

Vol. 8. No. 4. 2021.

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Contents available at:

www.crdeepjournal.org

International Journal of Social Sciences Arts & Humanities (ISSN: 2321-4147)(CIF: 3.625)

Research Article

Ascending Patriarchal Structures: A Study of Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters

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ARTICLE INFORMATION**ABSTRACT****Corresponding Author:**

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This article tries to point out the complex journey of Virmati in Kapur's Difficult daughters and teaches that any lock can be opened with the key of determination

Article history:

Received: 10-12-2021

Revised: 16-12-2021

Accepted: 27-12-2021

Published: 31-12-2021

Key words:

Ascending, Manu Kapur

"Difficult Daughters" traces the complex journey of Virmati's life who is torn between family duty and the desire for education and unlawful love. She is emotionally and financially dependent upon her family. The family safeguards the growing girl from the realities of being a woman in a patriarchal society. It upholds the girl's innocence by her naivety and her purity. Virmati lives in a world defined by others, especially by her parents. She has to dance to the tunes of her family. She is captive to the demands of the socio-cultural norms and is forced to surrender her being to the norms and taboos set by her parents who regard her as a transitory control, an object to be preserved in all its purity until she is given into the safe custody of her husband.

The central protagonist of Manju Kapur, Virmati, willingly accepts a fortune that is controlled by others and is guided by a set of values, beliefs and roles of a former era. Virmati is incorporated in the residence as long as she ascribes to these parameters of her family. Her identity depends on her association with others. In the beginning Virmati is ready to live by the traditional values. But, there was a spark inside her which caught fire with the views of her cousin, Shakuntala, an M.Sc in chemistry and working in Lahore. Manju Kapur also finds an urge of new woman in Shakuntala, a self-governing working woman who does not believe that marriage is the final aim of her life. Her bold and independent views bestir Virmati and help her in becoming a new woman. The successful choice of Shakuntala not to get married in the conservative India of the forties shows her strength to resist the rules framed by the patriarchal society. Shakuntala also encourages Virmati to study further and invites her to Lahore, for she believes that : "*times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you*"(p.16).

Her views are indicative of her feminist attitude and these views leave an indelible impression upon the mind of Virmati, who starts exploring other possibilities in her life. She imagines of being something other than a wife. The views of Shakuntala echo in her mind endlessly. Virmati fondly remembers the time when Shakuntala "*turned her face to her, caressed the flushed cheek and touched the loose strands of hair on either side behind the ears*" (p.17).

Although Virmati takes Shakuntala as a model of her life yet she fails to become a new woman of the type of Shakuntala. Shakuntala is a *constructive new woman* whereas Virmati is a *destructive new woman*. Shakuntala's information about Indian women participating in rallies, organizing meetings and holding demonstrations all over India give rise to development ideas in the mind of Virmati. She shares her new and liberated lifestyle with a group of friends whose activities she explains to her cousin. "*we travel, entertain ourselves in the evening follow each other's works, read papers, attend seminars, one of them is going abroad for higher studies*" (p.17).

For Shakuntala, marriage is not the only destination in life. She has enjoyed the freedom and wants other women to have it. She desires that women should not only fight for the freedom of the country, rather their own freedom as well. Despite her mother's objections, she clings resolutely to her single, but happy unmarried state. She has all the traits of a new woman and loves to choose her paths herself.

The family of Virmati is not open-minded which agrees with the assumption that education is meant primarily to help a woman to marry well, be socially useful to her husband, be good at bringing up her children, equip her to render social service and most importantly 'an insurance policy' against a broken marriage.

Virmati is trained to believe that marriage is the final end of her life and it is only through marriage that she can get respect in her family and society. The tone is set very early in the novel with Kasturi and Lajwanti talking about the marriage of their daughters. Kasturi holds that it is the duty of every girl to get married and further, "*A woman's shaan is in her home and that a woman without her home and family is a woman without mooring*" (p. 112).

