

## Manju Kapur's '*Difficult Daughters*': A Study of Meek Women.

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### Abstract:

*Manju Kapur is one of the popular feminist novelists of the second generation of the Indian English Novelists. Through her literary works she has tried to pen down the sufferings, torments, tortures of the women who are the victim of the male dominance. She presents the traditional minded Indian familial set up. Her female protagonists are the mute sufferer of the ill treatment given to them, the secondary status given to them by their in-laws. Though these protagonists are highly educated, they are the victim of the dominating patriarchy of the Indian society. She deals with the theme of feminism and always tries to suggest the remedies, solutions to heal the wound of these characters. 'Difficult Daughters' is the prize winning novel by Manju Kapur. It is the story of three generation focusing on the pathetic condition of the women. This present research paper is the study of the female protagonists of the different generation, their sufferings, torments, and their plight in the male dominated society in 'Difficult Daughters'.*

**Key Words:** dominating patriarchy, ill treatment, Sufferings, torments, torture, meek, suppression etc.

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### Introduction:

Manju Kapur is one of the Indian Women Novelists who have obtained name and fame for the novelty in the presentation of the women's condition in the socio-cultural surrounding in the Indian context. She presents the typical middle class mentality of the Indian familial set up. It gives her wide popularity. The glimpses of the inner turmoil and mental struggle of

her female characters and their response to the situations as a social constructs can be seen in her novels. Her first novel- number one best seller in India- '*Difficult Daughters*' (1998) is the fine example of the women's issues. This novel introduces Manju Kapur to the world of Indian Writing in English with the burning, serious issues of the contemporary women.

### ***'Difficult Daughters': A Study of Meek Women.***

With the publication of '*Difficult Daughters*' in 1998, Manju Kapur enters in the galaxy of the Indian Women Writers. This novel has received tremendous international acclaim for presenting various burning issues related to the women. The cover page of this novel itself tells the readers as it is an urgent and important story about family and partitions and love. It is also inscribed as love can divide as well as unite. '*Difficult Daughters*' is a skillful, enticing first novel by an Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism. It is a simple story, a story of sorrow and coping, love and compromise. The novel is set during India's freedom struggle. It is partly based on the life of Kapur's own mother. It is a story full of grief and struggle, love and lust, compromise and defiance. '*Difficult Daughters*' discusses the life history of the women protagonists of the three different generation- Kasturi-Virmati- the central character and Ida- the narrator of this novel. Prof. Harish Chandra's wife Ganga is another important character of this novel.

Kasturi-Virmati's mother represents the first generation. She is the perfect example of the meek woman. She is the victim of child marriage. In her early childhood, she marries with Suraj Prakash an Arya Samajee. Though she is educated lady she could not resist the ill treatment especially the sexual harassment given to her by her own husband. She gives birth to six daughters and four sons and this time she is again conceive. But she is not mentally, psychologically, physically, emotionally prepared to give birth to the child. She is too meek, weak to deliver the baby. Her life seems such a burden, her body so difficult to carry. Her sister-in-law's words echo in her ears, "Breeding like cats and dogs," "Harvest time again."<sup>7</sup> During her married life, particularly in giving birth to the babies, her views, her willingness are never considered. She is always taken for granted. Her husband neither takes care nor consider her health. She is not permitted to avail the equal rights. She cannot even utter a single word against this. Her individuality is never been given respect by her husband. She simply remains only the child producing machine. Due to the constant pregnancies, she is unable to pay attention at her children. She fails to perform her motherly

duty. She expects that Virmati- her eldest daughter should play the role of second mother for her siblings. In fact Virmati too longs for the motherly love, affection, but instead of showering it on her daughter, Kasturi used to scold her every now and then for not taking proper care of her siblings. She is the perfect example of subordinate, meek woman who mutely bears all the tortures and torments. Kasturi is the real representative of the traditional submissive Indian woman who is lost in the domestic world. She is the woman of weak mentality and physically due to the burden of the child-bearing for the long span of seventeen years. She dances on the tune of her husband. She never dares to say no to his love making and bears the sexual tortures for a long period.

Virmati the heroine of the novel is the representative of the second generation. Since her childhood, she desperately needs the motherly love. Being the elder daughter and consistent pregnancies of her mother, she has to look after the upbringing of her siblings. During the course of taking care of them, she misses the glory, pleasure of her childhood. She feels suffocated with the increasing needs of the family and to fulfill them always she has adjusted these needs. When she expresses her desire to continue education after getting the marriage proposal at the age of seventeen from Inderjeet-the canal engineer, her mother instead of thanking her for playing the role of second mother of her brothers and sisters, she scolds her as: “Are you out of senses? Two years is not long enough for you? You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you.”<sup>58-59</sup> Virmati refuses the marriage proposal and she even attempts to commit suicide but later she is saved while drowning and locked up in a godown. Her mother could not bear Virmati’s foolishness. She grabbed her by hair and banged her head against the wall. She curses her by saying: “What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one.”<sup>59</sup> It shows that Virmati has to fight against the aggressive patriarchal oppression and equally against the engulfing power of her mother.

