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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN-MACHINE INTERFACE
AND THE DAWN OF POSTHUMANISM**

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Alienation and Isolation in Kapur's "Difficult Daughters"

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Abstract

Indian writing in English has a vibrant history with gigantic expansion globally. In the beginning the Indian writers were inspired by Western models towards prose, translation, biographies and political essays. So in the same the role of Women Novelists played an important role in the world of novels. Women novelists have played a critical and significant role in increasing the quality and quantity of the Indian English fiction. Indian English Literature written during the pre-independence period and post-independence period is the representation of its periods, where more or less the writers penned down the social issues in their writings. Writers of every category are the spokesperson of their age. Some worth mentioning authors of the contemporary period to be mentioned here like Salman Rushdie, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Manju Kapoor and many more of the current literature who represents the age through their particular works. Their writing deals with the great issues of the society of every age. In Manju Kapur's characters with a desire for a life outside faces struggles in accommodating the devotion to the family expected of middle-class Indian woman. This paper focuses on the protagonist's journey in search of her identity, exposing the gendered spaces and hierarchies of power to a stage where liberation, self-determination is gained at the cost of isolation alienation.

Keywords: Vibrant, gigantic, crucial, accommodate, hierarchies, liberation, isolation, alienation.

Manju Kapur is one of the renowned Indian English woman novelists today. She is a popular novelist like Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. She is the new woman writer of Nineteenth Century, born on October 25, 1948 at Amritsar in Punjab. Manju Kapur is an accomplished Indian novelist who writes in English language. She is married to Dalmia, Gun Nidhi, so she belongs to the affluent family. She completed his post graduation in 1972 from Dalhousie University of Canada and the M.Phil. Degree from Delhi University. As a lecturer in Miranda House, Delhi University for fourteen years and took voluntary retirement to devote herself completely to creative writing in English. Kapur was acquainted with the suffering of woman and she elaborates the traditional Indian families and modern thinking of characters in his creations. Her writing is merely an identity and an analysis of female characters.

Manju Kapur, a prominent Indian English novelist, having an international reputation, has contributed a lot to the Indian literature in English. With her six novels *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody and Brothers*, she has to her credit and she has emerged as a significant and eminent novelist in the contemporary literature. *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is the very first novel of Manju Kapur, for this credit she was awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999. Each novel of Kapur shows woman's identity, reality and struggle against some evil systems. Manju Kapur shows the female characters in her novels in a real way. In the novels of Manju Kapur, the woman is personified as a new female who struggles against the social evil customs.

The novels of Manju Kapur pursue the popular trend of contemporary Indian women's writing in English. Her novels focus around woman characters within the territory of home and society. Out of her six novels, only three novels- *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* and *Home* are the incarnation of the theme of female bonding in varying shades and degrees. These novels offer a fascinating glimpse into women's consciousness and their interrelations. Her novels constitutes a wide range of theme related to



women's live in context of patriarchal society: Women's Lives within the family, their relationships with the male and family members, their ambition for education and independence, their conflicts with other women and men and their journey towards self-realization, their desire to have and possess children and finally their bonding with other women as a means of emotional support, survival, identity and empower.

In the novel of Manju Kapur, the role of woman has undergone in a significant manner. Her writing is only an analysis of female character and cultural identity. Kapur's female characters are all real and living figures. The female character in the novels of Manju Kapur is personified as a new female who struggles against the social evil customs. The protagonists of her novels try to break the tradition of silence. *A Married Woman*, the novel of Manju Kapur, searches the woman's identity. It is the novel of cries of woman for freedom. This novel exposed the struggle of woman against the traditional patriarchal society.

Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. She chooses the urban Indian middle class and performs the majority of the population. They show the identity of joint family structure in her *Difficult Daughters* where we have a thriving Arya Samaj family of Jewelers in the twentieth century. Virmati, the protagonist of the novel has to face different buckles and turns to satisfy her desire of higher education.

Difficult Daughters is the first novel of Manju Kapur. It is her first attempt in the field of English novels. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, was set against the historical background of India's partition. Her first novel centers on a young woman Virmati, born into an Arya Samaji household in Amritsar. She belongs to an observant family who lives in Lahore before Independence and settles in Amritsar after Independence.

Now she lives in Amritsar with her parents- “The cottage Suraj Prakash had rented for his wife in the mountains was a pleasant one, with a pointed roof, and a glassed-in front veranda. It was high on the hillside, with a grand view of the valley in front, and washed with cool, bright sun during the day. There were deodar trees, thick and fragrant in the back garden, and blue and pink hydrangea bushes down the path leading to the front door.”¹ From the very beginning she has been brought up in a traditional patriarchal Indian society which confined woman to the four walls of the house. The head of the family, the grandfather of Virmati, is progressive enough in his outlook to think that basic education is necessary for girls.