Manju Kapur has portrayed Virmati as an easily influenced immature woman and excitement comes to her life at an early age when Professor Harish enters as an occupant into her life. She gets immensely fascinated to him who tells her that she believes that a wife must know English for becoming a fit companion to her "Westernized husband" (p. 36). When this foreign educated Professor confides in her that his wife, Ganga is not prepared to learn anything, and cannot share his ideas or understand music, she sympathizes with him and is convinced of his need for suitable companionship.

In the beginning, their relationship is that of a teacher and a student but later Virmati falls in love with Professor Harish. Although, a married man, yet is drawn to her because he finds Virmati suitable to his romantic notion of an ideal companion. The entrance of Virmati in the fantastic world of Harish lays the framework for her omission from her home, her family and society.

Manju Kapur traces out the love affair of Virmati against the traditional and patriarchal set rules. She was already engaged to a Panjabi boy from their own caste who is a canal engineer. But during the phase of her graduation, she has already developed a passion for Professor Harish and wants to marry him. In this decision too, she has an axe to grind. She anticipates her that her potential of growth will be multiplied in her dependence on Harish and he is the only person who will give her a proper place and status in life. She is determined to marry the Professor as "*he is successful academician, a writer of books, a connoisseur of culture, a disseminator of knowledge*" (p.144).

Despondent with her family's persistence on her marriage with Inderjeet and pressed by Professor Harish to break her engagement, Virmati is driven towards suicide and she writes to the Professor of her purpose. The Professor feels bewildered over the situation and redirects the letter to her family. Their affair now becomes an open secret to the family and they are horrified at her wish to marry an already married Professor. Later, she was rescued from drowning by the workers of her grandfather and only returns home with a new zeal to study and not to marry. All these steps can only be taken by a new woman who has the courage of conviction and confidence. Virmati uses study as an excuse to escape the forced marriage and also to forget her married paramour: Study mumbled Virmati like a Mantra, She swallowed, "*study... and not to marry...*" Virmati's face twisted "*I don't want to marry,*" then she had to explain, "*the boy I don't like the boy*"... Her silence though was not of acquiescence, but refusal she would not marry" (80).

Isn't Virmati resisting the patriarchal family decisions? Hasn't she emerged as a new woman of the modern age? Finally she is sent to Lahore for further studies with the hope that she will forget the Professor there, but in vain. On the contrary, they have uninterrupted meetings there at Lahore and she experiences complete freedom. Harish explains the significance of education to Virmati and that is what she wanted. But when, Virmati raises the questions of marriage with Harish, he starts talking about the image of his family reputation which shows males' roots of the patriarchal system of tradition ingrained in his psyche.

Virmati is a devotional woman and her love for Professor is replete with romantic thoughts. But for Professor love is only a physical relation and nothing more. As they continue meeting, Virmati becomes pregnant which was an unpardonable crime in Indian society to conceive before marriage. When she goes for abortion, Harish tells her that she has really done the right thing. Harish is like serpent chasing Eve and trying to seduce her at every level. He takes an irresponsible stand not to marry her as he seems to be taking the responsibility for Ganga his first wife and her children, even this relationship is based on disloyalty and cheating.

After sometimes, Virmati takes the job of a Principal of the Pratibha Kanya Vidyala run by Maharani Pratibha of the state of Sirmaur. Her family and particularly her father agrees to the proposal of the Diwan of Sirmaur, who is a family friend. Since Virmati pledges not to marry, Virmati's father allows her this freedom of taking up a job because they feel that through this opportunity she will change into a responsible and sensible woman.

