
Intellectual and Psychological Journey of a Woman -- A Study of ManjuKapur's Novel *Difficult Daughters*

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Abstract: *In the first decade of the twenty-first century, many changes emerged in the society especially for the women. However Indian society is always patronized by patriarchy. Women always remained silent and totally subordinate. They had been denied their basic rights, individuality and self-reliance. In Indian English fiction there emerged a group of Indian women novelists who raised many issues related to emerging new woman, in their novels. Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan, Nayantara Sehgal, Manju Kapur etc. are some of Indian women novelists who have portrayed the life of women with a new perspective. They show them as strong women of emerging modern society. The present paper studies Intellectual and Psychological Journey of the protagonist of her novel 'Difficult Daughters'. In this novel, Kapur explores the psyche of her educated middle-class protagonist who is trapped between tradition and modernity. The protagonists in the novels of Manju Kapur express their resistance in many ways and thus they try to challenge the existing codes.*

Keywords: Intellectual, Psychological, Tradition, Struggle.

Introduction: ManjuKapur states many issues in her novels which are related to the middle-class women. She wants a society where women are equal to men. She considers education as the main weapon to fight with all discrepancies in the society. In her novels, she tries to show her protagonists as the emerging new women in society. It becomes very troublesome for these characters to break the rules of traditional and orthodox society because in return they face all kinds of resistance in the family as well as in the society. *Difficult Daughters'* protagonist of the story, Virmati, a woman who thinks beyond the time and dares to see those dreams which could not be imagined at that time. In the journey of English fiction after independence, the theme of partition remained in the focus of many novels. The early image of a woman shown by an Indian English novelist always remains as a silent sufferer or totally subservient. But as the time changed the portrayal of a woman also changed in our Indian English fiction. She is no more a

puppet of the social roles given to her. These women writers try to show a woman Intellectual and psychological journey between the traditional forces of Indian patriarchal family system and emerging modernity. Manju Kapur's undoubtedly became successful to show this journey with its true colours. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* received national and international acclaim this novel was published 1998. It was awarded the commonwealth writers price and became the best seller in India. The purpose of this paper is to study Virmati's Intellectual and Psychological Journey.

Difficult Daughters is a story of a young woman, named Virmati born in Amritsar in a joint family. Story deals with her family duties, her desirous education and her illicit love relationship. The story of the novel sets the scene pre-partition in Amritsar and Lahore. The story begins with Ida's narration about her mother Virmati who has passed away. Ida's related console her and show their sympathy. Now Ida decides to visit her birthplace and wants to discover her mother's life. She reaches to her relatives without informing them. Now relatives disclose Virmati's life with every single detail. They tell Ida that Virmati was very passionate about education.

bap re. First F.A. then B.A. on the top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an M.A. to Government College, Lahore, she studied more than any other girl in this family and Harish Bhai Shahib – your father – was very particular about education. 'But why do you want all this? What is past is past, forget about it. Eat, have another parantha, you are so thin, my relatives gave me one view of my mother, I wanted another. (Kapur 5)

Ida wanted to know everything about her mother so they narrated the complete life story to her. Virmati was the eldest daughter of eleven children of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. She was seeing the increasing members of her family. One after another Kasturi was giving birth to children while all the household duties were falling on the innocent shoulders of Virmati. Whenever Virmati approached Kasturi for love and affection she always rebuked her.

. . . When she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother's arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. 'Have you seen to their food – milk – clothes – studies?' . . . 'I am just going', protest Virmati finally. 'Why can't Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?' 'You know they don't listen to her',

snapped Kasturi. ‘You are the eldest. If you don’t see things, Who will?’ (Kapur 6)

When she had been sent with her mother to Dalhousie she complains to Kasturi, “What is all this nonsense? In Amritsar you were bad-tempered because you were busy and tired, here you are bad-tempered because you are idle, retorted Kasturi. ‘May be I should go back to Amritsar Pitaji can take me the next time he comes’ (Kapur 12). Virmati was frustrated of all this. In these conditions, Shakuntala became her inspiration. Shakuntala was a symbol of ‘Modern woman’ for Virmati. When Shakuntala departs, Virmati hugs her and says, “May be I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji’, she wept. ‘I wish I too could do things, But I am not clever’ – ‘Arre,’ exclaimed her cousin patting her on the back, ‘times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?’ Why not, indeed, thought Virmati looking at her, almost breathless with admiration and love” (Kapur 18). Shakuntala symbolizes new and independent woman. Virmati wants to become like Shakuntala. This ‘new woman’ wants to break all those rules which are barriers in the way of her personal freedom and individuality. Education for Shakuntala does not only need but also an ideological difference as she says, “These people don’t really understand Viru . . .

women are still supposed to marry and nothing else” (Kapur 17). While Kasturi takes education as a benefit for the family and nothing else. She does not allow Virmati for higher studies or doing the job. She wants to marry her as soon as possible. In amidst all types of difficulties, she passes her eight standards but could not pass her fine art degree and fails. She complains to her mother, ‘Mati’ she said to her mother that evening, ‘I’ve failed.’ I told you it was too much for you’, said her mother, busy feeding the young children. It’s not too much for me’, protested Virmati, ‘Not if I have time to study’. ‘Ever since we’ve come back, you have been making difficulties’, said Kasturi crossly.

Virmati’s family starts to think about her marriage and fixes her marriage with a canal engineer Inderjeet but she was not happy with this relationship. Soon she comes in the contact of Harish Chandra. He was English Professor who hired Lajwanti’s home. Soon Virmati’s family and Professor’s wife became friendly and this friendship opened the door for Virmati. She takes the decision to study further after competing for her F.A., her whole family opposed her decision but she was firm on her decision and took the admission in AS College. Virmati’s intimacy with Professor increased with the passage of time.

