju Kapur raises some questions regarding religious differences and the rights of a woman - Why to put social and political restrictions on women? How long will women suffer due to quota system? Does any religion forbid equal status to women? As a supporter of equality, liberty and fraternity she pleads for the equal rights for all individuals.

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