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Positioning the Women as a Subaltern in Post Colonial India in the Select Works of Manjukapur

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ABSTRACT: *Subalternity becomes an overriding concept in literature when the marginalized section of the society has no voice of its own. The condition of the women in the society is same as to that of the treatment of the untouchables. Though a woman is respected like a goddess, her role is very much limited by the male dominated world. The men-folk will be happy when women carry out the traditional job of rearing children and looking after the house hold duties. Women in the society occupy only a subordinate position and their rights and privileges are determined by the patriarchal society. Women have very limited freedom and even less control over four constituents on the self. Society, religion or tradition controls them and more often than not religion and morality are used to exclude women from power and knowledge and reinforce patriarchal authority. The research paper explores the position of subalterns especially women in the post colonial India in the selected works of ManjuKapur. ManjuKapur's novel present larger issues of patriarchy, which denies woman's voice and freedom set around the time of partition. Her novels highlight the issues like the awakening of the country for freedom, women education and feminine freedom. She presents the intimate understanding of women and their problems, injustice done towards her in the name of religion, god, morality and honesty. ManjuKapur mainly focuses an eccentric approach in all her works. It is always an acceptable fact that a life of woman is always a challenge and since ages she has been subjected to the many challenges thrown by society, customs, traditions, and men. Tradition, the world over, has assigned a lower and subordinate position to women in its social set up.*

Keywords: *Subalternity, Man-woman relationship, Eccentricity, Post Colonialism, Patriarchy.*

India is a male dominated society where women are still considered inferior to males. It is a fact to be accepted that gender inequality is not only an accepted fact in India, but is one which is deeply ingrained within the culture. The sardonicism is that women are not only answerable for themselves, but their children and entire families; however they do not have any control over anything. Subalternity exists in different forms in almost all spheres of human activities. Age subalternity, Gender subalternity, Linguistic subalternity, Economic subalternity, Religious subalternity, sexual subalternity and even love subalternity are detected in the novels of our Indian writers. Indian society has become a male dominated society and women are started to be treated as man's slave. Women are prohibited to take part in many domestic, social as well as external matters. India women are treated badly and indifferently in the family and society.

Men in Indian society played a predominant role in public life and in the pertaining work system and this axiomatically made them a prominence of power in the family system. This system made sure that possessions and children belonged to the same beliefs. Women in India are always subjected to the honor killings and they were never given their basic rights for the proper education and freedom. This research work aims at presenting how the female characters are positioned and subordinated and explores the traumas suffered by the women characters in the male dominated patriarchal society in India, with reference to select works of *ManjuKapur*. As a women liberator and writer, ManjuKapur promotes a powerful revolt against the patriarchal Indian society. The unequal, unjust and oppressed role of women can be observed in all the female characters that undergo a loveless life throughout dominated and dictated by their husbands. The research work brings out the voice of women's

frustrations, disappointments and alienation in this subaltern patriarchal world and mainly their place where they are positioned in post colonial India as domestic slaves.

ManjuKapur was born in Amristar in 1948. She was educated in India and Canada. She is a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi and did her post graduation in English at Dalhousie University, Canada. Manjukapur started her carrier only with poetry and then shifted to drama and eventually finding her forte in novel writing, she turned into a novelist and also succeeded in that. ManjuKapur is a contemporary Indian novelist in English who has established herself with her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998), which won her prestigious commonwealth Writers' Prize (Urasia Section) in 1998. She has also written best seller novels such as *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *Custody* (2011). Her books have been translated into many languages both in India and outside.

ManjuKapur through her novels bring out critical new telling in the altered phenomenon of cultural outlook in which marriages, trustworthiness, equal responsibilities and general and social restrictions are seen from the womanish point of view. ManjuKapur is very much familiar of the verisimilitude that woman under the dominance of a male are inflicted to more social banishment. ManjuKapur's novels divulge a hope of feminist strife against women partiality.

ManjuKapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* depicts the life of Virmati who got education and a career despite the constraints of being a woman and became the second wife of a Professor. The women characters in Manjukapur's "*Difficult Daughters*" are divided into three generations who marry for different reasons and also hate their marriages for different issues. Virmati acts and behaves like a difficult daughter for her mother and also for her daughter Ida becomes a difficult daughter for Virmati. Both Virmati and Ida eventually end up bearing a disproportionate burden of coercion and exploitation.

ManjuKapur's second novel "*A Married Woman*", portrays Astha as a protagonist, who, despite an initially happy arranged marriage and satisfying sexual life, drifts into a lack of marital and familial contentment; and involves herself in politics where she meets a woman, who ultimately becomes her lover. The protagonist Astha attempts to assert her independence and her awakening to her rights though she loses the battle in the end. The novel imports the life of Astha from her young age to her middle age through various dreams and failures, irritations, rejections, disappointments and disgruntlements.

