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Special Issue : 22-23 September, 2017

Special Issue on

Impact of Socio-political Movements on World Literature

Issue Editors

■ Dr. V. R. Mirgane ■ Shri. M. N. Navse

Organized by

Department of English, Shri Bankatswami Mahavidyalaya, Beed (M.S.)

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COMMUNAL TENSION, RIOTS AND EMOTIONAL TRAUMA IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is set during India's Independence struggle and is partially based on the life of Kapur's own mother Virmati. It is a story of a woman torn between family duty, the aspiration of education and illicit love. Virmati, a young woman born in Amritsar, falls in love with neighbour professor and eventually marries him. Virmati is presented as a woman struggling for her own independence; her created irrevocable lines of communal riots and pain around her. The novel allegorically appears to be a critique of religious communalism.

This novel also reflects the attributes of the Indian Nationalist Movement and Partition and candidly presents the realistic picture of the pre-partition era, the communal riots and the struggle of Indians for freedom.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a tremendous transition in socio-political scenario at national and global levels. It was the era when Europe saw the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the devastation, violence, chaos and depression caused by the First and the Second World Wars. India was struggling for freedom from the British tyranny. Eventually India got freedom in 1947. But unfortunately Independence was followed by the holocaust caused by a hectic and unwanted historical event i.e. the partition of India in 1947. The chaotic days that preceded and followed the partition of British India were fraught with political hatred and violence, with passions which had seized people in a communal frenzy and the irrecoverable loss of human lives and human values. Manohar Malgankar appropriately words the terrible situation:

The entire land was being splattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred its roads gutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war. (Manohar Manohar, 1964. p. 342)

We can't say who has benefitted by the partition, the colonizers or the contemporary political figures. But it has caused the loss of human lives that can never be reimbursed. It was a great loss of human lives irrespective of religion and caste.

The novel seems to cross all barriers of time and place. It attempts to recreate the unrest and turmoil witnessed by India during the first half of twentieth century. Kapur, in this novel has expressed her own view of a changing world.

Virmati, the protagonist is a girl of ten years. She is the eldest daughter of a Punjabi housewife, Kasturi. The character of Viramati, since the beginning, unfolds a saga of revolt against the established structure of family and deep rooted traditional values. Virmati is preneted as a difficult daughter to her mother Kasturi. When Viramatibecomes mother of her daughter, Ida, she (Ida) too aggressively and boldly revolts the traditions of her mother. This chain of clash weaves the major plot of novel. Mrs. P. Sudhashri observes:

Virmati, the protagonist rebels against tradition. Yet she is filled with self doubt. She pleads for studying further and postponement of her marriage. She attempts suicide, when faced with prospect of marrying the canal engineer. The family brands her 'to be restless, sick and selfish and locks her up'. (Shree, P. Sudha, 2005. P. 165)

In fact, Virmati after a number of conflicts marginalizes herself from traditional family and social norms. During the time of freedom struggle of India, the ideas of modernity were cultivated in her heart. She decides to study further and to go Lahore.

Virmati is exploited a lot at the hands of mother-in-law and her co-wife. The former wife of professor refused to yield to her the rights over her husband, except that of sleeping with him. She grows so fed up with her life that she decides to take up the job of a school teacher.

Virmati's father is killed in the riots. The next day his grand-father dies of a shock of his son's death. When her father dies, she is not allowed to go near his dead body. When her grand-father dies, Virmati refuses to accompany her husband. These two deaths bring her the sense of loneliness. Later on, the professor moves closer to her and this time she is pregnant. Unfortunately this time it is a miscarriage. She thinks that it is god's punishment to him.

