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SOCIAL REALISM IN MANJU KAPUR 'S NOVEL DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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ABSTRACT

This research article delves into the works of Manju Kapur, a renowned Indian author known for her compelling narratives that shed light on various social issues in contemporary Indian society. The focus here is to analyse the elements of social realism portrayed in the Kapur's novels and their impact on readers. Through a thorough examination of her selected works, this article aims to highlight the author's ability to capture the nuances of social relationships, cultural norms, gender roles and societal expectations. Furthermore, it aims to evaluate the distinct perspective Kapur brings to gender dynamics within the Indian context, elevating her novels to a platform of socio-cultural criticism. In Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* social realism is intricately woven into the narrative, addressing the complexities of identity, gender roles and familial expectations within the context of post colonial India. The protagonist, Virmati, grapples with her aspirations for education and autonomy against the backdrop of traditional norms and her family pressures. The novel highlights the tension between personal desires and social obligations illustrating the struggles of women striving for independence in patriarchal society. Through Virmati's journey, Kapur unveils the impact of cultural heritage on individual choices, revealing how societal constraints can shape and often limit the paths available to women. The narrative employs vivid characterization and realistic dialogues to depict the generational conflicts within families, emphasising the nuanced experiences of daughters navigating through the expectations set by their mothers and society.

Keywords: social realism, Contemporary Indian society, gender dynamics, cultural norms, Societal expectations, family dynamics, patriarchal society.

Introduction

Women are an essential part of human civilization. "Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, personal and social rights for women" (wikipedia). Manju Kapur mentions in her novel *Difficult Daughters* that women wish to be freed from patriarchal set up. They daringly demand human rights and identity for women who have been coerced to be docile and silent for centuries in the male dominated world. Manju Kapur's novels are incessantly looking for familiarity from social and moral constraints and cast a look at women's quest for having their own identity. Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters* presents women who try to establish their own self in a patriarchal society.

Difficult Daughters is wonderfully written with a narrative that is captivating in so many ways. While depicting the three generations, this narrative focuses on a woman born at the dawn of 20th century into a Punjabi family. It depicts an illicit affair and its larger social and political ramifications. The central character, Virmati, falls in love with a neighbour, the professor, who is already married. He helps her study further in Lahore which is small consolation to her outraged family. The backdrop of the story is set in the real world not just a real place and time but one that feels real, seeping out of the pages to envelope the reader. *Difficult Daughters* is a fascinating insight into many things such as history, into a distant culture but most importantly into human hearts and minds.

This novel is about educating daughters and facing the repercussions when they learn to think for themselves and begin to probe the basic values of society. It is the old conflict again between the demands of modernity and tradition, enacted this time in a conscientious and high minded middle class family in the 1930s and 40s. The drama unfurls intelligence and absorbing sympathy in her traditional family in Amritsar. At the centre of the storm is Virmati, who yearns for something beyond marriage. Having seen the dampening child bearing subsistence of her fragile mother, Virmati wants a life of her own. She wants to be like her cousin, Sakuntala, who is independent and self confident. Sakuntala sows a seed of freedom and defiant attitude in Virmati. She stands for modernity as she doesn't follow the conventional norms which restrict any daughter to an early marriage and then taking care of home and family. She encourages her for independence and for equal rights for women, this epitomising the post colonial emancipated new women.

New woman breaks the norms of the tradition bound society. In the beginning, Kasturi, mother of Virmati, is presented as an embodiment of motherhood who bears pain and suffering. "Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs didn't ache" (DD7). As a child, Virmati has to do house hold chores, after marriage, she has to tolerate pain to give birth to a child as Kasturi's condition is disclosed after having eleven children and after being the mother her whole life is dedicated to her whole family. Ida, Virmati's daughter can be seen as the last descriptive character in the order of generation. Kapur used her as a tool to re explore Virmati through the eyes of others.

As Dorasales points out ,In *Difficult Daughters* we do not listen to virmati voice .she could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions : colonialism and patriarchy.what we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation "(Dorasales 119)

In one of the passages kasturi says "All the time in lab , doing experiments, helping the girls , studying and going to conferences,I tell her she should have been a man " (DD16). Catherine stimpson has called the attention towards the omission, distortions,and trivializations" of women 's experiences and the sphere to which women have historically been consigned,such as private life and the family (stimpson 17). Virmati feels the influential impact of sakuntala and at once exclaims "I want to be like you Pehnji....I wish I too could do things ,But I am not clever" (DD17). Virmati comes to know about her inner yearning to find a self identity.Sakuntala's visit sows the seeds of aspiration in virmati,seeds to find her true place in society.

Being the second wife of Harish ,she loses all sense of identity.Virmati experiences the humiliation and decides to walk tight lipped ,mute on the path her destiny had created out for her " (DD196). Virmati is coerced to lead a life of compromises quite in prosecution with her principles from which she finds no escape.In the evening,she went to the angan to bring the clothes in.she took them down,clamped her lips together.she wondered tediously whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life"(DD215).

The story tells the tale not only of virmati but of other difficult daughters who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggle for independence in their lives.virmati's daughter Ida is shown as leading more a free life than her mother in external terms ,yet inside her she feels the same anxieties as her mother,"I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society "(279)Ida tells that "this book weaves a connection between my mother and me ,each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart .now live in it,leave me be Do not haunt me anymore "(280).Ida is the narrator through whose voice the novelist speaks.Kapur 's novel shows that what happens to virmati is the representative destiny of every indian women in patriarchal society.Gur pyari jandial correctly points out that "it is a mistake to devalue virmati struggle just because she failed, for what mattered was to have made the attempt, to break the patriarchal mould and for virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement"(jandial 47)

The life cycle of a woman goes through various ups and downs while fulfilling the responsibilities of wifehood, motherhood and above all woman hood.Even in the most difficult circumstances,she remains like a strong rock unaffected by the umpteen privations faced by her at every stage of her life and ultimately emerges as a fighter and survivor .The conclusive part of the novel is the reality that every woman has to have a deeper vision towards her strength and weaknesses and come across male domination in a graceful manner being in her own boundaries.

To conclude, *Difficult Daughters* is a wonderful story of daughters who deals with adversities as their life is not bed of roses. The story teaches us to have patience and not to stop Virmati,the daughter of a father of progressive ideas and traditionlist mother seeks human relations that would allow her to be herself.

Her desire for self - expression and self-realization is condemned to failure by her own family as well as that of the man she marries . Through Virmati 's character, Manju Kapur has dealt with the theme of travails in self identity with reference to socio cultural identity.

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