ManjuKapur has clearly asserted all possible reasoning to get married through her protagonists. In *Difficult Daughters*, for Kasturi it is the responsibility, for Virmati it is blind love towards Harish and for Ida it is just to follow as instructed by her father. In *A Married Woman*, Astha's parents want to marry her because they consider it as their duty. In ManjuKapur's fiction the consequence of the protagonist's marriage are completely different in each of the characters. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kasturi becomes a passive sufferer being exploited in a patriarchal family, Virmati is alienated, and Ida is single and childless. ManjuKapur's "*A Married Woman*" brings the strain that portrays the changing image of Indian women. The starting lines of the novel embarks on an honest and realistic portrayal of the life endured by Indian women in insinuating the role of deep set cultural conditioning that forces them to think of themselves as weak and vulnerable in need of protection. The sources of the miseries of these difficult women lives in the fictional works of ManjuKapur are variegated in nature. In *Difficult Daughters*, the problem with Kasturi is the socio-cultural background at her times, Virmati is in the dilemma, and Ida is too radical. In *A Married Woman*, Astha suffers because of her husband's negligence to her, and Peepalika's agony can be traced due to her emotional weakness of being a single mother.

ManjuKapur's "*Difficult Daughters*" bring out the sufferings of Indian women in a combined family structure in the male dominated patriarchal society. ManjuKapur as a post-colonial feminist deals with the problem of Virmati, an educated daughter in a colonial joint family. ManjuKapur's women characters in the novel are divided into three generations, with their values, mindsets and relationships. The novels presents larger issue of patriarchy and subalternity which denies woman's voice and freedom set around at their times.

Virmati, central character of the novel "*Difficult Daughters*" takes up the role of a mother and looks after her brothers and sisters. Virmati is burdened with all the responsibilities of the household work. Harish, Virmati's husband, represented as the patriarchal society, oppresses Virmati compelling her to abort their baby. The third character Ida is prey to the burden of patriarchal expectation. Ida was forced to live to her father's expectation and after marriage compelled to live to her husband's expectation. The unequal, unjust and oppressed role of women can be observed in all the three female characters that undergo a loveless life throughout dominated and dictated by their husbands.

The women characters in Manjukapur's "*Difficult Daughters*" are divided into three generations who marry for different reasons and also hate their marriages for different issues. In case of Kasturi, marriage is a responsibility and for which she becomes the sufferer being exploited in a patriarchal society. In the case of Virmati, it is for the sake of love and attachment towards a married man Harish which results in her alienation. For Ida it is to carry the line and it results her to remain single and childless. In the traditional social milieu of her novels she shows the existence of mothers and daughters, where marriage is regarded as the ultimate goal and destiny from which these women cannot escape.

The female characters Kasturi, Virmati and Ida are seen to be struggling to cast off their web of patriarchal dominance. The protagonist Virmati, her mother Kasturi and her daughter Ida all of them emerge in their young age as difficult daughters and when they try to cope up with the society, they confront failure. These three representative daughters in their journey of life face difficulties from others or by the circumstances they live in. Thus the women beneath the patriarchal demands and power are subjected to isolation. The condition across all Hindu society is that, as a girl she is under her father's control, then after the marriage under her husband's control and finally after the loss of her husband, it is the turn of the son to take the control over his mother. These women just try to challenge the existing social – cultural – patriarchal system, but they cannot liberate themselves from oppressive patriarchal structure.

Astha, the female protagonist of the novel, "*A Married Woman*" webs in between the modern feminist awakening and the ancient family responsibilities. Astha's trauma to decide between her desire for freedom and her obligations towards family sickens her. She represents the image of new woman who longs to have her own space in the traditional patriarchal society. Through Astha, ManjuKapur brings out the voice of women's frustrations, disappointments and alienation in this patriarchal world. Astha, when pushed to take decision in between her family life and social norms, chooses to come back to her family and readjusts herself to her tradition undergoing all traumas. Despite Astha's daring to cross the patriarchal threshold, in the end she only adjusts, compromises and adapts only to the existing situation.

Astha's happiness is short lived as she gets frustrated to take care of her children and in-laws continuously the whole day. After becoming a mother of two children, Astha experiences too much trauma as she is forced to do all the parental works all alone without any help from her soul mate which suddenly becomes a big shock to her. It is a burden for her longing for Hemant on the other side as he gets busy in his business that has made Astha waiting for long hours. Astha's behavioral change takes place mainly after her feeling of betrayed, when she finds her husband's infidelity.

Astha doesn't want to be pushed around in the name of family and responsibilities. She tries to restrain her disgruntlement and takes on her duties as a mother, wife and daughter-in-law. She is contemplated to do all the works of a house wife flawlessly. Hemant's dominating attitude, superiority complex exercising over Astha, and lack of interest in her achievement completely freeze the channels of her bliss of marital life.