She assumes to her daughter about the past, “I had grown up on the mythology of pure ghee, milk, butter, and lassi, and whenever I came to Amritsar, I noticed the fanatical gleam in the eyes of people as they talked of those legendary items. Perhaps, if I could have shared that passion, the barriers of time and space would have melted like pure ghee in the warmth of my palm. But my tastes are different.”² Virmati is a careful and she knows her duties and responsibilities very well. Her caring nature is shown in these lines of the novel- “Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children. It wasn’t only baby Parvati to whom she was indispensable; to her younger siblings she was second mother as well.”³ Virmati was emotionally starved from her childhood and whenever she tried to forge a bond with her mother, she was rebuked. Kasturi always preached Virmati that marriage is the final goal and destiny of a girl.

She achieves her ambition by receiving B.A. from A.S. College Amritsar and B.T. from Lahore. While she was studying in B.A., Harish, an Oxford-returned professor entered her life. This secret romance of Virmati and Harish continues and Virmati attempts suicide when her family arranges her marriage with an engineer, Inderjeet. Virmati denies to marry with Inderjeet and to avoid any humiliation, Virmati’s younger sister Indumati is married to Inderjeet on the appointed time and date. Virmati insisted about her further study so her father Suraj Prakash and her grand father Lala Diwan



Chand, sent her to Lahore for further study of B.T. study. Virmati was very interested to doing B.T. - “Virmati loved doing B.T. It took up her day from nine to three- theory classes in the morning, practical teaching in the attached SL girl’s school in the afternoon.”⁴

During her education she falls in an illicit love with a Muslim friend and its result was that she becoming pregnant without the professor knowing it. Swarn Lata also confesses this fact- “Yes she was pregnant, said my old lady slowly, carefully. Though she only told me when she had to.”⁵ Instead she shared this problem with the help of the room-mate Swarna who managed the abortion of the unwanted pregnancy.

When Ida narrates the story of her mother Virmati, Virmati’s brother Kailash Nath offers his unconditional support and co-operation in the undertaking of unearthing the details of Virmati’s past and connecting them together in a logical pattern. Ida feels that her relatives gave her one view whereas she wanted another- a real and full view of her mother’s life. The opening lines of the novel shows Ida’s view to her mother- “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.”⁶

According to Ida, Virmati’s childhood was not a usual happy childhood under the wings of her mother Kasturi. Virmati was almost tired and harrassed because she was burdened with the care and responsibility of her younger siblings. Ida was childless and a divorcee. She asserts her independence as a single woman who has equipped herself to fight the battles of life alone. For Ida, it was not easy task the recovery of her mother’s past. She asked about Virmati, the way she was before she knew her. She came to learn that Virmati’s parents had eleven children. The female children: Virmati, Indumati, Gunwati, Hemavati, Vidyavati and Parvati. The male children: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishnanath, Prakashnatah and Hiranath. Ida noticed that her relatives were polite, respectful to the dead.

Virmati felt emotionally deprived of her mother's love and affection. Now she has to accompany Kasturi to Dalhousie. Virmati was now much closer to Kasturi and her youngest sister Paro. Kasturi always encouraged Virmati to do some domestic work in order to make her useful. After sometime, Virmati's aunt, Lajwanti arrived and wrote to her daughter Shakuntala to visit them in the meanwhile. Shakuntala arrived Dalhousie, she is the eldest child of Virmati's household. Shakuntala was the daughter of Virmati's father Chandra Prakash and aunt Lajwanti.

Ida, who is Virmati's daughter, identifies and sympathises with Virmati because Ida herself had undergone an abortion. Ida reflects sympathetically how poor Virmati must have suffered the unwanted and socially unacceptable pregnancy. In such crisis, Virmati looked up to Swarna as her only support and shared the secret of her pregnancy. Swarna did not look shocked or surprised but careful. Virmati knows very well that government hospitals did not permit illegal abortions. However, Swarna finally managed Virmati's abortion with Miss Datta's help who hired a male doctor to perform the task. This incident shows the female bonding between Virmati and Swarna Lata.

Reference

Kapur Manju, *Difficult Daughters*, Faber and Faber, London 1998, p. 11

Ibid. p. 4

Ibid. p. 6

Ibid. p. 132

Ibid. p. 155

Ibid. p.1