



Epitome Journals

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN : 2395-6968 | Impact Factor = 3.656

A Feminist Approach to Manju Kapoor's 'Difficult Daughters'



Prof. Ramesh V. Patil

Assistant Professor & Head,

Dept. of English

Bharat Mahavidyalaya, Jeur (C.R.)

Tal : Karmala, Dist : Solapur, India

Abstract :

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a sudden spurt in feminist writing in Indian English fiction. A group of Indian women novelists in their inbetweenness, hybridity of thought and multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious social dimensions have contextualized the problems of women in general and middle class and upper-class women in particular. While the gynocritics think that many women in many countries speak the same language of silence. But some Indian women novelists like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander and Manju Kapur have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women.

Keywords : gynocritics, feminist writing, Manju Kapur, Indian English fiction, stress

Research Paper :

Introduction

Tennyson asserted that man is to command and woman is to obey and all else is conclusion. But this Victorian attitude is not acceptable to all sections of society as people have adopted a different life style in the last fifty years. Gone are the days when women were satisfied with their subordinate role in society. Women have faced various challenges in the past and are still prepared to accept every new challenge for the protection of their rights and interests.

Feminism is a global and revolutionary ideology that is political because it is concerned with the question of power. A feminist is a one who is a very much conscious about the life of women as well as their problems. So this concept is based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within a society. It opposes woman's subordination in the family and society. Feminism or feminist theory deals with the themes of patriarchy, sexual objectification and oppression. It studies the inequality of women because of the social injustice.

However, the study of Feminist theories begins with the 18th century and continues until the present time. Feminist theories try to identify the existence of women among the readers. Gender difference is the primary concern of inequality between men and women; because of it women suffer from the social injustice. The inequality between the sexes produces the cultural construction of gender differences.

Feminism

The concept of feminism is nothing but a development and a movement which began in the late 1960s as a force. It began as an attempt to describe and interpret the experience of women life and problem highlighted in literature especially in the form of novel. It also began as an attack towards male ideas about women as seen in literature. It rejects the ideas of men about women. Therefore feminism is an attempt to remove the small space of women given by the male writers in the society.

Origin of Feminism

Feminism had its origin as early as 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1869 and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* which came in 1929. The most powerful book that brought into focus the gender bias was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949. In the 1970s Elaine Showalter's essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics*

distinguishes literature written by women for women, about women, as they really are, by calling it Gynocriticism.

Although most of the critics tried to define feminism, they could not cover the entire meaning in it. In the same way, in literary Historiography, it means digging at the past a new from the women's point of view. Virginia Wolf calls Shakespeare *A Masculine Mind* and regrets the fact that Lady Winchilsen (1616) who could be equally great a poetic talent was not allowed to grow because of gender bias of the Elizabethan period.

However, feminism is also considered as cultural, economic and political movements that are thought about as the freedom, security and complete equality of women. In Indian Writings in English, feminism has been used for evaluating the real picture of women.

Feminism in Indian English Literature

Considering the concept of feminism, Indian women novelists have played an important role in Indian Writing in English literature. They have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. In the galaxy of Indian English literature the women novelists who have occupied the important place are Kamla Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai who have chosen the main theme of the writings in feminism. For example, in some of the novels of Anita Desai like *Voices in the City* she has focused on the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to depict the psychological aspect of the protagonists. So, by writing women's problems, the women writers try to create awareness among women.

In fact, more authors like Gita Mehta, Shama Futehally and Nisha Da Cunha work on feministic themes and emotional crisis of women. Considering the above writers, we have some other names such as Shobha De, Nargis Dalal, Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Bharati Mukharjee, Namita Gokhale, Gauri Deshpande and Manju Kapur etc. Most of these female novelists are famous for their bold views that are highlighted in their novels.

Feminism in British Literature

After taking a brief survey of all these Indian women novelists with feminism, we can look back to English novels by British novelists in which women characters depict the psychological insight and feminist objective. First of all, Jane Austen was the pioneer who expressed the theme of feminism in her novels. Secondly, Bronte Sisters presented in their novels a sketch of women characters from the women's point of view. Thirdly, the Victorian women novelist Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell explores the inner mind of women in her masterpiece *Cranford*. Then George

Eliot, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf etc. are the milestones in the British literature concerned to feminism.

Feminism in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

In the last decade of the twentieth century, there are many women novelists who have enriched the Indian English literature. Among them a notable writer is Manju Kapur. She has presented the problems of the Indian women in a joint family in a male-dominated society. She has given a new vision of Indian women in her fiction. Manju Kapur's first novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book in 1999. In her novel, *Difficult Daughters*, she explores her women characters, some of them who are modern in their outlook. 'The main protagonist of this novel is Virmati who is a traditional woman but her cousin Shakuntala is totally different from her. She is a westernized lady. Virmati is inspired by Swami Dayanand's concept of women's education. Manju Kapur reveals the traditional idea of marriage which is essential for every woman. So, she depicts consciously the characters of Virmati and Shakuntala having two different attitudes. The former is of traditional outlook and the latter is of modern outlook.

Shakuntala is M.Sc. in Chemistry working at Lahore. She is an intelligent independent modern and a sophisticated girl who does not believe in the concept of marriage and reacts strongly to this traditional idea. She speaks to Virmati with the following words "but women are still supposed to marry and do nothing else". She suggests her to live like a free bird and says "times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?" This reaction of Shakuntala shows her attitude towards marriage. Therefore, Manju Kapur depicts this woman character as her own spokesperson and gives importance to freedom and education for India women.

However, the novelist highlights her ideas of women and their relationship with others, women's sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage, gender roles, self discovery and various other problems. We find that Virmati is a bold and more vocal character and aware of the rights for education and economic independence. Through the character of Virmati, Kapur shows the issues of modern women, their sufferings, problems faced etc. She is torn between family duty, desire for education and illicit love with the professor who is already married with two children. She loves her parents, family, education and romantic professor. Like a modern woman, she thinks that, "Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family" because "a girl lives

for others, not for herself". Thus, Kapur has studied the problems of Virmati as a socialist feminist for her situation and struggle for identity and self expression.

Along with the discussion, the major part of the novel highlights the problems of Virmati as a difficult daughter for her parents. At the beginning of her love, she knew that Professor Sahib wasn't formidable but later she finds her life in difficulty standing between 'educations versus marriage'. She becomes rebellious for the professor's unwillingness to marry her. She suffered the traumatic experience of her abortion in Lahore and realized her father died without forgiving her. In this novel, we find Virmati's problems and conflicts are existential and her struggle for self-assertion leads to self-alienation.

Conclusion

To sum up, Manju Kapur's novels enable us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against biases. While reading her novels, one can get the impression that women's life is just like the love of a nation which is passing through various trials and tribulations.

References :

- Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1998.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essay on Women Literature and Theory*: New York. Pantheons Books, 1985.
- Sing Sushila. *Indian Novel is English*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980.
- Allen, Walter. *The English Novel: A short History*. London: Penguin book Ltd.1970.