

**Quest For Self In The Novels Of Manju Kapur****¹Dr. Sudhir Kumar Agrawal, ²Dr. Qamar Alam**¹Bhartiyam Vidya Niketan, Gwalior, M.P. India²Former Prof. and Head, Dept. of P.G. Studies and Research in English, K.R.G. Govt. Post Graduate College, Jiwaji University Gwalior, M.P. IndiaE-mail- drsudhiragrawal12@gmail.com

Manju Kapur has portrayed the psyche of her female protagonists very effectively. Indeed Manju Kapur has delineated the social conditions in which her heroines live and have to bear the brunt of patriarchal society as well as relentless quest for self. In all her novels, male characters are dominating but they do not come in the definition of a hero. They are affecting the psyche of women to such an extent that all the major women characters whether they are Virmati, (Difficult Daughters), Astha (A married woman), Nisha (Home) or Nina (The Immigrant), all are on the verge of secluding themselves from the company of man. These four major women characters are searching a place for themselves in the male-dominated society from the beginning. Society, morality, values are like bondage to them, so all of them are leading forward in an ambiguous manner in the midst of relentless urbanization and the far reaching western influences.

The search for control over one's destiny is surely the key theme of Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters. Through her very first protagonist Virmati, Manju Kapur has dealt with the theme of travails in self-identity vis-à-vis socio-cultural identity. In the same novel, the second protagonist of third generation Ida again revolts against the ways and follies of her mother Virmati. She embarks on her search to know her mother's legacy after she dies: the novel Difficult Daughter opens with the anguishing voice of Ida:

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

She becomes a more typical daughter of a difficult daughter Virmati. Virmati's life has been a saga of pain and protest against the institutions of family, marriage, tradition and society. All her novels take shape in family background. In an interview with Jai Arjun Manju Kapur says:

Literature by women, about families, always has these larger considerations, with years of studying texts, it becomes almost second nature to look beneath the surface- at social and economic forces, gender relationships and how they are played out in an arena that, in my writing happens to be the home. But then, all sort of things happening outside do affect what is happening inside the home.²

Since childhood, she has to bear the heavy responsibility of becoming a small mother of younger brothers and sisters. Her desire to study becomes more fervent when she meets Shakuntala, her cousin. After meeting Shakuntala, she feels the need to

make her own existence and leads a life on her own terms. Ultimately she breaks the traditions and old family system. But unfortunately, she keeps on becoming a pendulum between education and marriage. When she is compelled to marry the canal engineer, she protests and writes a letter to Professor Harish whom she loves dearly and says:

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 he 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!³

When she rejects this marriage proposal, she is treated more harshly. She just beholds each happening occurring around her and keeps mum but soon she takes her decision in spite of several unprecedented hurdles.

It is interesting to note that Virmati talks of her identity, her freedom but her freedom is confined only to her body and heart. She does not attempt to utilize her education as Shakuntala did. Her internal and external conflict becomes louder when her mother Kasturi's profound identification with Virmati makes her think of her daughter's thoughts of independence as sheer selfishness smacking of ingratitude. Her mother better knows the norms of patriarchal society so when Virmati revolts against patriarchal values; her mother takes it to be a revolt against her own self. Virmati's illicit relation with professor makes her life more crucial. She becomes a stigma to the family reputation. She is compelled to lead a life of compromises quite in prosecution with her ideals from which she finds no escape.

One more bolt comes to her when she becomes pregnant and finds that her love Harish for whom she revolted against each emotional and social part of her life is indifferent to her state, she splits into pieces. She herself goes for an abortion to be done. After abortion she realizes half the meaning to be called woman and the illusion of romantic love.

After much difficulty and condemnation she is married to the Prof. Harish, the second stage of her suffering begins. In the house of Harish, she is not considered an identity but the second wife of Harish who has snatched the rights of his first wife Ganga. She is a sinner to the backbone. When she dies, she is neither cremated according to her wishes nor her voice and her identity is recognized by anybody. Even her daughter does not consider the ways of her mother justified. Chandra Holm comments:

It is also not very flattering about what happens to young Indian girls when they are allowed some 'freedom'. Any parent who believes what is written in the book would lock up the daughter again, because it is better not to give the daughter any freedom because it will be so grossly 'misused'.⁴

Manju Kapur experiments with new themes such as gratification of sex from women's point of view along with the politics of the day. Feminism and contemporary history go hand in hand to give a new dimension to their fiction.

Although, the quest for self, especially in the life of woman has become a much debatable phenomena, as long as this term is growing old, it is losing its authenticity. Literati of the world occasionally misinterpret it. No one can deny the fact that women are treated as no entity several times in their life, their sentiments and emotions are mostly ignored but as far as their honesty to themselves is concerned they must be vigilant for their chastity and responsibilities.

REFERENCES

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