She goes to Lahore to complete her M.A. in philosophy. When she returns, she finds that the rest of the family has been sent to Kanpur due to communal riots in Amritsar. This time she is again pregnant. She feels tormenting and tense atmosphere around her. No doctor is there to look after her. Ida is born. Virmati suggests the name Bharati, but her emotionally agonized husband opposes it:

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" (DD. 276)

Rather he suggests the name Ida. Virmati asks its meaning. The professor says:

It means a new slate, and a blank beginning. (DD. P. 277)

By March 1947, slaughtering of human beings was started on a large scale. Different characters in the novel like Kailashnath, Gopinath, and KanhaiyaLal, relive for Ida the hell that they underwent during those terrible months. India's birth into a free nation proves to be a difficult and bloody one. Gopinath describes the train coming from Pakistan filled with blood.

There was blood everywhere, dried and crusted, still oozing from the doorways, arms and legs hanging out, windows smashed. (DD.P. 268)

Kailashnath remembers what he witnessed in the month of March:

I remember when it started. It was 5 March. Those Muslims were well prepared. They knew how to make bombs, explosives. They looted and burnt, drank our blood, destroyed our peace, and put the fire of revenge in our guts. They had always hated us, tried to poison the well once. (DD.P.267)

There are number of characters in the novel. The novelist has portrayed the emotional agonies and their sufferings caused by the communal riots. Communal riots have left everlasting impressions on the minds of the characters. KanhiyaLal expresses:

I'm a doctor and I had never seen so much blood. It was horrible. I will never forget it as long as I live. (DD.P.268)

Communal riots spread everywhere ghastly sense of fear, loathe and distrust. Kapur focuses on the psychological trauma that people underwent during those turbulent days. With a few lakhs dead, the dispossessed could not stop talking of all that they had lost -their houses, animals and furnishing. Ironically, in this period of unrest, the scourge of death covered the entire city. Virmati finds the "space" and peace that she had been craving for.

In Lahore, by means of the character of Swarnalata, Virmati's roommate, the novelist has thrown light on the major events preceding the partition of India in 1947: debating societies, meetings

and politics of the Muslim League and Indian National Congress. Gandhian non-co operation and communal tension was on the increase during the forties. It is Swarnalata who first makes Virmati realize that people have strong religious identities.

Allah--o--Akbar,

Har, HarMahadev,

Bolo So Nihal. (DD.P.270)

People would identify themselves with their religion and culture. Virmati finds Swarnalata committed and articulate. When Ida meets Swarnalata to find out more about her mother, the old lady relives,

the division that had ploughed furrows of blood through her generation. (DD. P. 124)

Kapur seems to be obsessed with the then socio-political scenario and the Hindu-Muslim conflict. She seems to have responded to this issue in narrative of *Difficult Daughters*. And it is too in a very innovative manner. She has incorporated the AryaSamaj Movement, freedom struggle, partition and tabling the Hindu code bill in the parliament. The politics of communal riots is relevant with regard to the theme of Hindu –Muslim feud.

So many things are deeper than friendship. In this case it must have been religious identity, may be Muslim fear and insecurity. They must have told her she would be disloyal to the Muslim cause. I didn't want to stand against Ashraf, but my group said we had to win this election if it was the last thing to we did. So you see, ultimately I too put something before friendship.... Anyway, for the first time our college was divided along communal lines. (DD.P.135)

One of the major issues in *Difficult Daughters* is the conflict between Hindu and Muslim. The novel also covers the politics of partition and the turbulent period that followed partition. The novel portrays communal tension between Muslims and Hindus, violence, and bloodshed. It portrays the devastation at social, cultural and emotional level. Swarnalata also participates in the national politics actively. But Astha associates herself with the contemporary politics in full spirit and fights tooth and nail against the culprits of communal violence.

ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughters* focuses on different aspects related to partition and critically exposes its different dimensions and the impact of partition on human lives, human values, and socio-cultural scenario. It also represents the reality of the relations between gender and socio- historical processes, as Seema Malik observes:

History of woman may not necessarily be the same as the history of the men. The impact of cataclysmic event like partition on women was much different and more traumatic and enduring than men. The word partition is inadequate to encompass the myriad meanings this event has for women or to even approximate the many levels of experiences that they lived. (MalikSeema, p. 184)

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