During her higher studies Virmati falls in love with a married UK returned professor of English-Harish Chandra. She easily falls in his trap. He sexually exploits her and as a result she remains pregnant. He doesn’t feel it is necessary to meet her and take the responsibility of the would be kid by getting married with her. Virmati becomes restless and with the help of her cousin-Swarnlata she manages to get abort. Here, she is being treated only as a pleasure seeking object and not as a true companion. Harish shows the typical male mentality of exploiting the girl. Later due to the social shame, Harish ties the sacred knot

with her and takes her in his house where he is already living with his illiterate wife Ganga, and kids Giridhar, Chhotti, sister-Gudiya and mother- Kishori Devi. Virmati is denied the status of the wife by Ganga. She is not allowed to cook the food, clean Harish's clothes also. She is humiliated and never been accepted as their family member. She remains the second wife of Harish. She is outsider for the family members. She tries to help Gudiya in her studies; she offers her help in drawing a picture to Giridhar. But nobody wants her help as she is an 'outsider' for them. They say: "Who asked you to give trouble where you are not wanted?"<sup>219</sup> This 'otherness', 'outsider' status creates the feeling of frustration, subordination, subjugation in her mind. Virmati is ignored in the family. She has to face hostile gestures and scornful remarks of the family members. She isn't only a difficult daughter but difficult daughter-in-law also. Virmati finds everyone humiliates her in a new environment after her marriage.

After her marriage with Harish, she goes her parental house for the first time. But here also she is neglected, deserted. Nobody pays attention at her. For everyone of her parental family she is just like an opposite party. Her mother scolds her: "You have destroyed our family, you badmash, you randi! You have blackened our face everywhere!"<sup>221</sup> Kasturi-her mother herself humiliates her daughter.

Gender discrimination can be seen clearly in this novel. Virmati is excluded by the society as she violets the rule of the society and falls in love with a married man and consequently marries him later. Due to her adultery, violation of the rules and regulations of the male dominated society, she is banned in the society, she is not allowed even to participate in the funeral ceremony of her father, but on the other hand, Harish who is equally responsible for the violation of the society rules where a married man's falling in love and marring with another lady while his first is alive, though it is considered as a sin, he is accepted by both the families. He is allowed to attend the funeral ceremony of Virmati's father though is fully responsible for Virmati's distress. Maria Elena Martos Hues says as: "Virmati's quest for freedom from the patriarchal moulds of tradition casts upon her eventually proves an erratic one, for she gets caught in the net of allocated female role that she was trying to evade."

Ida the narrator of this novel is another meek, subordinate minor female protagonist of the novel. She represents the third generation. She unfolds the life story of her mother who proves as the difficult daughter and failed to assert her individuality till her last breath. She is the only sign of Harish and Virmati's married life. The readers meet her

at the very beginning of the novel. The novel opens as: “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.”<sup>1</sup> Satish Barbuddhe mentions as: “The daughter Ida does not want to be like her mother as she does not want her voice to be suppressed by anybody”. Her father wants her to live a neat and tidy life whereas Virmati-her mother tightened her reins on her as she grows up stating as it is good for her life. Due to the consequences of these Ida constantly looks for the escape route from such suffocating, dominating lifestyle where she is denied to assert her ‘own self’. Ida engages herself in wedlock to inhale the free air and find some solace from her personal life. But her marriage proves a disastrous marriage and very soon she separates from her life partner. Her life becomes sad and she feels disapproved in a society. She considers herself as husbandless, childless. She is engulfed by melancholy, depression and despair. She is also the subordinate woman like other female protagonists in his life. She feels herself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society.

Ganga- Professor Harish Chandra’s first wife is another meek, subordinate woman referred to in this novel. She gives a new dimension to the story. She is the victim of a dominating patriarchal society as well as of child marriage. At the age of three, she marries with Harish. She stays with her husband up to the age of twelve. Later she shifted to her paternal house where she studies the culinary and other domestic work. Due to this her mother never sends her to the school and trained her in housekeeping only. When she returns to her husband’s house, she tries to be a good housewife, but she fails to be an intellectual partner of a highly qualified companion. Harish never feels happy contented in her company. When he brings home Virmati- the qualified girl who suits to his social reputation as his second wife, his mother Kishori devi scolds him. He becomes furious and replies as: “I do what I can for everybody. But to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman with whom I have nothing in common. Who cannot even read. Who keeps a ghunghat in front of my friends.”<sup>209</sup> Her husband himself doesn’t give due respect to his wife with whom he has tied the sacred knot, who has given birth to his two kids. Ganga is herself responsible for her pathetic, submissive, meek condition, her subjugation, suffocation in her marital life. Harish attempts for several times to teach her, to literate her and expects from her to share the much needed intellectual companionship to her husband. But she fails to capitalize the opportunity. So due to her illiteracy, he falls in love with his student and marries her and brings her home as a second wife. Ganga weeps on her fortune. She expresses her feelings to her mother-in-law as: “What I have done that God should

punish me like this?"<sup>211</sup> She feels Virmati as her rival. She feels insecure while sharing the house as well as husband with Virmati. In Indian family setup no married woman can tolerate, bear any other woman's interference in her happy married life. The wounded, frustrated Ganga doesn't allow her to help her in her domestic work. As a result of insecurity, Ganga doesn't allow even to wash her husband's clothes. There was lot of distress in her mind but she continued with domestic routine and her role as a wife, a mother and daughter-in-law. Like Kasturi, marriage is religious and social institution for Ganga where marriage is not settled on the basis of love. She too has to involve in the daily chores. She bears all the psychological, emotional tortures mutely after the sudden arrival of Virmati in her happy quadrilateral married life.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, Manju Kapur presets the different protagonists of the different period suffering the same torments. Though the time period is different still there is no remarkable change in the mindset of the male particularly the life partners of these women. The sufferings, ill treatment still remain the same. All these women are the victims of the male dominance. These are the meek, suppressed characters who bear lot of tortures. Since the establishment of the society, woman is deprived, suppressed, subjugated of social security, political awareness and economic liberation. Though the generations are different, though the ages have been passed, the suffering of the women is the same. They were meek, subordinated; still they are meek and subjugated at some extent. The root cause of their misery lies in their own family itself. The above discussion of the miserable plight of the women referred in this novel shows that these women are the victim of the patriarchal society where victimization of woman is a common thing.

### **Work Cited**

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