



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS, A MARRIED WOMAN AND HOME*

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ABSTRACT

There is a marked change in the writings of women in the recent past. Apart from focusing on the trials and tribulations that women experience in their pursuit of identity, women writers have been markedly portraying the increasing violence inflicted on women by men. Men have abused women and even young girls so as to assert their authority and they have understood that it is a means to oppress women so that their power over them is unquestioned. Writers like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Shobha De have questioned the male authority through their writings and gave an expression to the issue of how women are sexually exploited in their novels. They have tellingly presented the atrocities committed against women in their works. Manju Kapur, a modern Indian woman writer, has portrayed similar incidents of monstrosities perpetrated against women. In this paper I have examined incidents of violence against women in Kapur's *Difficult Daughters, A Married Woman and Home*.

Keywords: *Violence, Exploitation, Sexual abuse.*

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The increasing feminist participation with the rights of women to her life and body has of late led to the discussion of sexuality in literary discussions and debates. The shift in women writing all round the world has been to depict experiences particular to female sensitivities. The modern feminist thinkers and writers have ventured to synthesize both the female body and her sexuality by proclaiming that, instead of pointing out biological genitality, sexuality must show a mechanism of dealing with sexual relations by means of

conventions and establishments along with discussions and types of renditions, which have been formulating, devising, dispensing and restraining the topic of sex. Their purpose is to create space for more comprehensive attitudes towards comprehending the sexual politics of desire and violence among men and women in modern India. The question of sex includes a question of power and understanding of patriarchy – which forms sexual politics. Of late, women writers, apart from, providing voice to the suppressed victims, have also



projected a powerful and intense description of the most forbidding facets of femininity. Violence against women is a regular issue discussed in their works. Women writers of modern era have been engaged with distinct demonstrations of male violence against women. These women writers have articulated the sufferings of women in the anticipation that their voices would pitch in lessening the pain of coming generations of women from violence. In the present paper, I have explored three novels of Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* and *Home*, where she has portrayed incidents of violence directed against women.

Difficult Daughters (1998) is the first novel of Manju Kapur which outlines the story of the heroine, Virmati, whose life collapses as she has succumbed to Professor Harish's desire. Gradually, but undoubtedly his desire devours Virmati. She defies the family traditions, finds herself in a mire of difficulties due to her physical relationship with Harish which finally leaves her shattered mentally. She is too naïve to realize that the Professor is enjoying the privileges of a man both in the company of his wife, Ganga and his young love, Virmati. His domestic needs are provided by Ganga. He traps Virmati in the garb of educational pursuits and draws her into a physical relationship with him. In this manner, he takes advantage of her and fulfills his intellectual needs. He is a paramour who knows how to play with the emotions of women. His intense desire to touch and feel Virmati's body is fulfilled. His illicit love affair is always maintained distance with his home so that peace and harmony at home are not disturbed. He always evades the question of marriage with Virmati. In her innocence, Virmati could not understand the Professor's evil designs. He is obsessed with her body that he crushes all her attempts for self-assertion. He follows her to Lahore, capitalizes on her sentiments and gratifies his cravings. As a result, Virmati is pregnant and has to go for an abortion as there is no other option left for her. This incident brings about a change in Virmati's outlook of life. Virmati is brought up in a traditional family which makes her to think that since her body is touched by the Professor she should devote her life to him.

Nevertheless, Harish's exploitation has its effect as an incident of rape once again before he was strapped to marry her. He is so cunning that he takes every measure to tighten his grip over by closing every escape route of Virmati from his life. On completion of BT, Virmati starts her career as a teacher at Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya in the Princely state of Sirmour. His first attempt to trample her career does not meet with success. He succeeds in his second attempt when he intrudes her privacy during night time and crushes her emotional strength. He forcibly enters her cottage and makes love without her permission to the act. 'Viru, I love you more than you love me, that much is obvious,' panted the Professor. 'It's been almost six months – I can think of nothing else and here you torture me with your questions and answers!''No,' protested Virmati, as strongly as she was able. The salwar was undone, and his hand was making stroking movements on her belly, before embarking on its more probing journey downwards." (189) Despite Virmati's opposition, Harish lunges at her and satisfies his carnal desires. Her initial pleas and attempts of resistance are turned on a deaf ear and hence with another incident of savagery and brutality Virmati is ruined forever. Her bright career suffers an unexpected climax and she is left with no promise in life. Her life is destroyed since she could neither go back to her family for support nor her inclination to marry Harish is accredited.