Education plays a great and important role in her life which promises to unlock all the doors of success. Her education makes her economically self-dependent and is positive enough to face any difficult situation. She feels that life is now very well organized and has a sense of satisfaction and success. Economic independence makes her capable to do anything. But she is unable to forget Harish and keeps on writing to him. She realizes that her body belongs to Harish as she feels guilt at her sexual relations with Harish. She thinks that it is only the Professor who can provide her security and safety. Harish reinforces her dependence on him through his letters: "*Talked much romance and beauty, he came to be the spectre that lay between her and her life as principal, so that she too began to look upon her stay there as a period of waiting rather than a beginning of a career*" (p 170)

Manju Kapur portrays both the qualities of the protagonist in "Difficult Daughters". On the one hand, Virmati is a strong-willed daughter who rebels against her parents, but she is shown as very weak in her liaison with the Professor. Despite knowing that her job will be at risk, she permits Harish to stay with her in her cottage when he comes up one day at her door unexpected. Passion and desire for the restoration of her status of being incorporated in home entrap Virmati again in a desperate situation. She understands that her destiny is to have "*only this series of fair-time meetings in borrowed place*" (p 203).

When the things go out of her control, she finally decides to go to work at shantiniketan. On her way, Virmati has to wait for seventeen hours at Delhi, before boarding the linking train to Calcutta. She knew Harish's poet friend very well, who lived in civil lines and she decides to meet him one last time. The Professor's friend settles the matter by forcing Harish to marry her. When she finally does get married to Harish, there is hardly any element of free personal choice involved. Harish also continues to be anxious about his status and family. He cites his helplessness, "*what can I do? I am hemmed in and tortured on all sides... everybody will condemn her. My children will never accept it, not my mother... what can I do? My wife, my son...*" (185). There is very clear indication that he would have slipped out of marrying with Virmati.

In this case, this is another aspect of Manju Kapur's feministic understanding. Finally Professor Harish brings Virmati to his house and his family. He has a very small house with just one bedroom, shared by the Professor and his wife along with his two children. His mother, Kishori Devi and her daughter Guddiya use the *veranda*. The family has no isolation. Virmati is allotted pitiful space in the dressing room with access to her husband's study. Thus, her status in the house of Harish is of the 'other' woman and not of the wife in her marital home.

Virmati's marriage does not give her the coveted place as a wife and she has to settle for being the second wife of the Professor. Once married, she is dissolved like a soft doll. Whatever identity she had in her father's house, is completely lost and she has to live like an outsider in her husband's house. She feels awfully upset and her mind and heart are absolutely agitated, rippled and tumultuous with thoughts of her lost freedom and her resented position in her husband's family: *Thought not overtly hostile, in the warring factions that existed in the house she belonged to the opposition.* (229)

She is restricted in her movements by Ganga and Harish's mother and Virmati feels left out and unwanted. Ganga also accuses Virmati of snatching away her rights along with the rights of her children. For Ganga, the family is an inviolable sacred entity. She is the mother of Harish's children and got worried about their future. As a mother, she is entitled to keeping her family "safe from outsiders" (187). Both Ganga and Virmati seem to be bathing in turbid water while Ganga becomes aggressive at being threatened of being barred from the family, Virmati becomes passive due to her disillusionment with her husband's family. She stands totally defeated as there is no choice for her and she accepts her dilemma as deserved fruits of Karma. The belief dawns upon her that individuals can't alter destiny and chance, but as they possess reason they must change their social codes, so that they enable themselves to withstand these forces or adapt themselves to them.

Thus, Virmati may be taken as a ripe fruit of feminism. She accepts that each action is destined by providence and she is a puppet in the hands of her fate. She breaks free from old prisons but is locked into newer ones. The feelings of anger, resentment, guilt and anxiety add to her woes. Virmati is often in a see-saw of feelings. She has some sense of pride in her husband's obvious attraction for her but it is juxtaposed with feelings of social vulnerability.

Ganga is more perceptive than Virmati and Professor, but her position is undignified. Both Ganga and Virmati are fighting over one man and that too within the family. Ganga has the ability to appreciate her husband and his finer sensibilities. On the contrary, Virmati never sees beyond the halo of the Professor and her jealous obsession with his first wife.