Virmati always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the Professor's class and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male students . . . The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he remembered it in all its detail . . . the Professor's desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind. (Kapur 46)

Virmati became disturbed psychologically. On the one side she was seeing her family, society and traditional values and on the other side her love for the professor and her dream to educate herself. "She would sometimes wish that . . . but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No Professor and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased" (Kapur 54). Her conflict tormented her soul

You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you; otherwise, would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strong than you, not 68 change you. Now, what will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it? (Kapur 58)

She denied marrying Inderjeet. On hearing her decision, Kasturi grabbed Virmati by the hair and banged her head against the wall, "May be this will knock some sense into you! . . . What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?" (Kapur 59). So, for her revolutionary ideas, she had to face violence.

Seen in relative terms to the male, female is denied the opportunity to forge an identity of her own. If and when she dares she comes face to face with the last weapon in patriarchal arsenal: violence. In most simplified form, violence is defined as abuse and it takes on many guises, from physical assault to psychological domination to social subjection to cultural oppression. (Kalpana 68)

So Virmati's younger sister Indumati had been settled with Inderjeet. Virmati went to Lahore for higher studies. There she becomes frustrated of love meetings with Harish. When she goes to meet Harish she reacts adversely to Harish's irresolute attitude.

I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, being 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 . . . I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right. Men do take advantage of Women! (Kapur149)

Her words clearly indicate the true nature of Harish. He always seduces Virmati. The Professor, in actuality, wants to have Virmati not as his wife but as a woman to gratify his intellectual needs. However, Virmati believes that she and Professor are bound together by the bonds of intellectual compatibility but it is Harish's physical lust that conquers their meetings. Virmati always talks about her identity, her freedom but her freedom is confined only to her body and heart. She could not go beyond these boundaries.

Virmati struggles between the physical and moral; the head and heart. Finally, she gives way to her heart and body. Virmati is engaged to an engineer initially but series of incidents propel the family members to postpone the wedding. This incident paves way for Virmati to begin an illicit relationship, with the married Professor living next door. Virmati undergoes the trials and tribulations of a love that has little hope of social acceptance. The Oxford returned Professor finds little to share with his uneducated wife and is unable to resist

the charms of Virmati, who is innocent and hungry for knowledge and love. Virmati who appears "flower-like against the backdrop of male students" the Oxford returned Professor forces himself into her mind and heart by spreading his anguish and desire at her feet (Sree 175).

She becomes pregnant and compares herself with the Fool of Shakespeare's plays.

Now, each of Harish's words echoed in her mind with an irony he had taught her to recognize in Shakespeare's texts, Tragic irony, comic irony, how he had loved to expand on them. Which species was this? It lacked the epic proportions of tragedy and the love-courtship-marriage theme of comedy. In either case, she was the fool, that much at least was certain. (Kapur154)

However, her family marries her with the person whom she loves and comes home with him. Harish denies leaving his first wife so Virmati becomes his second wife. She is treated as an outsider in the family.

In the evening, Virmati went to the angan to bring the clothes in. The line was bare except for her own, hanging forlornly at the end. She took them down and clenched her lips. She

wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life.’ (Kapur 215)

Virmati becomes irritated and frustrated. She feels humiliated in that house.

Being the second wife of Harish, she loses all sense of identity: the continuation of her education feels no more dreams of independence. Virmati undergoes the humiliation and decides to “walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had created out for her. (Kapur 196)

When Virmati’s father Suraj Prakash dies, she is blamed. Next day her grandfather is expired. At this news, Virmati feels almost totally lost. “It was almost as though she had gone mad. Forgotten who she was, who she was married to, and all her obligations” (Kapur 240). In the end, Virmati’s story disappears in the agony of partition. It is only after Virmati’s death that her daughter, Ida, sees her as a lonely woman who had committed the unforgivable sin of carving an identity of her own. The story tells the tale of a difficult daughter Virmati. Such kinds of daughters are difficult to rear. The novel ends with the birth of her girl child, Ida. Virmati dares to reject her arranged marriage and falls in love with a professor who is already married. She crossed the borders of social norms and chose her own path.

The novel also traces the history of India of independence and pre-independence days. Though pre independence era can be counted as Modern era because of the intervention of Britishers, but orthodox ideology was still deep-rooted in the mindset of the people. “During Kasturi’s formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued in the home” (Kapur 62). The novelist’s depiction of the history of pre-independence day points out to this fact that ideology of Britishers had shaken the roots of tradition. Kapur very skillfully deals with Virmati’s psychological condition. When she finds no solution to her problems then she tries to commit suicide.

Her mind wandered to the thousands of mosquitoes that hovered around the drains and all the fruit and halwai stalls in the market. Then to her father’s shop, the old house, her old school, her new house, her new college, incoherent pictures jumbling about in her unhappy mind . . . The waters going strangely and mysteriously on, having a being in which her own would soon be inextricably mingled . . . Now that she was actually going to merge her body with the canal she felt her confusion clearing. (Kapur 75)

Conclusion: Kapur's protagonists balance their life between their household responsibilities and their inner urge to fulfill their dreams. They do a lot of sacrifices for it. Three women present three different generations, Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. Kasturi symbolizes pre-independence; Virmati presents a time of Independence while Ida stands for post-independence period. Kasturi is the victim of a Patriarchal pattern of society. As stated in the Novel "Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache" (Kapur 7). Psychologically Virmati fights with patriarchal norms of the society. She shows her rebellious nature to protest against the traditional social conventions. The novel

presents Virmati's quest for freedom and identity. Though she is educated but imprisoned within the boundaries of conservative society. She wants to seek her identity but her decisions shattered her family. She struggles between tradition and modernity.

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