

## Marital Relationship in Manju Kapur's '*Difficult Daughters*' and '*A Married Woman*'

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### Abstract

Indian women novelists burnish shiningly like the male authors by their noteworthy hand-outs to the fortification of Indian English literature. In the past few decades the works of the women novelist were not appreciated because of the male dominated society. It was very tough time for women; they were confined under the four walls. Now the time changed with the passage of time. Indian woman novelists have turned towards the woman's world with great introspective intensity and authenticity. Such stalwart literary figures are Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, and Manju Kapur and so on. Manju Kapur is such an reputed figure who needs no introduction in literature. The thought that all female meant to get married and be obedient to their husbands was allotted a second look when we go through the pages of Manju Kapur. She instigates women to cross the threshold of family life.

Keywords: *Marriage, Marital Discord, New Women, Tradition and Modernity.*

### Introduction

Marriage holds a great importance in Indian culture. It is assumed as a unification of two souls. It embodies conviction, support, integrity, obligation and sympathetic. Both of the couple takes in the duties and errands to run the marital life efficiently. In conventionally, all of the duties, conciliation, and confines were assigned for women. Women were confined under four walls. They revolt against the marionette behaviour of male dominated system. It results in the

appearance a number of new revolutionary stars in the literary world. They left their ineffaceable marks through their writings.

*A Married Woman* has a protagonist, who, despite an initially happy arranged marriage and satisfying sexual life, drifts into a lack of marital and familial contentment; and involves herself in politics where she meets a woman, who ultimately becomes her lover. '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 main character of the novel risks losing the acquisitions of her torrential marriage and safe family. The novel raises the controversial issue of homosexual relationship in a challenging way. After all gay and lesbian relationships are not mere fancies. This is getting more and more visible in modern societies though we may or may not accept it.

*Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and her longing for education, affection, and freedom. There are different perspectives between the female characters about their exciting culture and norms. When Kashturi, the mother of the protagonist, Virmati, compels her daughter to accept the marriage as a traditional norm, Virmati refuses to accept it; instead she seeks knowledge. The narrator of the novel, Ida, is Virmati's daughter. Through her voice the novelist distinguishes the women from three generations. Manju Kapur takes Virmati as a weapon of her writings and through her she highlights of marginalization suffered by women who are primarily concerned about their individuality and dignity.

### **Marital Relationship in 'Difficult Daughters'**

Marriage means mingling of two souls, bodies and aliens with each other's consent. It plays a vital part in world as well as Indian literature. In every woman novelist's art it occupies a dominant part and Manju Kapur is not an exception. In her fiction it is not only smooth relation but rough and tough or zigzag road which has to be taken and its difficulties to be suffered. She reveals the characters through this institute. "*Difficult Daughters*" displays three generations. It is about how to establish oneself in male dominated society. "Manju Kapur deals with the theme of travails and self identity vis-a-vis socio-cultural identity in 'Difficult daughters' (Sudha Shree, 165).

Woman here is seen trapped in between her responsibility for her family and her aspirations. She loves to live free life. Women live according to their view under strictures. Mother of a

protagonist uses her influence and orders her daughter to agree to the conventional marriage but Kasturi denies and proves defiant. Virmati is Kapur's mouthpiece through which she attacks the tools of domination. "Kasturi is Virmati's mother. She is repeatedly reminded that she is born to work and please her in-laws. Since her school days" (Manju, 58). Mother acts as Hitler figure but in our culture it is to prepare daughter for future, show her the ways to respect the family and the laws of in-laws. It can be said that she was emotionally blackmailed and pressurized as every Indian girl like Lata in Seth's "A Suitable Boy" is forced by her mother Mrs. Rupa Mehra. Kasturi after marriage gives birth to eleven children and becomes a child bearing machine. At this juncture she wants to abort the eleventh child and invokes God to never make her fertile again. She was always exhausted and after her 11<sup>th</sup> baby came into being she was not allowed to take a proper rest. Her life was a hell. She cannot think of herself but she has to take care of family and children all the while.

Kasturi is a commodity who is just to multiply and produce children. It is that she is for sexual gratification and her husband takes her to be a thing and not human.

Virmati has been called to marry at the early age and her parents want her to marry. Kapur says that Virmati said, "They want nothing from me but an agreement to marry" (*Difficult Daughters*, 100). Marriage actually is a sacred bond but when it is forced upon any one it is problem then. It was a time when marriage was forced upon and in an early age as has been the convention of India. Virmati is responsible, caring her relations but her mother couldn't comprehend her psychological state. She just lingers on in her decision and Virmati feels more frustrated. Her mother every time wanted her to take care of her siblings this aggravated the situation and she met the refusal most often. When she becomes conscious of free life of Shakuntala she wants to live the life without bondage to satisfy her hunger for the life of aspirations. After marriage she wants to continue her education, M.A. to Government College, Lahore; you know-very good college, not like now a day. The Oxford of the East they call it" (*Difficult Daughters*, 5).

She was modern woman who has her own life while her mother's life was to give birth and prepare food but she was not in control of Diwan Chand. Virmati was not submissive like her mother but hard one who wants to fulfill her desires. "Virmati, the protagonist in her early days

(i.e) at the age of ten, acted like a boss” (Mrs. T. J.Thilagavathi and Dr. T. Manason, 65). Her attitude was bossy and she wanted her desired place.