Virmati is barred from her mother's family as well. She belongs to nowhere. There is no proper liberty for Virmati in both the houses. On her arrival in Amritsar, she writes and tells her own mother's family that she is married, but nobody comes to see her. Virmati musters courage to go there only at her father's death. After reaching there, she hesitates to enter the house from the front door rather she enters from the backyard, where the cows are kept. This has symbolic significance as an important member of the family is seen as having lost the right to enter into the house promptly and legally.

Manju Kapur traces out her protagonist Virmati's realization that she has transgressed. All ties between herself and her family are broken. All the care and concern, the sacrifice and responsibility that she carried out as the daughter of the family have been flung away because of the dishonor she brought to the family by marrying a married man. Her father had died without forgiving her and when her mother sees her standing in the funeral ceremony, she hurls all possible harsh words at her and asks her to leave the house immediately: *You have destroyed our family, you badmash, you randi; You have blackened our face everywhere; for this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on our family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji. But what do you care, brazen that you are* (221).

Thus, Virmati's marriage to Professor irrevocably excludes her from her birth place.

Due to lack of love in Harish's family, and the humiliation in both the houses made her dedicated in asserting her right to self-affirmation through education at Lahore. Once again, this decision improves her situation. There, she has freedom and independence which she does not have in Amritsar. Harish also feels free from tension and responsibility when Virmati leaves for higher studies. Now the clouds of tension are removed from all sides: *Her studies were her passport to independence, not just her passport to sleeping with the Professor.* (140)

Manju Kapur also traces female participation in the Independence Movement in her novel "Difficult Daughters". In Lahore, Virmati participates in this movement which was her own freedom movement as well. Virmati's battle for independence, started in her youth is taken up again with full vigour. The freedom at Lahore brings about a great change in Virmati's outlook which makes her more assertive. Consequently, she also launches her own non-cooperation movement by not submitting to Harish's wishes. Virmati outrightly rejects the objections of Harish for not participating in the freedom movement of India: *I have tried adjustment ad compromise now I will try non-co-operation* (239).

This journey of Virmati was the journey of liberation which creates irrevocable lines of partition: partition between Virmati and Ganga, Ganga and the Professor, Virmati and Kasturi and most importantly between Virmati – the impressionable, naïve young girl and she now mature and independent new woman.

In the meantime, the struggle for Indian independence gains momentum and owing to constant curfews, agitations and killings; Virmati has to return from Lahore without a degree, but with a new degree of self-confidence awakening and a purpose in her life. Now Virmati is able to build a strong identity. During the riots, Ganga, her children and Kishori Devi have been sent to Kanpur for their safety by Harish. When Virmati comes back to Moti Cottage after their departure, her desire to be free of Ganga returns with redoubled strength: *The first thing she did was a shift everything belonging to Ganga to the dressing room. Doing this, she felt light headed, as though she had conquered and won. Now the dressing room was Ganga's and the main bedroom her's* (273).

Finally, Virmati achieves her coveted end and feels a sense of fulfillment. "Difficult Daughters" shows the struggle of woman under the patriarchal and traditional system in which Virmati feels victories after achieving her goals when the first wife of Harish leaves the house due to communal riots for the security reasons. Virmati had allowed Professor Harish to take over the wheel of her life for long. He is responsible for Virmati's insecurity, regression of individuality, rejection and liness. Harish does not allow any freedom to Virmati and even the subject of her Master's degree is decided by him. But she compromises at every step because she had her own axe to grind. She does not have the liberty to name her newly born child when she gives birth to a baby girl, she suggests Bharati as her name as the name had close connections with India's freedom. But this is out rightly

discarded by Harish and he names the child, Ida, which was small and very easy to pronounce. Virmati's daughter also represents contemporary modern Indian women. She divorces her husband as he tries to subjugate her personal ambitions. She has to abort her child on the direction of her husband which finally creates a crack in their married life. Now she never wanted to play a sewed fiddle to her husband. She starts playing the role of a new woman character under the banner of a new woman. Ida leads a more free life than her mother. Virmati wants to ensure a bright future for her daughter. She creates such a setting for her daughter which would help her in taking bold, new and positive steps in her life. She inculcates the values of self-reliance and dignity in her. She creates such a space, which would give her daughter dignity and affirmation. Ida too has a great fascination for her mother and admires her a lot. She thinks highly of her mother as a woman who defied her own family for many years. In inheritance, she gets the mantra of "*adjustment and compromise*" (236) from her mother. But in the end, she herself admits that these things that express a typical Indian sensibility have significance in a woman's life: *I would lie in bed for hours, unable to sleep, pitying myself for all I didn't have blaming my mother, myself* (258).

