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WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EMANCIPATION IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English is a relatively recent phenomenon as far as literature goes. This study deals with the issues of Women and the struggle for their Emancipation in the select works of Manju Kapur. Her protagonists of all the novels are facing against all odds. She wants to express the torments of women at deeper level in her novels. Her novel evokes some concern over the difficulties of women in a male-dominated society. She portrays women who want their individual worth realized and attempts to break through the suffering the traditional society offers them. Here women prove their ability and strength through their sufferings.

Manju Kapur is a popular Indian English novelist who has written *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *The Custody* and these reflects man-woman relationship, human desire, longing, body, gender discrimination, marginalization, insurgence and challenge. Implied in it is Kapur's examining of the over contested site of socio-cultural life in modern, urban, postcolonial India. The strains of feminism are clear in these writings. She has written five novels.

Here *Difficult Daughters* is based on the crisis in the value system of the modern society. The novel brings forth the issue of gender discrimination and the struggle of the Indian women under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society. *Virmati* is portrayed as a new woman of colonial India challenging old outmoded attitudes towards women. *Virmati* started to

investigate the possibilities for herself in education and economic independence.

Manju Kapur's female characters are overall educated. Their education leads them to self sufficient thinking for which their family and society become intolerant. They scuffle between convention and modernity. It is their personal scuffle with family and society through which they pitch into a devoted effort to sculpt identicalness for themselves as competent women with faultless background.

Manju kapur's quest for Emancipation, *Virmati* the main character of the novel taking arms against custom. She is forced by the inner need to feel loved as an individual. A woman, *Virmati* who tries in quest for Emancipation, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well. The story tells how she is agreeing the torment between family duty and illicit

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love. Virmati topples in love with the Professor who develops an intimate relationship with her.

Quickly she calculated dates She was certain she was pregnant. With this certainty, the nausea came again, ripping through her throat, salivating her tongue. She thought of all the hours she had spent over her practical files, her teaching charts, ... What would happen to her BT now? (DD 141)

Virmati has to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. If Virmati's mother, Kasturi, and Ganga finds happiness in domestic work, Virmati struggles between the physical and the moral. Finally, she gives way to the dictations of her heart and body. Refusing male dominating notions enforce women towards their life inside the home. Virmati states her personality and aspires for self-reliance through education. Virmati wanted to be independent.

Kapur's protagonist has their own feelings. Their passions are nothing but a choice not everyone dares to make. They prefer to walk down the way less travelled. They decide to pursue their passions whole heartedly. Virmati want to keep her higher education and determination. *Difficult Daughters* describes how to step out of the framework defined by men and patriarchal values and how to identify and create a tradition of their own.

Virmati's mother, assemble of patriarchy terms her unique privilege to improve her daughter into traditional norms so that she takes up the allotted role of a daughter, a wife and a mother without interruption and learns the importance of self-sacrifice, and devotion. But Virmati becomes a site of frightening estrangement, because she is not able to face the importunity of the society which is represented by the mother, as well as by the importunity of her psyche.

"She was his for life, whether he ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice" (DD 163). The Early part of Virmati's life has been set in the early twentieth century India before Independence. The delineation of the decolonization of India along with the presentation of a gradual growth of an emancipated state of women's existence has been developed into fictional parallels.

Virmati's experience in specific socio-historical situation can be deliberated a significant feminist

position. The cultural context created in the *Difficult Daughter* is traditional Indian social set up women's education emerges as a significant form of feminist position. Education, in the social context that finds expression in the novel, was considered a most powerful means of women emancipation.

Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* protests and shows a way of mapping from the point of a woman's experience. Kapur negotiates varied issues newly created out of a socio-political cataclysm in her homeland. *A Married Woman* is a serious acknowledgement of a woman about her personality cult in the personal allegory of a bad marriage. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power try to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. As a writer of the present scenario, she observes the nation's socio-political dissolve, and has marked the factuality in her fictive narration. With zeal to change the Indian male perception, she expresses the unpleasant experience of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph.

A Married Woman is an honest and seductive story of love, passion and attachment set at the time of political and religious turmoil in India. The fiction moves the argumentative issue of lesbian relationship in a challenging way. After all gay and lesbian relationships are not mere fancies. This has been seen getting more visible in modern societies though one may not accept it.