“In the novel the women are found at marginality level in the society. This novel does not approach the women of a family or a single state of Punjab; rather it has wide dimensions” (S.Santhi, Dr.A.Padmashini<sup>4</sup>) Virmati falls in love with college professor in Amritsar and falls headland with one who is already married, even she is aware but she couldn’t control her desire and he takes place in her brain and emotions. She rejects other suits of marriage and tells her mother about her love with professor. Virmati was taken to be as mistress by professor and not wife. Then professor married her and it proved to be a trap, jail for Virmati, “Though married, she was dispossessed. Well so be it. She would walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had carved out for her” (*Difficult Daughters*, 196). She was a spectator very silent listening to her patriarch husband. She was manipulated. She was not allowed to cook in the kitchen by his another wife as though she was a social outcaste. She was thrashed by her mother when she came to her home and she became a rolling stone with no status at all. “She realizes she isn’t forgiven by the maternal and paternal family for the mistake of trying to put her own needs first above others’ need” (Sudha Shree, 166). They were a couple whose end was separation and that has to happen. “A great marriage is not when the ‘perfect couple’ comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences” (Dave Meurer, 8). It is overall Indian society where women are no community but only entities who have lost their identities which is shown by Manju Kapur.

### **Marital Relationship in ‘A Married Women’**

“A Married Woman”, is a genuine assertion of a woman about her individuality cult in the brink of a bad marriage. The novel “A Married woman” revolves around Astha. It talks about the different stages of a woman, pre and post marriage. By keeping the traditional values, Astha’s parents are desperate for her marriage. The mother of Astha has the opinion:

“There is time for everything. The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit is ripe, it has to be picked. Later she might get into wrong company and we will be left, ringing our hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem for adjusting. We too are not so young that we can afford to wait” (kapur,20)

Hemant is an MBA from America and working as a manager in a bank in Delhi. Hemant seems to match her dream of an ideal husband in the beginning of their married life and this marriage seems to fulfill her girlish dreams. Astha belongs to a typical middle class family but she breaks the chain of her traditional family. Before marriage she fell in love with a man. These all romantic feelings of love flutter in her virgin heart right from teen age. But this episode soon comes to an end when Astha's mother complains against it to Bunty's parents. During her final year of graduation, her aching heart finds relaxation in the luxurious ambience of Rohan. Astha's aspirations receive a bolt from the blue to know Rohan's departure from her life. Rohan goes to Oxford for higher education.

In her early days of marriage, she enjoys life. She was better half of Hemant, but from the firmament of romance, one has to come down to the ground of realism. Then their marriage falls into the expected pattern. When Astha was expecting her first child, her mother-in-law wishes her to have a boy. Kapur depicts such tugs of war within a world of gender politics, where male figures and female agents of patriarchy set the limits within which women must struggle for their version of individuality. Their first child is a girl. Hemant's desire to have a son makes Astha dissatisfied and uneasy. When Astha is pregnant for the second time, everyone hopes for the birth of a son.

“When Astha's son was finally born, she felt a gratitude as profound as it was shamed .....her status rose.....she was fulfilled.” (Kapur,68)

Gradually Astha turns to write poetry and this alleviates the heaviness within her. But Hemant thinks these emotional outpouring as “positively neurotic”. Art is a refuge to her, she struggles to express herself, put her thoughts on the canvas.

Astha becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of “mother and father” for her children. This denies her self-fulfillment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Restlessness drives her to enjoy absolute loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and “always adjusting to everybody's needs”. Astha understands a married woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thinking of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. It incurs a feeling in her: “A

willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant's wife." (Kapur 231)

Hemant does not involve Astha in any of the financial decisions, and the way Hemant does not understand her feelings at all and still Astha has to carry on the charade of a happy married life just for the sake of her children and her family. Astha's state of mind and her sensitive nature cannot be understood by Hemant and her family. Astha suffers humiliation and exploitation by the elders and society.

Manju Kapur believes that the woman needs more than bread, butter and physical comfort. They want to satisfy their emotional hunger from their male counterparts. Astha's diversion towards Aijaz is due to her dislike for a routine life of a married woman in Hindu society. Her individuality, her longing for liberty carry her far away from her family obligations.

Kapur shows that despite these obstacles that Astha faces from her husband and his family, Astha is able to exercise her agency in forming her own views on the national and the religious through a conscious decision that she makes. Astha's conscious decisions are helped by her interactions and close contacts with other characters whose national and religious identities do not follow the pro-right wing sentiments of Hemant and her in-laws.

### Concluding Remarks

Manju Kapur registers her concern for Indian Women in this novel. She dwells on various feministic issues in this novel like female education and their empowerment, financial independence and so on. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in post colonial India. Manju Kapur advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. It is important to note that education plays dominant role in the lives of women. If in certain cases it fails to free them from the shackles of male dominance, social tradition and popular prejudices. It also gives them the authority to doubt and question to assert and reshape their lives. We can say that her novels evoke some concern over the problems of women in a male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix and a husband stands as a sheltering tree. Hence progress and development depends on the emancipation and empowerment of both the sexes.

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