

THEME OF MARRIAGE IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur is one of the successful Indian women novelists in English. Difficult Daughters deals with the struggles of a woman of Arya Samaj as a daughter, lover and wife. This paper aims at analyzing the theme of love and marriage in the narrative of Difficult Daughters. In the episodes of Kasturi, the condition of women and India during the pre-independence is represented. In the episodes of Virmati, the condition of women and India during the independence is represented. And in the episodes of Ida, the condition of women and India during the post-independence is represented. The study shall unearth the suggestive meaning in the evolution of women

Keywords: Love, Marriage, Mother, Daughter, Relationships, freedom

Introduction:

Manju Kapur is one of the distinguished contemporary Indian women novelists in English. She, who teaches English at Miranda House College, Delhi, pursues the career of writing novels in English simultaneously. She has produced four novels i.e., *Difficult Daughters*, *Married Women*, *Home* and *Immigrants* so far. She has chosen the predicament of women as the theme in all her novels. *Difficult Daughters* is Manju Kapur's first novel published in 1998. It was short listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book. The novel has received positive response from the readers and critics both at home and abroad. This novel has been translated into as many as seven languages namely Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Marathi. In this chapter, it proposes to examine the theme and form of *Difficult Daughters*. *Difficult Daughters* deals with the struggles of a woman of Arya Samaj as a daughter, lover and wife. This paper aims at analyzing the theme of love and marriage in the narrative of *Difficult Daughters*.

The image of traditional family with reference to marriage is recurrent motif in all Kapur's novels

including *Difficult Daughters*. The episodes of Kasturi, Lajwanti and Ganga elucidate the notion of marriage vividly. Kasturi is Virmati's mother. She is also the daughter of very affluent parents. Her father is a big merchant. As he is a member of the Arya Samaj, he sends her to school following its doctrine with regard to education for women. However, the people of the Arya Samaj are very particular about the purpose of education. They want female education for their daughters to become strong but not to change their community customs. They view change as an evil and thus are opposed to it. It is reflected in the episodes of Kasturi. She is sent to a missionary school but her mother becomes intolerant when she discovers the influence of Christianity on her. It is explicit in the narrative as follows:

Sultanpur, West Punjab, 1904. Kasturi was seven and had been going to the mission school for only few months when her parents caught her praying to a picture of Christ, something the nice Bengali teacher said herself did. Her mother had torn the picture, screamed and shouted, and threatened to marry her off, before she brought further disgrace to the family.

(Difficult Daughters 61)

Her uncle comes to her rescue by making an objection to the marriage for Kasturi. Though he knows that the British use the mission school as a means of colonizing the minds of Indian students, he is not ready to approve Kasturi's mother's decision. He considers that such decisions are bound to encourage child-marriages which in turn amount to betraying Dayanad Saraswati and the principles of the Arya Samaj. He insists that Kasturi should not be married off before she attains the age of sixteen. Hence the suggestion of prohibition of marriage and compulsory education for girls up to the age sixteen years is evinced in the dialogue between Kasturi's mother and uncle as follows:

'That's all very well,' said the irate mother. 'But this witch sitting at home will have nothing better than to do than think she is a Christian. Who will marry her then, I would like to know?' *'Sixteen, and the best bridegroom in the Punjab,' said Kasturi's uncle, flapping the*

advertisements in the *Arya Patrika*, advertisements of educated boys wanting educated girls. 'Till then, She must go to school. I started one for four boys, I will do the same for the girls. Had I done so sooner, there would have been no question of exposing our daughter to Christian schools" (*Difficult Daughters* 61)

It is stated that the evening Kasturi's uncle dissuaded her mother from getting her married off and persuaded her to send her to school up to the age of sixteen years is unforgettable time for her. She feels so because her uncle motivates her to pursue education by that stating she would become the finest flower of Hindu womanhood after she gains a proper education. Kasturi's experience of education in the subsequent time is narrated vividly like this:

"So the school came about, and Kasturi became the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by a tentative assault on learning. Her father, uncle and teacher made sure that this step into modernity was prudent and innocuous. Her head remained modestly bent over her work. No questions, no assertion. She learned reading, writing, balancing household accounts and sewing. Above all, the school ground the rituals of Arya Samaj havan, sandhya and meditation so deeply within her that for the rest of her life she had to start and end the day with them. After five years of this education, it was considered that Kasturi had acquired all that it was ever going to be useful for her to know. She appeared for her first and last outside exam, performed creditably, and graduated at the age of twelve, to stay at home until she married" (*Difficult Daughters* 62)

It must be noted that though Kasturi's parents have allowed her to pursue her further studies, they have been very particular about the influence of the education on her state of mind. They see to it that she learn the qualities of running her household required for her after her marriage, Thus she is made to learn sewing and the preparation of various food items. Though her parents seem to have permitted her to acquire education, what they actually do is that they wait for her to attain the marriageable age so that they can get her married off. This factor is reflected in the following lines explicitly: "During Kasturi's formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued in the home." (*Difficult Daughters* 62) As soon as Kasturi completes seventeen years of age, the arrangements for her marriage are commenced. They go through the advertisements appeared in their *Samaj* magazine and select one man called Suraj Prakash. After the procedures of investigation about the groom, he is invited personally to their place. Though their *Samaj*

advocated that young people should get married without knowing each other, Kasturi's mother refuses the couple to meet and interact privately. She has a valid reason for her refusal. She is of the opinion that if first man rejects the bride, she has to undergo the humiliation of meeting the successive men who come to her. However, she approves the idea of letting the girl serve milk to all including the groom on the occasion of seeing the girl. Swarna Lata is a rational activist participating regularly in the student movements supporting the Freedom Movement. Though she very radical in her views, she does not reject marriage altogether. She agrees to marry when her groom has agreed not to interfere in her freedom. She marries and has maintained the harmony between her married life and her social activities without affecting either of them. It is worthwhile to note how Surendra Narayan Jha observes the character of Swarna Lata:

