



REMAPPING FEMININE SELF IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

K. Geetha* & Dr. Olive Thambi**

* Assistant Professor of English, L.R.G Government Arts College (W),
Tirupur, Tamilnadu

** Assistant Professor of English, L.R.G Government Arts College (W), Tirupur, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: K. Geetha & Dr. Olive Thambi, "Remapping Feminine Self in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 179-181, 2018.

Abstract:

Indian writing in English has emerged with Post colonial aesthetics, which examines the manner in which the Indian society grapple with the challenges of self-determination and how they incorporate with the western ideologies and conventions. The women writers of the late 20th century focus light on the different facets of the society they live in. Manju Kapur has vividly painted the inner turmoil of Virmati, who wants to fight against taboos, social and family restrictions proves her struggle for not giving up her 'Self', and 'Identity'. The relationship between man and woman is very essential but drastically changing in this materialistic world. However, as a feminist Manju kapur has keenly studied the problem of Virmati and how she wants to remap her role in the present century and gives a new dimension to contemporary thinking. 'Difficult Daughters', is the story of a young woman Virmati, torn between family duty, the desire for education and illicit love. She falls in love with the neighbour who is already married. She eventually marries him, and finds herself in the battle for her independence. She challenges cultural and social values in order to show her own 'self' and how she moulds her life with the relationship which leads to controversy.

Key Words: Grapple, Remap, Self-Determination & Identity

Introduction:

As a post-colonial feminist, Manju Kapur has an actual understanding of social Hyporisis and perception of human foibles in a tradition based society. She is an eminent Indian novelist, was born in 1948 in Amritsar, and graduated from the Miranda House University College for women. She received an M.A. in 1972 from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada and an M.Phil from Delhi University. At present she lives in New Delhi where she teaches English literature at her alma mater Miranda House College. Interestingly her very first novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) received a huge international acclaim. This novel was published in 1998 which helped Manju Kapur to carve a niche of her own as a chronicler of middle-class Indian manners. Manju Kapur's themes revolve around the marginalizations of women, their power struggles and an inherent desire for identity. She has been even compared to the timeless Jane Austen who has enthralled readers across time and space. In most of her novels, her characters correct their faults through lessons learned because of tribulations. The novelist has very well studied the novels of Jane Austen and much inspired by her narration and style. Kapur's heroines are typically belong to middle class and well educated women with Gynocentric nature. Her plots reveal women's conventional dependence on marriage to safe and sound social status and economic stability. *Difficult Daughters* pays tribute to the enduring bond between mother and daughter. It is based partly on the life of Kapur's mother Virmati, which is also the name of the novel's main character. Kapur writes dedicated this novel as "to my mother and her mother and my father", reveals woman-to-woman attachment. The story set during partition, revolves round Virmati who is caught into an illicit relationship with her married English professor. The professor eventually marries Virmati, installs her in his home and helps her towards further studies in Lahore. But it is small consolation to her scandalized family and even to Virmati, who finds that the battle for her own independence has created irrevocable lines of partition and pain around her.

Review of Literature:

The major tools used in this article are the comments of Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Simon De Beauvoir and Bassnett, Susasn. The pioneering works have been *The Second Sex and Sexual Politics*. Making novels as the medium of expression, the novelists have protested against the wrong done to women and have fought for the identity of women. Defining a feminist writer, Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes:

The feminist writers are those who write as women- they are self-conscious producing women's literature, writing about women,- their rights, their dreams, their problems, their sufferings. (92)

Virmati is depressed to face her daughter husbandless and childless. If tradition-bound women run the risk of losing their identity, nonconformists face personal and social conflicts. Culture establishes the condition of men and women to behave differently. As Simon De Beauvoir says:

When a woman begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy, she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective. If the difficulties are more evident in the case of the independent woman, it is because she has chosen battle rather than resignation. (696)

Virmati stands as a woman of revolution to explore the possibilities for modern women in attaining education and economic independence who experience humiliation and disillusion. The novelist has raised the 'question of women' during a political and social movement in colonial India for which Bassnett says,

