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Broken Family in Manjukapur's *Difficult Daughters* and *Custody*

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ABSTRACT : Marriage is one of the most important ceremonies in Indian society. It is the best dream and wish of women and men. The Indian women writers have focussed on the problems in married life. Women writers consider broken family as the central problem of a family. Among the contemporary women novelists, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande voice for domestic violence and write about the inner life of man and woman. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and *Custody* deal with the theme of broken family. The innocent children are affected by their irresponsible single parents. So, the article mainly focusses on the broken family issues due to extra-marital affairs. It points out how men and women face the consequences throughout the life socially, psychologically and intellectually.

The following abbreviations are used after quotations:

C- *Custody* and DD- *Difficult Daughters*

Broken families are the ones who do not live together because of which children are forced to live with a single parent. It affects the growth of children both physically and mentally. Many contemporary writers voice for the suffering of women as being single parents.

Among writers, Kamala Markandaya's novels like *Nectar in a Sieve* is focussed on the women subject. She talks about the male dominance and female subordination. Jaishree Misa's writings are based on the theme of gender domination and the sufferings of single parent and child. Her novels like *Ancient Promises* and *Secrets and Lives* strongly reveal an awareness of relationship between parents and children in terms of their equality, independence and freedom. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* talk about the parent-children relationship. In the novel, both mother and father give less importance to their daughter and value their son. This affects the psyche of the daughter, Saru who searches for her self-identity in her married life which results in break-up. Manju Kapur's women protagonists tries to balance in the entire situation. In *Difficult Daughters* she narrates in the realistic way about the daughter, Ida. The story centres round the characters like Virmati and Ida. In *Custody*, she brings the theme of infidelity and infertility.

Difficult Daughters narrates the love between a girl Virmati and a professor who get married. It is evident that the novel depicts the problems of the women prevailed in Indian family. The novel also portrays three women – Virmati, Ida and Ganga - belonging to the state of Punjab. Virmati, the protagonist is a college student who loves an 'already married' professor. They beget a girl child, Ida. As she grows, she learns her mother's illegal affair with the married professor. So, she wants to get rid of her mother who dies of disease. After her death, Ida realizes her mother's love. Having learnt from her mother's pros and cons, she escapes from the similar situation which once trapped her mother.

Kapur's *Custody* is about the love of Raman, Shagun, Ashok and Ishita. Shagun is a wife of Raman who has illegal affair with a woman, Ishita. In turn, Shagun lives with Ashok. The

family encounters with the problem arising out of break up which affects their children – Arjun and Roohi both psychologically and intellectually. The parents want to separate the brother-sister relationship as they are selfish. They bargain children for their own benefits. Raman does not allow Shagun to see the children, but she longs to see her. Finally, Raman wants to take Arjun under his custody whereas Shagun wants the custody her daughter. But the parents fail to think that the children long for their parental care.

Kapur's novels view at the issues of women because she is a feminist. She focusses on the women's life style and the problems which face in day-to-day life. Kapur brings gently the issues of an infidelity in these characters like Raman and Shagun. The extra-marital affairs spoil the lives of both the parents and children must be realised. The illegal attitude of the elders push them into the crises. They are deprived of the real love. Ida in *Difficult Daughters* and Arjun and Roohi in *Custody* suffer a lot as they fear they might lose their real identities and values in the society. Ida is aware of what happened to her mother and escapes from such illegality. Ida sums up her resentment in one line, "I grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure, pressure to perform day and night" (DD 258). She must fight against her society and with her own genetics. "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (DD 1).

On the other hand, Arjun hates his own life as he has been thrown into hostel life. Either the men or the women in the name of seeking sensual pleasure they lose their dignity and decorum and happiness in their lives. They shed their shames in the guise of western culture. The ultimate end is the broken family. There is only chaos. Virmati says, "I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace... and why? Because I am an idiot". (DD 137-138) But her daughter, Ida never turns up to her mother. In *Custody*, because of divorce both lose the true love of their children.

Marriage is one of the most important ceremonies in Indian society. If man is meant for his duty and the girl is for beauty. While arranging marriage for Shagun, she is found to be beautiful. She is the perfect blend of east and west. Kapur states her, "Within a few months of arriving in India he saw the woman he knew he had been proceeded for. In her colouring, her greenish eyes and her ideas, she was a perfect blend of east and west. A woman so pretty had to be married; besides she had the look of someone who never had to compete for male attention." (C 4) The marriage of Raman and Shagun can be said as "She the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects." (C 14)

A man or a woman is educated to acquire the worldly knowledge, culture and custom. Each country gets astonished about our marriage customs. They feel surprised that India gives importance to chastity. It is this that binds each couple in the family to live together till their end. But the man or the woman ignores the Indian culture and is induced to be westernized. It is not because of his or her love for West. They forget the values of the East. In both the novels, extra-marital agreement plays a crucial role. The married professor who must be role model for the students has illegal affair with his girl student and begets a child. It is regrettable that they never marry throughout their life. A life of agreement continues and it is the cause for their daughter, Ida to move away from them. Raman and Shagun share their illegality by going in opposite directions to enjoy their extra-marital affairs – Raman to Ishita and Shagun to Ashok.

Manju Kapur also depicts how the parents treat women in terms of marriage proposals. In society, women can study to such a certain extent to obtain any degree. At the same time, they

are not allowed to live as they wish. In other words, women are deprived of their wish and will for they are weaker sexes. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati is not allowed to choose her partner according to her wish which drives her to choose boldly a married Professor. Even though it is illegal, the Indian society pities upon her death as she is deprived of her daughter's love to her last breath.

Divorce plays a brutal role in the life of the couple Raman and Shagun. It makes them to even bargain between each other regarding leasing their own children. Indian tradition values and respects the men and women when they beget children. Begetting a child is the aim of the marriage which attains its fulfilment. But these couples forget one more value of the Indian marriage. They fail to bring up their gifted children happily till their end. Ida gets rid of her mother and Arjun completely hates on seeing their parents' illegality. Just for bodily comfort, Virmati loses Ida and Raman and Shagun loses Arjun.

It is pathetic to question ourselves like: When will the Indians stop looking for extra-marital affairs? Won't the society rescue the fallen angels in the family? Won't the society provide awareness to the couples that they should protect their innocent born angels? Won't men and women give importance to family reunion? The answer to the above problems is that people must not forget the age-old traditional marriage, culture and customs of India. They must save the Indian culture and custom by following them. They should not make their children become victims of broken family.

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