



Quest for Identity in The Novel *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur

Elsaritilda D.

MA English Literature, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.

ABSTRACT:

Identity is an ineluctable necessity for human beings. In this world, every human beings spends his or her whole life in creating or searching for one's own identity. 'Identity Crisis' means, when a person's personal traits comes into conflict with social identity. Women are more at the end of identity crisis when comparing to men. The life of women lived and struggled under the cruel mechanism of a closed society and also under the different structures of values. Women were discriminated and were biased in lien of their sex. Manju Kapur is one of the leading figure of contemporary Indian English fiction writer, who has dedicated all her works which is related and discussed about the women's suffering and struggling in their personal and social identity.

'Identity' is one of the most concerned topics for the thinkers as well as the writers of the age. With the advent of twentieth century, Indian English novelists shifted their ideas of work from handling the theme of outer to inner surface of world which is from one's public sphere to private sphere.

Keywords: Identity, Education, Patriarchal society, Illicit love, Struggle for Identity.

It aims at studying 'Identity Crisis' in the novel, *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur. It refers to the theme about identity of women in the male dominated culture. The portrayal of women in Indian English fiction as the silent suffer and to hold a lot of tradition and traditional values of family and society. One cannot live without their identity, because it is a psycho sociological to survive. The term 'Identity' means, the fact of being who or what a person or a thing is. The twentieth century novelists moved their ideas towards to the modern themes of human existence, quest for self, identity crisis and etc.,

There are few women writers who rebel against the traditional role, breaking the silence and suffer of the women in the family and society, women's position in the society, women's identity crisis and also these writers questioning among the identity in women and they always remained as an unsolved puzzle. Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many are the most prominent writers of the Indian English fiction of the twentieth century. More than half of the population of the world is made of woman but she is not treated equal with a man despite. She has the same mental and moral power as like as man, yet she is not recognized by his equal. In male dominated society woman has played a role of wife, mother, sister, home maker and also, she is expected to serve, sacrifice and tolerate against her peaceful life.

The protagonist of Kapur are rebels who are enlightened by education and raise question to validity of stereotypical roles of women. These women have a desire to go beyond the ordinary to find their own identity. The beauty of Kapur's novels characterization of the women who are facing their struggle seems real. A middle class woman is not supposed to be individualistic. She is expected to find happiness in the marriage and childbearing which is the ultimate "Dharma" for a pious woman.

"The nature of femininity and masculinity is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for individual...It is a struggle which begins at birth and which is central to upbringing and education"(Weedon 98).

Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* is one of the character by Manju Kapur and also she is termed as difficult, because she is rebelled and defied the old norms of patriarchal society. She is the eldest daughter in the family, and the one who hold the household drudgery. As a perfect eldest daughter she accepts her role without any questions.

As a girl she is unable to find the love and affection from her mother which makes her to feel weary and irritated all the time."At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. However, when she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother's arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. 'Have you seen to their food - milk - clothes - studies?' (6). Although from within she felt stifled but never raised her voice. At this time she was already engaged to canal engineer, Inderjeet. Seeds of aspiration are planted in Virmati, whenever she sees her cousin, Shakantula who tasting "wine of freedom". Virmati knew if wanted to be free she needs to look outside the family, but her mother was epitome of traditional women in patriarchal society. Who looked at education as evil force? When Virmati showed her desire at education her mother retaliated and said, 'Leave your studies if it is going to make you bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first' (21). To achieve her identity, she used education as a tool. She not only clears FA exams but also enters, 'A.S College, the bastion of male learning' (45). She asserted herself not only through education but also through her choice of groom. During her college years she develops her feelings for Harish, professor in college and a tenant at her place. It became most unsuitable choice in case of Virmati; a professor was already married. She had an illicit love relationship with him even before the confinement. This relationship leads her to commit suicide as she was not able to define her position neither in her family and nor in professor's. A professor was not loyal to her, his love for her on one hand and making his wife pregnant on other cannot be apparently dependable.

Virmati gives birth to her baby girl which is the next phase of problem. As a remembrance of independence she name her daughter as Bharati, but her husband rejected by saying that, "I don't wish our daughter to be trained with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred?...reminded of it"(276). Though the country has got freedom, the man who speaks about the freedom, cannot provide freedom for his wife. When India was fighting for freedom from British government, Virmati also literally fights for her self identity. In patriarchal construct women were enforced towards domesticity, but she was bold and educated.

The most constructive period of Virmati's life was at Nahan where she led her life like a free bird without worrying. She works as a headmistress which gave her economical independence, respects and also gain all the responsibilities were to be delineated by herself. This gave new meaning to her life but these actions lead her to no family or friends. But the societal construct makes her feel incomplete, as there was no man in her life. So, she returns to professor and ends herself in a closed society which governed by patriarchy. In the words of Maria Elena Martos Hueso - "Virmati's quest for freedom from the patriarchal moulds of tradition caste upon her eventually proves an erratic one, for she gets caught in the net of allocated female role that she was trying to evade"(160).

From beginning to an end, her life is full of sufferings and search for her own identity. She loses all her hope. Even her daughter doesn't want to be like her mother. There is an evident from the first and last line of the novel, where Virmati as a failure mother.

"The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother"(1).

"This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me any more"(280).

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