Finally, Virmati is united with Harish in a family that has space sufficient to comprise her as a lawful and central member of the family. Her journey from Amritsar to Lahore can be regarded as a journey from a traditional society to a more open and liberal one.

At the end, Virmati develops her self-esteem and emerges as a *new Virmati* who is self-confident, self-governing, strong and pure product of feminism. Now she determines her life for herself and her feeling of addition in the home is not dependent on others but in her own sense of self-growth. Hence, Manju Kapur's protagonist finds her identity during the partition of India.

The participation of women characters in political activities brings out Kapur's feminist understanding of women's existence. Although only few women are involved but their active participation in these activities is an example of women's increased awareness about the outer world and their role in it. Virmati's cousin Shakuntla and her room-mate Swarna Lata participated actively in these movements. These women aspire for a different life and finally get complete success in their mission. They work relentlessly to create a difference. Shakuntla appears as a new woman from the beginning. She studies, teaches and takes an active part in the political movement. She also keeps a firm grip on her autonomy and in this way becomes a role model for Virmati: *Virmati listened, thrilled to be her mother's confidant, but drawn towards Shakuntala, to one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children* (17).

Swarna Lata, Virmati's room-mate at Lahore college, leads a similar life-style and she has own world of whims and fancies. She is a staunch and committed activist and keeps a firm grip on her freedom of action and thought. She has absolutely clear ideas about the role of women in society. She is a voracious reader and an active speaker of women's organization and takes an active part in politics. She takes Virmati to a meeting of the Punjab women student conference where she shines as an orator. Swarna Lata's speech is applauded immensely: *Heavy applause broke out as Swarna Lata finished speaking* (134).

Swarna Lata gets married as per the wish of her parents by laying down her own terms and conditions for better and secure future within the family. Besides continuing her political activity, she maintains a perfect balance in her married life as well. Like Shakuntala, she is a staunch supporter of women's freedom from traditionally ascribed roles that compel to woman to remain inside the threshold. Both Shakuntala and Swarnalata are emblematic of the educated, politicized and emancipated women.

Manju Kapur has presented the women of three generations, the mother of Virmati, Virmati herself and then the daughter of Virmati, Ida. All have their different reactions towards male-dominated society. Through Kasturi, the novelist has presented typical traditional Indian women of twenties, who willfully accepted their secondary position in a male dominated society. Kasturi is an obedient, composed and a docile woman for whom her house is her '*shaan*'. She is totally lost in her family, her house and her children. She epitomizes the significance of marriage for traditional Indian people for whom marriage is a must. It is their primary aim of life and all other things revolve around this aim. Kasturi willingly gets married to the boy selected by her family and thus gets completely involved in household activities for getting her own self. Such values are inculcated in her as a part of traditions in her childhood. She has been taught and made to believe that the ultimate fate of a woman is marriage only. She can be a daughter, a wife and mother and nothing else. Her destiny lies within the four walls of her house and after marriage Kasturi is lost virtually her marriage.

Kasturi is a stereotype orthodox Indian woman. Of earlier time who believes that education encourages unwanted independence in the individual, disobedience of elders and defiant and irresponsible attitude towards society. Under this impression and attitude, she discourages the education of her daughter. On the other hand, Virmati opposes traditional and orthodox ideas throughout her life, yet she tries to inculcate the same ideas in her daughter Ida, who belongs to the third generation. Manju Kapur presentation of three generation of women highlights the ever rising level of social awareness in them.

