

ISSN:0976-8165

# THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 7, Issue-I February 2016

7 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## Gender Discrimination: An Outlook in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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Gender bias has been a dominant theme in literature since time immemorial. The struggles of women and the difficulties they face in the oppressive mechanical society are well reflected in the literary writings, especially in the writings of women authors. In Indian literature Manju Kapur is a highly talented writer who explores the patriarchal ideologies and social traditions which make women powerless and docile. Their efforts to extricate themselves from the social mirages especially through education are well reflected in the writings of Manju Kapur. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore Kapur's exploration of gender discrimination in the novel *Difficult Daughters*.

The woman in *Difficult Daughters* seems to have the characteristic traits of new generation woman who carries with her the burden of suppression since ages and wish to be free. The writer vividly presents the problem of women who carry with them the burden of being a female besides the responsibility of being mothers to members of their own gender. According to the traditional social setting of the novel where mothers and daughters exist, marriage is regarded as of paramount importance and fate is something from which these women cannot escape. Manju Kapur succeeds in realistically portraying Virmati, the protagonist in a patriarchal society. Her intellectual exposure leads her to liberal thinking which is not being entertained by her family and society as well. She is caught in between the age old tradition and her liberal thinking. The author has presented her as a woman being caught between the carnal desire and the longing to be part of the political and intellectual happenings of the day. Women are often described in terms of the role they play. The chaos between their beliefs regarding their identity and their desire for personal fulfilment are the major themes found in the sub-continental literature.

Manju Kapur has joined the growing women writers of India, like, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Shobha De and so on. These writers have exposed the image of the suffering passive women suddenly breaking the traditional barriers. They filled the English language in such a way to suit representations and narration of what they feel about their women and their lives in post modern India. These modern day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a number of new themes. To Christopher Rollason, "The women of India have indeed achieved their successes in half a century of independence; but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done (183)". And the battle for self-sufficiency remains an incomplete struggle. Women under the patriarchal pressure and

control suffered violence and social banishments .They seemed to be discriminated and biased because of their gender. The collision of patriarchy on the Indian society varies from one writer to another.

The story of Virmati is not only that of a difficult daughter but also about an obstinate student, a forlorn lover, an unwanted daughter-in-law, a second wife detested by everyone, a denied mother and in short, she is an outsider to the end of her days .Virmati's family is a joint family of four generations who live under the same roof dominated by an authoritarian head Lala Diwan Chand who imposes the strict rules of Arya Samaj which is a more challenging task. It could be said that the disaster which overtook the life of Virmati is the narrow belief professed by the Arya Samaj. But the dominant theme in *Difficult Daughters* is the heroine's useless attempt to oppose a tradition which deprives a woman of all roles except child-rearing, cooking and to serve the husband chosen by her parents.

People sometimes feel that education leads a girl child to immorality. And to Virmati, education is an escape. According to her family, it is education which has brought her moral degradation. She is considered a fallen woman as she falls in love . Virmati drowns herself and when she is brought back by the elders of her family, Kasturi shouts saying:

Why? Why had she done this thing? Why run away? And worst of all, why tell a stranger of her intention and leave them to find out from an outsider what she was doing? And what about her relatives that -were- going- to be? Didn't she owe them a moment's worth of consideration? Was this all her education had taught her? (DD 79)

*Difficult Daughters* is about one difficult daughter and the poor hand dealt out to women in general. Virmati, the heroine yearns after independence, she craves for the human relations who will help her to be herself and to do whatever she wishes because she thinks being an educated woman, she deserves that. She wishes for a more independent life than that offered to her by people around her. This earnest desire of hers is condemned to failure as she is not understood both by her family and also the man whom she marries. Not only that, she was not compelled to marry the already married professor and she was free to ignore the wrong choice of her life. The relationship of Virmati with the professor brings her nothing except suffering. The repeated secret visits of the dreadful professor makes the protagonist lose her employer's confidence. Other than that she is made to leave the school, the house and employment at Nahan.

The mishap which happens to Virmati is undoubtedly the most representative fate of Indian women . Virmati like so many other sub-continental women is asked to accept an arranged marriage, but she goes against that fate which brings infamy not only to her family, but to her mother above all. Uma Parameswaran opines:

My disappointment with *Difficult Daughters* is two-fold, both as history and as fiction. Though one gets the general drift of the pressures of family on the young woman in the 1940's, the author does not show or interpret political or social history in any meaningful

way: and the choice of the novel's narrative point of view is disappointing. Had events been seen from woman's perspective, the story could have been that of a young woman carried away on the wings of romanticism because of the brave new world that education in general and this educator in particular opened up for her. It could have been a story of rebellion, of individualism, and of passion. Instead, in today's terms we would call it sexual harassment, where some one in power leads a subordinate up the usual garden path and wants to eat his cake and have it too. (393)

Even at a certain point of time, Virmati undergoes the shock of an abortion all alone. It does not move the professor much. He never opens his mouth regarding marriage and the protagonist loses interest in the secret visits of the professor. It is only because of that relationship that Virmati loses everything in the end including her home, the pity of her parents and brothers, and employment. Sometimes the mothers are the one's who are to be blamed because they teach their daughters to be extraordinarily patient and extraordinarily flexible. They even try to extinguish fires of their creativity. It may be said that it is not the patriarchy alone which is to be blamed but it is matriarchy as well, which has to be blamed for supporting weaker sons.

More than half of the population of the world comprises of women, but they are not given importance as that of men. Even though they have proved their mettle in various fields they are not given recognition as to men. There is a lot of gender bias in this era of war and peace between God's two favorite creations that is man and woman. A woman is the partner of man in the achievement.

### **Works Cited:**

#### **Abbreviation**

DD                                      Difficult Daughters

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