She is dynamic and dashing woman activist and keeps a fair amount of maturity. ... she is politically active and also actively participates in organizing women's conferences in association with Mohini Datta, Mrs. Leela Mehta, Sita Rallia, Noor Ahmad, Mary Singh, Swarna Lata Anand, Pheroze Shroff, Miss Saubhagya Sehgal and Begum Saba Malik. All these were the noted dignitaries of the woman world of the then India. However, Swarna Lata reports that she too embraced the nuptial tie. (Jha, 90-91)

However, marriage gains an edge over education at the end as Kasturi's parents get her married off to Suraj Prakash no sooner does she complete the age of seventeen. It is observed clearly that Kasturi is not reformed by her education. She behaves like typical obedient Indian woman both in the house of her birth and marriage. She never expresses her likes or dislikes in both places. Though she knows the adverse impact of child-bearing eleven times in seventeen years, she never raises any objection and goes on filling the house with the children which is stated in the novel thus:

Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying her children was a strain, even when they were very young. Her stomach was soft and spongy, her breasts long and unattractive. Her hair barely snaked down to mid-back, its length and thickness gone with her babies. Her teeth bled when she chewed her morning neem twigs, and she could feel some of them shaking. She had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted, but with another child there would be nothing left of her."

(Difficult Daughters 7)

She obeys to her parents and marries the one her parents select for her without second thought. Then she remains faithful to her marriage and to the patriarchal customs of her family throughout her life. She tries to impose them on her children as well. Thus the plot reflects the conflict between education and marriage and the triumph of the latter in the generation of pre-independence period in the episodes of Kasturi. Veena Singh observes about the tendency of Kasturi's generation towards marriage aptly thus:

"The earlier generation of her mother saw no reason to rebel. There was complete acceptance in life. Kasturi is an example of the typical feminine attitude-to procreate in order to bring about life and pleasure. To run her family, first a joint family and later her own, is happiness for her." (Singh, 167)

Lajwanti, Kasturi's sister-in-law, is also a sincere observer of the norms of marriage. She is the wife of Kasturi's husband's elder brother. She bears two children for her husband and leads her married life without any complaints. She is an example for the conservative wifehood. Shakuntala's refusal to marry causes unhappiness to her parents. Their efforts to persuade her to accede for marriage meet with failure. Her mother feels offended whenever people comment on Shakuntala's unmarried status. Shakuntala pays no heed to the pressure of her parents to marry forever. She stays in Lahore and takes up the career of teaching in a college. She finds her priority in being independent with marriage. She becomes a progressive and assertive woman in choosing to remain unmarried in order to be independent. It is important to note that the influence of modern education is responsible for the transformation of Shakuntala from a humble daughter of a traditional family into a radical feminist. Thus the conflict between of education and marriage is resolved in establishing the triumph of the former over the latter. It suggests that the change of mindset among womankind is effected by the development of education.

Shakuntala's brother, Somnath, also behaves like his sister in respect of marriage. He has led a lavish life during the days of studies. Whenever his mother tries to discuss the matter of his marriage with him, he eludes it by stating that he would think of his marriage after he gets himself settled professionally. Though he has made it clear that he would not continue his family jewellery business, he remains silent about what profession he is going to pursue. Hence his behaviour causes anguish to his mother as her wish of begetting grandchildren

seems to be a remote possibility. Her despair is presented in the narrative as follows:

"Somnath was used to shuttling between Amritsar and Lahore. He refused to marry until he was established in some profession, though what that profession was going to be, he kept secret. ... He at least should settle down. ... Her son owed her grandchildren. ... At this Somnath would laugh and look handsome. He wore rings on his fingers, a hint of kaajal in his eyes, perfume made of attar of roses, and silk pyjama-kurtas with Patiala jootis. His mother, looking at him, would regret that so much beauty was being wasted, but despite all the pressure, nothing would induce Somnath to change his mind about marriage." (Difficult Daughters 32)

Somnath concentrates his attention rather on the construction of his house in Amritsar. He takes up the decoration of his house with a marble bust of Caesar in the veranda, a fountain, double basins with a little statue on top in the garden and a cartload of green tiles with pink embossed in the kitchen. After shifting his family to the new house in Amritsar, he brings Harish Chandra and lets some of the portion of his house to him for rent. It is important to note that modernity has affected not only women but also men.

Conclusion:

Through the narrative of the marriage of three generations i.e., Kasturi and Lajawanti; Ganga, Virmati and Shakuntala and Ida, the novel highlights that some radical changes have taken place in the mind of women regarding marriage. The women of the first generation are characterized by complete obedience to their parents. After the marriage, these women adhere to the family and community conventions and traditions. They never attempt to violate them. The women of second generation yearn for more independence. They are ready to violate the restrictions imposed on them by their parents. Yet they never break their marriage. But the women of the third generation go to the extent of breaking their marriages in the pursuit of independence and freedom.

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