Astha relents to emotional coercions absolutely in *A Married Woman* (2003). Her sexual liberties with Rohan before marriage do not upset her as it was in the case of Virmati. Rohan's announcement that he is leaving the country for higher education results in the close of this association. Astha is distressed but she does not believe in the concept of female purity and virginity. She revels in her relationship with Rohan as he had enjoyed. Astha is not shocked and dazed. The idea of virginity is raised after her marriage with Hemant. Hemant, an American-returned M.B.A, "wanted an innocent, unspoilt, simple girl," (41) in other words – a virgin. Astha does not feel awkward since her virginity is proved when they find "spot of marriage blood" (38) on bed sheets in course of their



honeymoon. Thenceforth, Astha's marital life rested on their nocturnal nuptial exploits. Hemant unflinchingly and inevitably turns to his "quickie." Their passionate and sexual practices have become customary and habitual that, Hemant under no circumstances wishes to pull himself back, immaterial if Astha consents or not.

"That night, Hemant started his sex routine.

'No,' said Astha, 'I don't feel like it.'

Hemant paused. This was the first time his wife had not felt like it. 'What's up?' he demanded.

'Nothing.'

.....He took her face in his hands.

'Sweetheart, why do you upset yourself over nothing? You are my wife, I love you.....'

Without her willing it, her body responded. Hemant became even more ardent. "Baby, you are the only one for me, what's the matter, are you jealous?"

'No,' she said, trying to push him away, but it was of no use."(224)

The above lines stand evidence to Hemant's dominant role in sex. Astha's rejoinders are totally disregarded and ignored. He does not care for his wife's feelings and emotions. His opinion is that Astha is his wife and she should act according to his dictates at all times and all places. The above incident shows that there is no room for independence and choice for a woman even in the bedroom.

Manju Kapur in her third novel, *Home* (2006) highlights the issue of sexual abuse of children through the character of Nisha and exposes the fact that women are maltreated at home. Kapur presents a touching account of the sexual confrontations thrust upon the delicate body of Nisha. During her childhood, Nisha likes Vicky, the son of her late aunt, Sunita (Banwari Lal's daughter), who is brought to Delhi following the death of his mother. One day when she goes upstairs to play snake and ladder with Vicky she encounters her "horrors" unknowingly. Vicky is a boy of seventeen who is preparing for his board exams when his beastly tendencies make him to victimize Nisha and deprive of her mental

composure and sleep in the coming days. Nisha's dearth of maturity, inability and her physical fragility constricts her conflict with the perpetrator yet she firmly fights Vicky's attack and voices her aversion. However, when the victimizer wields brute force to make her succumb to his evil designs, she could no longer hold control over her body. Kapur highlights Nisha's frame of mind – her obvious abhorrence and extreme discomfiture – 'What are you doing? Chee, that's dirty, take your hand away,'(56) and her frail psychic condition is that she is petrified and panic-stricken. Vicky creates a perverted identity of Nisha, truncating her to the role of a sexual article conceived to satisfy his requirements, 'Vicky was always on the lookout for opportunities to get Nisha alone. Then bliss would follow. She was too young to understand what was happening, and then he really wasn't doing anything bad to her.' (59)

Vicky's sexual abuse reveals that Nisha is absolutely vulnerable to the patriarchal power structure and in no way has the capability to avert sexual intimidation. This gender-constructed cruelty indicates inner and mental mutilation of the sufferer. She undergoes a feeling of isolation and want of maternal reassurance and protection. Disastrous ramifications of the vicious act lead to extreme psychological unrest in Nisha when she 'awoke crying' and 'the child's screaming became worse.' (64) The irony is Sona, Nisha's mother, refuses to allow Nisha to sleep in her bed since she would disturb Raju's sleep. (Nisha's brother) Manju Kapur underscores the fact that home which is regarded a place of safety and security for women and girls turns out also to be a place of sexual exploitation.

Manju Kapur probes into the fact that man preys on woman in order to satisfy his sensual needs and as a result this imposed sex on women has disturbing and scarring impact on women's mind. Kapur challenges the society's sanction to spousal rape and the transgression of women's right to her body. The ultimate purpose of Kapur is to project the phallogocentric prejudices and presumptions related to the topic. In a way, Kapur's novels also serve another motive, that is, to expose and increase women's viewpoints on sexual exploitation. This narration of



the female view is necessary since it amounts to repossession of authority by pointing out the violence. Violence on women can be put to an end only when the issue is addressed by both men and women and also calls for combined efforts of both the parties. Patriarchal and chauvinistic opinions, conduct and convictions need to be revised and reformed so that women live in security, and women no longer need to face danger, terror or confrontation of sexual violence.

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