.....We may term a novel "feminist" for its analysis of gender of socially constructed for its understanding that change is possibly and that narrative can play in it. Feminist fiction is the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction- revolution both in that is formally innovation and in that it helped to make a social revolution. (01)

Feministic Perspective:

The concept of Feminism came into being when some individuals began to experience a chronic imbalance in gender relations and to realize that the unequal power- sharing between men and women. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were, subjected to much more social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased in lieu of their sex. Feminism, as a new way of life, came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman's role in society. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. And at the same time women have difficulty in achieving their own equilibrium. They seem to be alienated, fragmented and broken. So they launch their self and they long for autonomy throwing away the socially constructed, prejudiced gender norms.

The women's life and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, despite basic solidarity needs to be tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian Society varies from the one in the west. Manju Kapur has her own concerns, and priorities, to sketch her heroines seeking autonomy and identity. As well as their own ways of dealing with the predicament of their women protagonists.

According to Erik Erickson, the stage of psycho social development in which identity crises may float up is called Identity Cohesion versus Role Confusion. During this stage, adolescents confront physical growth, maturity, and they form opinions of themselves and wonder what others imagine of them. Adolescents therefore, generate their self-image bear the task of resolving the crisis of their basic ego identity. In this novel, issues such as trust, autonomy, and ingenuity exists everywhere. Every now and then people face hurdles that may delay the development of a powerful identity. A woman should be conscious, self controlled, having faith in the inner power of womanhood. A meaningful transform can be made only from within being free in the deeper psychic sense.

Remapping Self:

Virmati, being the elder daughter among the eleven children, takes the role of a mother to those younger ones. She gets exhausted with her routine role and wants to come out to the world of freedom. She acts as a rebellious woman of traditional Punjabi family of Amritsar. It was the period when women are supposed to remain quiet and obey their fathers and husbands and they were not allowed to raise their voice and opinions. The family Members of Virmati, expect her to be the role model of typical Indian Woman. But on the other hand Virmati is always particular about her own role that is stepping out from our own Indian culture and ethos.

Manju Kapur's basic approach to woman's life is to liberate them from the oppressive measures of patriarchy. Virmati is Manju Kapur's 'new woman' born into an austere and high minded family. The story tells how she is torn between family duties, the desire for education and illicit love. She is the eldest of all daughters. The whole burden of household work increases over Virmati. Due to her busy routine she does not do well in her study and fails. She falls in love with Harish, a professor who is already married. She is inspired by Shakuntala, her first cousin's liberal views of marriage and education.

Virmati's initial rebellion against her very traditional Arya Samaj family consisting of her parents, her paternal grandfather and aunt, at first postponing her marriage and then refusing to marry the person she was engaged to constitutes a radical rebellious act which predicts an individual who would go on to carve out a niche for herself. Thus, the novelist has shown Virmati bravely fighting against the old traditional, hackneyed values which attempt to oppress the free spirit of women. When Virmati comes to Amritsar and gets the desired space with the professor all alone at his home first time after marriage. Her mother gives a helping hand to Virmati and takes her to her home. Now Virmati gives birth to her daughter Ida. She now completes a full circle and gets her long cherished freedom.

Difficult Daughters is on the other hand focuses the story of a daughter's journey back into her mother's painful past. It spans the genres of fiction and history and falters in both. In the beginning, Ida, the narrator and daughter of protagonist, trying to reclaim her mother's secret life, turns out to be a main story. Virmati was a child of a conservative Hindu family, comes of age in the turbulent and optimistic 1940s. It was considered to be the time of transformation to the educated Indians. Exposed to taste the new wine of freedom, Virmati encounters freedom-fighters of all religions and persuasions. She was in a position to lead her life with her mother-in-law, co-wife and her husband's children, Virmati uses advanced education as an escape route. It is

true here, "Education led to independence and loose conduct". Her progress parallels the new-found freedoms of educated Indian women, but double standards prevail, increasing awareness of the ties that bind.

