

## IDENTITY CRISIS IN MANJU'S KAPUR'S 'DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS' AND 'HOME'

*Madhu Jindal*

*Associate Professor, Department of English, Mandi dabwali, Haryana, India*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The emergence of women writers in the last quarter of the 19th century, carried with it a double significance. It indicated the birth of a new era of emancipation for the Indian women, an era of increased opportunities and a more dynamic participation in the social and intellectual life of the country. Feminism emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's rights. It focused on women's struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. Simone De Beauvoir has very precisely exposed the condition of woman in her most famous book 'The Second Sex'. Of course, the miserable condition of woman all over the world inspired the women of talent like Virginia Woolf to do something in this field and the result was the emergence of Feminism, a great movement in the western world in 1960's. It is a movement for the emancipation of women and their fight for equal rights. The condition of woman is equally miserable in Indian society. The Indian society is basically patriarchal, where a woman is given the secondary role. This study seeks to identify the contours of feminine quest in the novels of Manju Kapur, with special reference to 'Difficult Daughters' and 'Home'.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Indian Women, Secure Women's Rights*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change. In the fiction of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and many women writers, woman has been presented as an individual rebel against the traditional role, breaking the silence of trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting the individual self. This woman is trying to be herself working within the ambit of the family ties. Writing in 1998, Manju Kapur's women protagonists try to establish their own identity and bring home the point that much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat.

Manju Kapur's novel 'Difficult Daughters', published in 1998 won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. In this novel, Kapur has presented the problems of the Indian women in a joint family in a male dominated society. The novel, set at the time of partition, highlights the issue of patriarchy which denies woman's voice and freedom. The novelist grapples with issues such as man-woman relationship, sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage and gender roles have been presented at a time when women had no voice to assert their rights. Kapur's women are aspiring individuals caught in the confines of a conservative society. Their education turns them into freedom seekers, which leads to conflict in their lives. They struggle between tradition and modernity. The novelist attempts to fight for women's cause in her novels.

'Difficult Daughters' presents the tragedy of a female protagonist, Virmati, who tries to come to grapple with her. Quest for freedom and identity form the core of Virmati's tragedy. She is divided between family duties, a desire for education, and illicit love. The major portion deals with Virmati's love affair with professor and the rest deals with her struggle for freedom. In her quest of identity, Virmati rebels against tradition. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. As a daughter, she turns difficult for the family and society when she sets out in search of her identity.

Kasturi and Suraj Prakash have parented eleven children, and the whole burden of the household ultimately falls on Virmati, being the eldest of them all. Due to her busy routine, she does not do well in her studies and fails. She falls in love with a professor, a man who is already married. He sublets a portion of Virmati's house. Thus, professor develops an intimate relationship with Virmati. Virmati's parents decide to marry her to an engineer Inderjeet, but due to the death in his family, marriage is postponed for two years. During this period, Virmati passes her FA examination, and declines to marry. The Professor insists Virmati on being firm. Now Virmati becomes mentally disturbed and jumps into a river. She is saved by the servants of her grandfather Lala Divan Chand and returns to her house at Lepel Griffin Road. Finally, she declares that she does not like the boy and wants to study further. So, marriage is settled with Indumati, the second daughter.

At RBSL College, Lahore, the Principal assures Kasturi that there will be no problem for her daughter, as she has her eye fixed firmly on each one. Sakuntala who has been a source of inspiration for Virmati, visits her regularly. Professor's meetings with Virmati result in pregnancy, which she gets aborted with the help of Swarnlata. After completing her B.T., she returns to Amritsar and is offered the Principalship of a college, she joins it, but in Sultanpur too, Harish visits her as a result of which, she is dismissed. She decides to go to Nariniketan but on the way, she meets Harish's close friend Poet who is already aware of their intimate relationship. So he does not let her go and calls Harish. He performs all the rituals of marriage. Professor with Virmati returns home. During her conjugal life, Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not been married with Harish. After sometime, she gives birth to a daughter Ida. 'Ida' means a new state and a blank beginning. During her lifetime, her relationship with Ida was one of misunderstanding, of accusations of 'Living only for oneself. Ida the narrator of the novel states in the beginning the one thing, she had wanted not to be like her mother. This daughter too has faced disasters in life- for she is husbandless, because of a divorce and she is childless too. The family is sorry for this difficult daughter too.

