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## **Underpinnings of Partition Dynamics in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters***

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### **Abstract**

A study of the man-woman relationship as narrated in the modern literature of the East and the West shows a disruption and the breakdown in the conventional expectations of female behavior. The paper analyses fictional representation of Indian woman's responses to trauma in the background of communal violence in India. Women, as their position within communal violence is usually theorized as that of victims who are either silent or who fictionalize their experiences. Fictional imagination of woman's condition during communal riots and their responses to the trauma as a result of those riots are demonstrated in this paper by examine the novel, *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur which have narrative set in the background of communal violence in India.

**Keywords-** *Indian Scenario, Communal Violence, Indian Women, Trauma*

### **Introduction**

*Difficult Daughters* published in 1998 was Manju Kapur's first novel presents the problems of an upper middle class urban Arya Samaj Punjabi family in Amritsar with a background of India's partition and the problems during the period of 1940s. With her own narrative style, Kapur similarize the women problems in colonial India as well as the problems arises due to the partition. The novel revolves around the story of a young woman, Virmati born into an austere Punjabi family, Amritsar. The protagonist of the novel is Ida; Virmati's daughter tries to reconstruct her mother's past. Dora Sales Salvador, Spanish translator of the novel says that Kapur emphasizes the effort made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal access to education and life opportunities, going beyond convention, were a visible force in the nonviolent resistance to the British. The novel is a deeply autobiographical book; yet Kapur had said that although the main characters are real the situation and encounters she has imagined are fictional. It locates the life of Virmati against a

backdrop of political happenings before and after partition. At the time of partition in 1947 communal violence on both sides of the border were against the dreams of Nationalist leaders about the secular democratic future of an Independent India.

Manju Kapur's novels reminds us a dense of exploration of the making of history in two different senses: the contemporary appropriation of the artifacts and symbols of the past; and the attempt to forge new kinds of human history here and now, in the construction and exploration of a discourse of modernity that stands in an uneasy relationship to a still hegemonic tradition. In her writing Kapur focuses on the co-existence of past and present in the socio-political facts. The novel convey that there is a pull – push between desire and duty for Indian women. The novel is a reconstruction of the Indian history in the point of women during partition days.

Dealing with religion, politics and social values Kapur feels India as socially cosmopolitan, politically egalitarian and religiously sectarian. Kapur's novels enable us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against biases. While reading the novels one gets the impression that a woman's life is like the life of a country which is passing through various trials and tribulations. In a socio-political context, Kapur has recorded the truth in her novels. A predominant concept in the novel is a strain of despair and disillusionment. She tries to portray the communal violence and disintegration of human values in the trauma and political upheaval of 1940s. Kapur express her serious concern – religion is above politics, nation and the court. R. K. Dhawan, a critic of repute says about the historical trauma i.e.:

A number of novels were written on the theme of partition, the destruction it brought and the plight of the refugees. They faithfully recorded the reign of violence that characterized the period and provided a sad telling commentary on the breakdown of human values. A stair of despair and disillusionment is predominant in these novels (14).

Kapur has described politics of genocide as an important fabric in India's unique experience of democracy. She is sincere and naïve as a sociologist in explored the bizarre paradox of antipathy sheltered under political support and social approval. Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India achieved their success in more than sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. In the context of contemporary global Indian society and culture, the novels of Kapur are relevant.

Many novels of 1930s and 1940s were deals with the nationalist and Gandhian Movement, novels of the 1950s and 1960s with the active sense of the alienation of character belonging to privileged sections of Indian society who were caught up in the contrary pulls of tradition and modernism, post-independence and several novels of the 1980s and 1990s with the concept of nation.

In all these novels there was a common element in it – the theme of Partition. The Partition has proved to be an enduring theme in Indian-English for over six decades; some of the novels depict the direct consequences and others as indirect spin-offs of the Partition of 1947.

By examining the novels we can see the fact that the treatment of Partition changed significantly over decades. They try to portray the value attached to women as the ‘subjects’ of this traumatic history whether close to or distant from the event of Partition. Concepts of nation and nationhood also become the main theme of Partition novels. From the 1990s the articulation of Partition as a more distinct theoretical accent rather than the direct reportage. The novel *Difficult Daughters* is an example for this. Along with the Partition all these novels describes something more.

Several incidents are narrated in a highly controlled manner in *Difficult Daughters*. Kapur has a remarkable sense of objectivity and impartiality. When Kapur narrates one happening in India, she immediately balances herself by telling that exactly artistic interweaving of themes and characterization has made the novel very unique. Novel interrogates the practices of an Indian nationalism that reveals a deep post-independence reliance on west inspired myths of the nation. The family memoir of *Difficult Daughters* is clearly configured around independence and Partition with marginal references to the European scenario so, as will be seen, this global perspective is somewhat lacking. The novel is read as family and national histories and the site where it articulate the strategy of historical genealogy in the domestic space. The narration is in the third person for the most which stands on its own as some sort of epistolary episode with an exchange of correspondence between Virmati and Harish and a silencing of both omniscient third person and Ida’s first person narration.