Astha's frustration and irritation peeks up when she wants to take up overall responsibility of parenting their children on her own. Against the backdrop of socio political turmoil, the author presents a narrative that features the trauma of neglect and a sense of alienation. As such the burden of carrying on with the responsibility of the household single handedly denies Astha the liberty of being an individual. But slowly incompatibility of temperament with her husband leaves her to suffer from anxiety loneliness and depression. Astha tried hard to reconcile with her stressful life, a heaviness she found hard to deal with. Discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led to argument, distance and the greater misery. In addition to all these troubles the attitude of Hemant who shows no self respect or love towards her but completely misunderstands her. Too much of trauma leads Astha to develop migraine and high blood pressure. In the moment of chaos, Pipeelika urges Astha to leave her family and join her. Astha cannot resist Pipeelika's words as she finds Pipeelika as her true companion and her intimate soul mate of both emotional and physical relationship. This leads Astha on the verge of losing her family.

The displacement the women suffer and the suffocation they face in the traditional limits of marriage and family is clearly brought out in the life of Astha. Thus dissatisfied in married life, Astha is unconsciously drawn towards illicit relationship in search of pure and true love. Astha webbed with her desires, aspirations, emotions, feelings and dreams is pulled back by her inner conflicts rising out of her patriarchal conventions. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation do not resist her to give out voice to her unhappiness, over her troubled relationship, and rather it prompts her to develop a feeling of guilt, negativity and lack of self – esteem while facing these challenges of life.

The story of Astha reflects fractured bond of marriages. The educated protagonist tries to assert her individuality and make an attempt to lead a liberal life which leads in trauma as we follow a tradition which implies an established method or practice, belief or custom, passed on to us by our ancestors. The difficulties faced by Astha to initiate a journey towards peace for which for she has to undergo a lot of struggle because of the complexities of life which of course leave her only in a traumatic condition as she is forced to give importance to marriage and family duties.

The paper depicts how in Indian patriarchal society, the tradition is so strong that a woman cannot get her out of the bond and carve an own identity for her. The conflict between her roles of wife, mother and that of a lover continue, making her guilty and panicky but she has gone too far to turn back. Astha, however is not a strong woman, she could never be bold enough to leave her marriage life with Pipeelika and so she leaves for US and the relationship breaks, knowing the society will never allow them to have a happy future together. Astha represents herself as a woman who wants to have her own space in the Indian culture who fights for her freedom and raises herself against the patriarchal male dominated society. Astha brings out the physical, psychological, emotional stress syndrome and suffocation of young Indian married women in their domestic life.

Astha's struggle brings out how the protagonist's rebel against the hypocrisies of her conventional middle class family dealing with themes of alienation, loneliness and craving for love. In short a clear picture of the marriage stress and its incipient outcomes in the neutral Indian family is brought down in Astha's life. The female characters Kasturi, Virmati and Ida are seen to be struggling to cast off their web of patriarchal dominance. The protagonist Virmati, her mother Kasturi and her daughter Ida all of them emerge in their young age as difficult daughters and when they try to cope up with the

society, they confront failure. These daughters in their journey of life face difficulties from others or by the circumstances they live in. Thus the women beneath the patriarchal demands and power are subjected to isolation.

The above study concludes however important the functions and duties of a woman are, she is always relegated to the background and woman is obliged to subordinate her interests and desires of the collective will of her community and in particular to the male members. Indian literature of the earlier era has depicted woman as one who is docile, self sacrificing, the very embodiment of self less love and a veritable monument of patience, over willing to suffer. Such virtues are highlighted as the virtues of true womanhood. It is a man made world, and woman is bound within the narrow confines prescribed by man. This kind of male chauvinism resulting in female enslavement has been a set feature of Indian society, since ages. This aspect of woman's life has been portrayed by ManjuKapur with sensitivity and understanding especially in both these novels.

The female characters of the novel are treated as bond servants of the house following all the old cultures, traditions and restrictions of the society. Virmathi, Kasturi, Ida and Astha are treated as slaves to acquiesce their husbands as a scapegoat existing in the four closed walls of the house. They were enforced to live under the domination of parents before marriage whereas under the domination of husbands after marriage. These women cannot take their own decisions by breaking all personal limitations of the society and family. They are hampered only for the routine house work or comprehend the burden of home and family members. There is a high level of gender inequality in these novels, where women are ill treated by their family members and outsiders and are positioned only as domestic slaves rather than a human being. The society mandates a woman's obedience to her husband and her in-laws. Any disobedience would bring scorn to both, the wife herself and her originating family, and might facade to the woman being expatriated and expelled by her very own family members and in her own home. They are the dumb cattle victims who have to undergo brutality and bestiality in the male dominated patriarchal subaltern country.

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