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The Changing Family Structure and the Dilemma of Women In Manju Kapur's Novels

[1]S. Shafrin Fathima, [2]Dr. J. Ahamed Meeran

[1]Research Scholar

[2]Associate Professor, Research Supervisor, Hajee Karutha Rowther Howdia College (Autonomous), Uthamapalayam.

Abstract: Family is considered the oldest and most basic institution in Indian society. It is the primary source of socialization and culture. In India, family is generally seen as a homogeneous unit with strong coping capacity, bound together by care and affection. In a large and culturally diverse country like India, however, families are not of one type. They differ based on class, community, ethnicity and individual choices. Members of a family are connected through personal relationships and social roles, and family acts as an important link between community and social change. The novels revolve around three generations living within a joint family framework and explore how patriarchal ideology, patrilineal descent and traditional gender roles shape women's lives. In Difficult Daughters, Virmati is caught between tradition and modernity, sacrificing education and freedom for family honour, struggling for identity and self-assertion in a male-dominated society. In Home, Nisha's journey from a protected girl in the traditional Banwari Lal family to an economically independent entrepreneur through her boutique 'Nisha's Creations' reflects the clash between tradition and modernity, where mothers themselves become agents of patriarchy. The study concludes that Kapur's protagonists represent the modern Indian woman negotiating between roots and wings, familial duty and individual aspiration, and ultimately redefining womanhood within the evolving Indian family.

Keywords: Family Structure, Patriarchy, Tradition and Modernity, Gender Roles, Identity.

Family can be broadly defined as a group of two or more people united by marriage, blood, adoption or consensual union, generally sharing a single household and interacting and communicating with each other. From ancient times, family, caste and community have dominated the entire fabric of Indian society. Family has been the most dominant institution both in the life of an individual and in the life of the community.

In India, family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages. Like most other less industrialized, traditional and eastern societies, India is a collectivist society which gives importance to family integrity, family loyalty and family unity. More specifically, collectivism is seen in the greater willingness to cooperate with family members and extended relatives on decisions related to most areas of life, including career choice, mate selection, marriage and its continuity.

The Indian family has been a dominant institution both in the life of an individual and in the life of the community. For the Hindu family, extended family and kinship ties are very important. In India, families follow a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patrilocal and support traditional gender roles. The Indian family is considered to be strong, stable, close, resilient and enduring.

The main role of family lies in raising a child within its atmosphere. In our cultural tradition, there is a deep-rooted belief that a child is a gift of God and must be nurtured with love and care by family and society, as the hope for future. Family is the first line of defence for children. It plays a key role in their survival, health, education, development and protection. It is also the main source of care, emotional bonding and social learning. It connects tradition with change and gives stability and support during difficult times. In this sense, human development can be improved by enriching family life.

At present, families in India are witnessing vast changes. There is a rise in divorce and separation, domestic violence, conflicts between generations, and problems like drug abuse and juvenile delinquency. These changes show that many families are unable to cope with the pressures of modern life. Yet, despite these challenges, most families have survived. They have learned to modify, adjust and adapt to changing social norms, values and structures, and have shown a unique strength in staying together despite growing stress and strain.

The most striking feature of Kapur's Difficult Daughters and Home is the similarity in the concept of family and structure. These works deal with generations of the same family and in turn their extended families. The author uses traditional setups to show the movement, flux in the characters of each generation. She wants us to understand that only outward changes take place, and otherwise each generation is intrinsically the same, making the same mistakes all over again.

In the novel Difficult Daughters, family plays an important role and for the sake of family's name Virmati is forced to sacrifice her education, and freedom. Difficult Daughters is about the saga of three generations set during the partition times. The family comprises Lala Diwan Chand who has two sons Suraj Prakash and Chander Prakash, Suraj married to Kasturi and Chander Prakash married to Lajwanti. Essentially the story is of three generations – Kasturi (the mother of Virmati), Virmati (the main protagonist), and Ida (the daughter of Virmati). The third generation is the protagonist of the book Virmati and her life. She is married to Prof. Harish and their daughter Ida opens this book's narrative.

The Professor, Harish Chandra has comes back to India from England only for the sake of his mother and family pressure makes him come back. It is again purely family customs that postpone the marriage of Virmati, rather than sitting at home she joins college, and there she is inextricably drawn to the Prof. Virmati is caught between familial and romantic love and her family fail to understand her love for the professor. Dishonouring her family name, she takes the step to commit suicide rather than get married. Kasturi cannot understand why her daughter does not want to get married. Fortunately, she is saved and Indumati is married off to Inderjeet in the name of the family name and honour. Virmati then is sent to Lahore for further studies. Later Virmati revolting against deep rooted family traditions, marriers the professor and comes and stays with the professor's family which comprises his first wife, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and children. Although Virmati succeeds in marrying the professor, yet her marriage proves to be a disaster. She loses all identity. Only her mother-in-law accepts her to some extent and that too at the behest of her son.