In the background of undivided Punjab the story of Virmati the protagonist of the novel is narrated. She is the eldest of the eleven sisters and brothers in the family. As the eldest daughter and also as the custom in the old days, it is Virmati who has to take care of all her brothers and sisters. Her mother Kasturi is pregnant for the last time when Virmati is hardly seventeen and preparing for her F.A examination. Her family does not bother about their daughters’ education.

Virmati is presented to the reader at the outset of the novel as a motherly figure, “attuned to signs of her mother’s pregnancies as Kasturi herself” (Kapur, 6) and most constantly dedicated to her siblings’ childcare. This is Kapur’s ironical wink at the fact that the same as in nationalist myth- Virmati’s life has been symbolically linked to her nation all along the novel, when she invokes her right to symbolically participate in it her husband’s negative is a bitter sign of her enduring marginality.

The novel is the story of the daughters who are indeed very difficult to understand. There are a good number of daughters in the novel right from the first chapter to the last. Some of them are very docile, humble, traditional, cultured and some of them are exactly opposite to them by being very

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revolutionary, modern, ultramodern and even non hesitant to keep immoral and illicit relations with other man. The stories of these difficult daughters are woven in the form of this novel. The strong female character in the novel is Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin, an MSc in Chemistry, goes out on the home and begins to lead her life in Lahore in the company of her friends. She is unmarried and takes part in 'conducting political meetings and join rallies'. She once says to Virmati:

These people don't understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedoms of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else. (17)

The other female character is Swarnalata, Virmati's roommate. She resembles to the character of Shakuntala. Once she says that:

Marriage is not only thing in life, Viru. The war- the Satyagraha movement because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream. (1998.151)

It has an ever lasting impact on her tender mind. She strongly desires to be like Shakuntala and Swarna. At the same time as luck would have it, there comes the Professor to live in their house as a paying guest. He is married. He is a lecturer in English with a scholastic appearance and teacher of Viru. Virmati and professor fall in love with each other and Virmati's tragic journey begins. Once shed lover, she begins her journey towards her married lover, she does not even bother to establish immoral and illicit relations with him. The Professor promises her to marry and succeeds in keeping physical relations with her.

It is on this background that communal poison begins to work and the Hindus and Muslims become enemies of each other. Suraj Prakash, the father of Virmati becomes a victim of violence and dies a tragic death. Virmati is so much disturbed that she undergoes a miscarriage and loses all interests in married life. She is then sent to Lahore for higher education in the field of philosophy. There instead of studying she wanders here and there in the company of her friends and attends meetings of the political organizations.

That summer vacation of 1945, she had seen the aftermath of the Direct Action Day. She is now afraid and thinks if this can happen in Bengal, Punjab is not far behind. In Amritsar too there are several incidents of violence and the Professor decides to send his first wife, his mother and children to Kanpur, a safe place for them. The day they are sent to Kanpur, Virmati enjoys a lot. She takes it as her Independent day. Now they are all in their home. She becomes pregnant, gives birth to a daughter. They name their daughter as Ida. In fact Virmati wants her to name Bharati but Harish opposes and says that:

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I don't wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred? We haven't been born. We have moved back into the dark ages. Fighting, killing over religion. Religion of all things even the educated. This is madness, not freedom. And I never ever wish to be reminded of it. (276)

The violence of the Partition changes attitudes towards freedom and he names his daughter Ida instead of Bharati. It means a new slate, and a blank beginning

Right from the first chapter to last page there has been a strong undercurrent of the politics of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. The daughters as well as all characters in the novel are born in the pre-independent India. They are, in the beginning, fighting untidily against the British. Their first aim is to drive away the Britishers from India. Like the Congress leaders, the leaguers, and all other political parties, organizations, castes and communities come together and fight against the British. But when the Independence of India comes within sight, all these are disintegrated and are found in their separate camps and compartments. Now they begin their fight for the interests of their castes and communities.

Kapur writes about the multilayered Indian experiences in colonial and post-colonial times, reflecting upon the holocaust of Partition and the problems of women in particular. Christopher Rollason comments that the search for control over one's destiny, surely the key theme of *Difficult Daughters*, refers to the Independence aspired and obtained by a nation (despite its cruel division by a fateful Partition), but also to the Independence yearned after (and finally not obtained) by a woman and members of that same nation (or of its rival communities). The very title of the novel is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries in search of an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well.

Virmati, who finds that battle for her own independence has created irrevocable lines of Partition and pain around her. The novel considers as a fictional representation of trauma and focuses on the theme of Partition. It narrates how Partition affects the characters as well as the society. There has been a strong undercurrent of the politics of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. When Kapur narrates one incident happening in India, she immediately balances herself by telling that exactly artistic interweaving of themes and characterization has made the novel very unique.

In its fusion of the personal and the political, Kapur's novel demonstrates how little lives are inextricably caught up with bigger social events and often go unrecorded by the processes of history. Kapur's prose is bare, devoid of the stylistic flourish that has become characteristic of Indian Writing in English.

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