Astha, the protagonist, becomes an abiding wife and immolating mother. Her moody incompatible with her commercial thinking husband forces her to play the role of "mother and father" for her children. She refuses herself accomplishment and leads to the crumple of the institution of marriage and dissatisfied leads her to defiance and restlessness. Her nervousness, agitate, unaccompanied and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life.

Restlessness drives Astha to happy absolute unaccompanied, a sort of crime by the family, its adhesion, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom. She thinks that "A willing body at night, a

willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth" (AMW 231) are the necessary prerequisites of a married woman. She contemplates marriage as a terrible decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of rage, pain and indecision.

Judging the male impression of woman she thinks that a married woman is a sexual object and she does not think "marriage is just sex" (AMW 275) rather it provides interest, togetherness and respect. Being pain between her work and responsibility, trust and factuality, public morality and personal values her thought "a tired woman cannot make good wives" (AMW 154) and struggles for an emotional freedom, dignity, and emancipation from the trouble of the nation.

Home quite interestingly, if not very fluently, shows the unhappiness and destructive limitations of Indian family values. It is a closed black world where any point of individual expression is quickly pained to death, to be substituted with deadened conformity. This novel is about the family of Banwari Lal. Banwari Lal, the shop owner his sons Yashpal and Pyarelal and their wives and children and it explores the world of joint families. This world of joint families is not the large happy make believe families of films. It is a world trying to grapple with complexities of adjusting our aspirations and individualities with those of the others inside closed walls of the house, facing challenges of generational changes, trying to accommodate growing children in narrow personal spaces and even narrower working spaces.

"Marriage into a family will enable you and your children to live comfortably for the rest of your life" (Home 200)

This world of joint families does have unselfish elders, a mutual support system and intimacy that make joint family living such a pleasure and pain, but the novel does not dwell much on these aspects. It rather focuses on tensions and rivalries, almost a Darwinian struggle of finding one's own space for catching the sunlight and growing up, escaping the shadows of the others, who came earlier or who have more rights.

Home beginning with the narrative Sona and Rupa, at last its calling in Nisha-Sona's daughter who spends her childhood, disturbed by sexual abuse, at auntie Rupa's home. "They were traditional business people. In order to remain financially secure, and ensure the family harmony that underpinned that security,

marriages were arranged with great care... Falling in love was detrimental to these interests" (Home4).

But it is her later chase in life-studying English literature in a university, falling in love with a low-caste boy, confidently standing up to her brassbound family, pessimistically at being break off by the lover, her faith in facing with the meanness of life, her efforts at searching her place in an different society that avoids to think the oath of her benefits, her illiberal angry, unarticulated issues and simmering frustrations that inevitably accompanies a life riddled with disappointments- that become central to the concern of the readers.

In all the three novels, cited above, one can notice that a woman's first encounter with her body becomes a significant point of departure for her. The female body is always at a disadvantage. The woman is either silent about her sexuality as in Home or defiant as in Difficult Daughters or rebellious as in A Married Woman. For a woman, sexuality is a domain of restriction, danger and repression. It can also be argued that sexuality becomes a site of woman's oppression.

Grounded in cultural, religious and social traditions a woman's body is pure as long as it is untouched by man. Elements of feminism occur when one has experienced sex. But loss of virginity has multiple implications in women's life. This may happen in marriage or outside marriage. This inflicts a shame in their lives. What is pleasure for a man is a sin for a woman, what is desire for one is disgrace for the other, what is fun for one is a scandal for the other.

Various female characters of Manju Kapur, Virmati, Astha and Nisha to move into this forbidden territory. Virmati emancipates through her education and others two still quest for liberation. Astha is disillusioned with her rich family setup and finds solace in the company of another woman while Nisha has to wait for a very long time in spite of all her body and mind attainments due to astrological reasons.

Woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and nothing presented as a passive character. However, Mrs. Kapur seem aware of the fact that the women of India have truly achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. One

sees the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's female characters, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will.

Male enforces women towards domestic; they assume their personality and aspire self reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not quite against but are courageous, open hearted, strong feeling and action oriented. All protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own. In spite of getting education and freedom

the women protagonists of Manju Kapur's novels do not blossom into new woman in the real sense. Though they face one patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are curbed.

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