'Difficult daughters' represents the turmoil of a woman who tries to overcome her cultural identity and this attempt at self-identification leaves a woman hard- hearted and desolate. Virmati has to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. The rebel in Virmati might have actually exchanged one kind of slavery for another. But towards the end, she becomes free, free even from the oppressive love of her husband. Once she succeeds in doing that, she gets her husband all by herself, her child the reconciliation with her family. Virmati struggles between the physical and moral, the head and the heart. Finally, she gives way to her heart and body. Thus, modern woman does not find any sense in self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality and self-identity.

'Home' is the third novel by Manju Kapur which questions patriarchal supremacy. It is the story of a middle class

family of a cloth merchant Banwarilal who lives in the neighborhood of Karol Bagh in New Delhi, who believes that men work outside, while women look after the home within. Men carry forward the family line, women enable their mission. His two sons unquestioningly follow their father, but their wives do not. Both brothers carry their lives as well as business, according to the wishes of their father. After Banwarilal dies, the whole burden of the family falls on Yashpal, the elder one. He has one sister who becomes widow in her early life. She has a child named Vicky. They also join them in their house in Karol Bagh. Sona and Rupa both sisters could not conceive for a long time. Sona belongs to a rich family in comparison of her sister Rupa. Rupa's husband is an educated man. They pass their lives happily. After a long time Sona gives birth to Nisha and then to Virat.

This novel deals with Manju Kapur's notion of survival. The novel pictures a joint family. Banwari Lal and his two sons – Yashpal and Pyre Lal. At first, it is the struggle for survival in the case of Sunita, who dies by burning and leaves Vicky to suffer the trauma of survival in difficult family conditions. Sanaa too suffers the same stroke of luck as she fails to conceive inspite of repeated fasts. Her sister Rupa is also married to a boy of Government job. Sona and Rupa are childless. Even, the younger brother Pyare Lal gets married to Sushila. Sushila gives birth a baby boy. The childless Sona makes a lot of effort to sustain in this family where she is taunted badly as it was past 'karma' that she could not give birth. She faces many odds but continues her patience to get child. She starts her fasting on Tuesday, living a life of devotee. Sona continues her prayers to get a child. But on the other hand, while Sunita dies, her son Vicky has been brought to Banwari Lal's family. The theme of struggle is felt here too, as now the big question is: who will take care of this ten years old boy. Sushila has already small baby who is looked after by her. Yashpal and Sona, they are childless, Sona has some spare time to look after this poor boy. But she has her belief in prayers and she says that this boy is a boy of another woman's womb. Manju Kapur's notion of survival is very much pertinent as:

Poor Sona, if only she could get rid of certain notions her life would be easier. Having Vicky was not such a bad thing, all the boy needed was a little love, he was still a child, and from the same family. (28).

When Sona's begets a child, Rupa, her sister feels happy thinking that her sister's childlessness is now ended. This moment was a moment of great boon because after a long gap, Sona gets her wish fulfillment. It was a result of her notion of survival as she kept on paying attention to her penance. It also hints the sense of survival theme. Vicky, who is living in Delhi after his mother's death has been cared by Banwari Lal's family especially Yashpal. He studies here. Vicky also tries to survive here. The novelist remarks the notion of survival as:

Vicky stepped through the mud carefully in imitation of his grandfather and uncles. Now he was part of the earning section of the family. His status would change: he would be looked up to, and given the respect that was given them. (46)

Vicky's struggle for survival goes on and he talks to his elders in the family about his own shop as Virat Baba Suits. He wants to set-up his own shop so that he may elevate his living status. The novelist aims to focus her philosophy of survival powerfully in the deliberation of Vicky. He does not get permission to establish his own shop but his sense of survival for it is very high and remarkable. He shares with his wife this whisper of the family where he was not allowed to begin shopping. He feels resentment, but the notion of survival comes out itinerantly as the author puts it: "Never mind, there is still plenty of time, we do not know what the future holds. We must wait, be patient, maybe after Ajay-Vijay-Raju start working, and there is no room in the shop, they will want you to start something of your own".