Later sometimes she suffers a miscarriage. Virmati blames herself to be responsible for the destruction of Ganga's life (Harish's first wife). Virmati is still struggling to establish her identity and to gain self-assertion. Though Virmati frees herself from the old shackles, she becomes a new woman. She represents the modern woman torn between desire for self and her helplessness. The novel also explores the problems of women in a male dominated society. Born out of typical Indian family, Virmati is caught between tradition and modernity. It results only in self-alienation and she became a symbol of female imagination, responding to pressures and the family structure. And yet she is amazed at her former roommate Swarnalata's efforts to participate and help to bring about change and be a part of the change. She asks Vimati to come and demonstrate against the Hindu code bill

"Men don't want family wealth to be divided among women. Say their sisters get dowry, that's their share, and the family structure will be threatened, because sisters and wives will be seen a rivals, instead of dependents who have to be nurtured and protected. As a result, women will lose their moral position in society! Imagine!" (232)

Virmati can only envy her as obviously these activities does not prove to be a threat to her martial life and family structure. There is constant negotiation with the family setting. Ida, Viramti's daughter and the book's narrator understands the family structure. Ida becomes the typical daughter of a 'difficult daughter' Virmati.

In her next book Manju Kapur, once again goes back to her theme of three generations resizing in one house, the women existing within the joint family set-up. Home is about the home of Lala Banwari Lal, a patriarch who firmly believes in living in a joint family. He is the head of the family and runs a saree shop in Karol Bagh. He has two sons – Yashpal and Pyarelal, and a daughter Sunita, who is married.

The novel focuses on three female characters- Sona (daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal), Rupa (Sona's sister) and Nisha (Sona's daughter)- who claim their identity in their own ways. The story begins with two sisters: one is good looking and the other merely plain. The elder one Sona is married to the elder son of Banwari Lal while the younger one, Rupa is attached to a junior Government officer of less value. Each sister thinks that the other is luckier and each one has more difficulties than the other. Rupa, has only a husband and a father-in-law in the family whereas Sona's is a joint family. At the initial stage the story revolves around the life of Sona and Rupa before it focuses on the whole family. Rupa is lucky because she is not subjected to bear the taunts of in-laws for having no child. Sona is still not pregnant after passing two years and she occasionally comments by her mother-in-law:

"What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no

sorrow, only a husband to dance around you." (18)

Meanwhile Yashpal's younger brother, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. Sushila brings a huge dowry including a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. Sona feels herself inferior to Sushila, as Sona's parents do not give her dowry at the time of her marriage. The newly married couple start living upstairs where Sona wishes to shift. But the system of joint family remains same. All take their meal together only. The family believes:

"Separate kitchens led to a sense of mine and yours, dissatisfaction, emotional

division, and an eventual parting of the ways". (12)

Sona struggles to have children and finally she gives birth to a baby girl. Everybody is happy and the baby is considered as Lakshami. Sona's delivery of her next progeny, a son is enjoyed and welcomed more than the first. Both of her sons now have their sons and they can hold their head high in the society. Due to this gender differentiation, the family never lets Nisha go outside and palys with her brothers. Later Nisha's empowerment is also considered as shameful as like her mother Sona. Nisha, the main protagonist and the daughter of Yashpal emerges as a self-dependent woman in the novel.

The family of Banwari Lal is traditional and patriarchal. They believe that men work out of the house, and women within. His two sons follow the ways of their father without any question. The head of the house, Banwari Lal, is ready to do anything for the honour of the family and to maintain its unity. Manju Kapur has portrayed the confused growing up years of Nisha in a heart-rending manner as Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in the early stage of her life. It affects the child psychologically and mentally. Rupa believes there is something at their home which is frightening and disturbing the mind of Nisha. Nisha is sent to her aunt's house. Rupa and her husband, take full care of Nisha.

In the family of Banwari Lal, girl's education is considered secondary. But Nisha's education begins properly at her aunt's house. Her uncle Prem Nath helps her in her studies and spends much time in telling her stories and lessons. During Nisha's education, her brother gets married. Now it is her turn. Nisha has been influenced by her Maasi's updated thinking of life. Nisha stays with Rupa has continued her education and Nisha sees her mentor in her aunt and wants to lead a life with her. Sona does not understand her daughter Nisha very much similar to Kasturi in Difficult daughters. Both Kasturi and Sona are the forces of patriarchy within their homes; the opposition does not come so openly from the male members as it does from their own mothers. They are unable to understand their daughter's feelings and rather expect them to follow role of women in a family.

Nisha always tries to defend herself and her aunt. This clash between Nisha and Sona is a clash between tradition and modernity. Meanwhile, during her first year of her college, Nisha comes across a boy, Suresh and falls in love with Suresh. Once her family comes to know she is not allowed to go out. Nisha's uncle consoles the girl and finally they go to meet him in a restaurant. Their meeting results in the destruction of her hopes and love. After the destruction Nisha starts her journey towards empowerment. She wants to do something valuable and wants to become economically independent. Her idea of working and earning is bitterly opposed by her mother. At her request, her father allows her to join a play way school, near her home. But soon Nisha is feds up with children at the school and leaves the job.

After all the traditional battles Nisha defies the social structure and defines womanhood entirely in different terms that suits her aspirations. She does not dance to the tunes of conventions and wishes to live a carefree life. With the help of her father, she starts her own business, a boutique, named 'Nisha's Creations.' She becomes a successful and known businesswoman of the Karol Bagh market. She is now economically emancipated. Meanwhile Nisha's marriage is fixed with Arwind. She closed inside her home after her marriage. Her sister-in-law, Pooja, takes over her business. Her husband does not understand her desires. Nisha had been like flying bird but has been prisoned in the cage of social norms. Within a month Nisha got pregnant, her husband and her mother-in- law do not appreciate idea of going to the shop and she delivers a twins-one girl and one boy and become a complete woman according to the frame of society.

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