Virmati wants to change her role. Her cousin Sakunthala's visit planted the seed of aspiration in Virmati. As an aspiring individual caged within the society, her education is the one which leads her to independent thinking. She says to Sakunthala, "It was useless looking for answers inside home. One had to look outside. To Education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahor Colleges." (17) On the other hand her mother, Kasthuri says, "Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me" (17)

This controversial conversation reveals the different opinion of Kasthuri the first generation woman to her daughter Virmati. On the other hand Ida, Virmati's daughter also disapproves with her mother's role and doesn't want to face the society with psychological and emotional tortures. This idea is revealed in the very opening line of the novel, 'The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother' (1). Ida marries a fellow of academic pursuit. She is not seems happy with him. Ida is strong and clear. She breaks up her marriage as she is denied motherhood by her husband. The forced abortion is also the termination of her marriage. Then she wants to face a freer life than her mother. She has that strength which Virmati lacks.

The emerging new forms of life are constantly keeping human relationship in constant flux. In India certain forms of existing structures soon become unrecognizable and even disappear from social life. "The existing Structures' that embody these activities and relationships, both in the material world, such as farming, and in the social world such as in marriage, are rapidly changing." (1) In case of Virmati's mother Kasthuri, the first generation women in *Daughters Difficult*, marriage was to please one's in laws, but for her daughter it was different. As an alienated woman without relatives and friends she has to fulfill her responsibilities by her own. But her fate leads her to select the married Professor, the relationship which brings nothing but disaster. . But she herself feels ill of her illicit affair, when the professor was reluctant to marry Virmati, she says,

"I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace.....and why? Because I am in idiot". (149)

Then he marries Virmati, but her married life with him turned out to be a calamity. She loses her identity in front of Ganga, her husband's first wife; again she continues her education paves way to her dream of independence. She could not get any satisfaction from her education too. She tries to flee from this reality in a dream world of her own, but nobody bothers her. She cannot please all her siblings. She says,

"This long period is the first time in my life I have been left completely to myself.

Away from my brothers and sisters, away from household activities, I feel strange, one pea alone in a whole long pod, no use to anybody, I have to get used to it, for this is my fate". (DD 100)

According to her mother she has betrayed and ruined all their lives. The members of Harish's family do not accept her. She remains aloof and alienated from her parents side and her husband too. Virmati is aggressively facing the identity crises, "I feel so utterly left out, so utterly cold. Will there be any change in my life, I wonder?: (225). As there is no change in her family, she remains neglected.

Conclusion:

It can be called as a fallacy to believe that people could get by in our relationships without limits. Whomever it may be, one must be conscious about the human relationship whether between parents, children, spouses, friends, siblings, masters, subordinates boundaries creeps in. For every interaction one have with another individual is being determined by the limits. Unlike Childhood relationship, adult relationships are designed to be more conscious in all the situations. However, the people are bounded with cultural ethos; they now and again, often unintentionally commit mistakes. Sometimes, they violate ethos wantonly, perhaps out of anger or out of personal disappointment. But things could be achieved in a right way. As Manju Kapur, most of the modern novelists depict their heroines with different attitudes, which lead them to challenge the present scenario. Virmati as a woman fights for her identity but falls by the wayside. In this novel the heroine Virmati demands equal life opportunities and education but goes beyond the convention, breaking them proves her fall.

References:

1. Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1998.
2. Agarwal. *Spirituality and Indian Culture*. Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi: 2005.
3. Bassnett, Susasn. *Feminist Experiences: The Women's Movement in Four Cultures*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1986.
4. Erikson, Erik H. *Life and the Historical Moment*. Dublin: Helicon Press, 195
5. Kumar, Ashok. *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feministic Study*. Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi: 2010.
6. Sen, Nabaneetha Dev, "Man, woman and Fiction." *The Literary Criterion*, XXI, No04.1985:92.
7. Showalter, Elaine. 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness'. *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No.2, Writing and Sexual Difference. 1981.