After the death of Banwari Lal, his wife lives a life of seclusion. She needs a lot of support from her family members. Sona and Yashpal try to help her in every possible way. Nisha who begins her career in Banwari Lal's family, gets a safe shelter in the home of her Masi Rupa. There, she gets admission to class I. She starts her life for survival of womanhood. As the novelist describes, "the pattern of Nisha's next ten years was now set. She spent all week with her aunt and uncle." After completing school education, Nisha wants to join higher studies. But her mother Sona thinks that there is no need of higher studies because ultimately she marries and will have children. Here too, the theme of survival is emphasized. Nisha tries to start her survival attitude for college education, and she gets admission to English Honours at Durga Bai College. For the first time, she leaves Karol Bagh to College alone. Even she comes close to a boy named Suresh. Here, she understands many practical aspects of life. She struggles sometimes for her choice but she has hopelessness. Besides it, she keeps on struggling for her survival as an independent woman. She remarks on the differences of man between man, but it evinces a sense of survival:

She thought of the love that had driven her own parents to marry, of all the films she had seen, with myriad combinations of unequal background between boy and girl: rich-poor, Hindu-Muslim, Hindu - Christian, high class – low class, educated-uneducated. (149).

Nisha continues her effort to do the same. The parents think about Nisha's marriage. Nisha's mother feels that Nisha's problem is that she is a mangli - she was born in inauspicious hour. Her mother thinks if a boy is also mangli, then the inauspiciousness can be coped with. But she loves a boy Suresh whose view about mangli is totally different. He says that for modern educated society, there is nothing like mangli. The novelist indicates the hurdle between this relation as caste and poverty. Nisha makes a lot of effort to clean out this hurdle and feels herself secure with Suresh. She has been badly observed by her parents, Yashpal, Sona and Masi Rupa and Uncle Prem Nath and brother Raju but still she has a positive feeling about Suresh. She traveled with her brother, but sat in that restaurant where she passed hours and hours with Suresh. It shows her sense of surviving love with Suresh as:

When she had actually been sitting here with Suresh, she hadn't thought she was that happy. They had eaten, hung around, and left. Now, every minute reminded her so vividly of him that her breath, as it slowly came and went, cut her to pieces.

Nisha suffers from eczema. Her condition is very pathetic. The family members are trying to make her survive. She is shocked to listen about her marriage to another person. But after sometime, she thinks that her family is also a matter of importance. Nisha's younger brother Raju gets married to Pooja. They have a daughter Shuchi. She teaches at a nursery school. She sets - up a shop of Nisha's Creations where she sells bridal suits. The novelist expresses the notion of survival in relation to Nisha. She did a lot of work to stand herself in the society and tried to get a home of her own. She has been married to Arvind, a widower of 34, having a motor parts shop of his own. At this moment, Nisha's survival to find a home of her own has been materialized. She finds a home where he has a son and daughter, as:

Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine. (337).

Therefore, the novel revealed all aspects of such notion which proves the matter of survival. For 'Home' which is the image of grace, peace and prosperity, wealth and happiness and so on. Nisha who represents a telling example of her

survival to find a home of her own, this is very remarkable. Ajay and Seema, Vijay and Rekha also struggle to get expanded accommodation. They present the spirit of survival. In this way, Manju Kapur's notion of survival treats not merely one home and heart, but many others and all these homes are interlinked to the Home of Banwari Lal. So, Kapur's idea of survival is pioneering in the home of traditional set-up all well as modern set-up.

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