The suffocating impact of patriarchy on the Indian society varies from the west and consequently, the Indian women novelists have tried to evolve their own concept of feminism grounded in reality. They have their individual concerns, priorities as well as their own way of dealing with the predicament of their women protagonists who are shown making tireless efforts in crossing patriarchal threshold. "*Difficult Daughters*" is seriously a good effort in this direction.

Set around the time of partition, the time of vandalism and commotion owing to Second World War, Manju Kapur realistically portrays the women of three generations, but mainly focusing on Virmati, who is presented as the *difficult daughter* of second generation. The major part of the novel revolves around Virmati, who plays the pivotal role. The opening line of the novel is quite dramatic: *The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother* (1). This cryptic statement is made by Virmati's only daughter, Ida, a divorcee and also childless. When her mother was alive, Ida could not develop much intimacy and understanding with her mother and after her death, this realization pricks her conscience. Ida sets out on a journey into her mother's past in search of a woman she could better know and understands. Virmati never raised the curtain of her past with Ida and now she hoped to remove the curtain by visiting different places and meets the relatives of her mother and interacts with them to know more and more about Virmati, the woman.

Virmati is over burdened with the duties and obligations of the family because of the repeated pregnancies of her mother. Being eldest in the family, she has to extend a helping hand to her mother at the times of her deliveries. She was brought up with the conditioning that the duty of every girl is to get married according to the match selected by her parents which will keep up the traditions of a reputed Punjabi family. She was also taught that a woman's '*shaan*' is in her home and not doing a job. But, she

emulated Shakuntala, her cousin who nurtures the desire of becoming something in life beyond a husband and children. She realizes the hopelessness of her illicit love when she learns about the pregnancy of the Professor's wife. How could it be true? Man professing his love for her on one hand and making his life pregnant on the other. She admonishes him and goes to Lahore for further studies.

Here starts the rising of a 'new woman' in Virmati who does not want, *"to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed"* (85). Resisting patriarchal notions that enforce a woman towards domesticity, she asserts her individuality, passionately and with steadfastness, aspires for self-reliance through education. She thinks that education is the only weapon which can enable her to fight the patriarchy. She does not rebel silently but shows audacity, determination and action. She realizes that she cannot depend upon the Professor to sort out her domestic situation and begins the journey of life without the support of any individual. She displays a rare strength of mind in overcoming her dejection. Virmati is *"strong enough to bear the pain, silently, without anyone knowing"* (101). She burns the letters of Professor with complete determination and moreover in an unperturbed manner which shows her resolution for independence. After closing the chapter of Professor, she plans for a meaningful life in Lahore without the support of anybody.

But does this determination blossom her into a new woman in the real sense? The answer should be, No! Despite her revolt against the family and her decision to snap all ties with the Professor, she succumbs to his implorations and passions in Lahore. Her loss of virginity pricks her conscience but compensates the guilt by rationalizing it as *"outmoded morality"* (114). She had made Lahore her destination to broaden her horizons and on the contrary she gets enmeshed in a useless love, doubtful marriage and unwed pregnancy. The initial tenacious and dynamic self gradually wanes away into a pawn who the Professor tells *"just what to look for, what to admire, what to criticize"* (119). She wants to follow the footprints of Swarnlata, her room-mate, who is committed to *"meaningful activities"* regarding the freedom movement and women's emancipation. But the Professor cuts the throat of her desires by constantly evading the question of marriage which he disapproves: *"May be I could be like Swarna from the inside, secretly"* (124). Punjab women's student conference shows innumerable vistas to her and she is amazed at *"how large an area of life women wanted to appropriate for themselves"* (132). But these larger spaces are not meant for her because her maximum time is wasted in the furtive meetings with the Professor in spite of the awareness that they were *"myriad instances of where she felt she had been weak or wronged"* (129). She allows the Professor to spoil her and when finally marries her reluctantly, she is given a step-motherly treatment in the house of Professor and feels sandwiched between the Professor and his wife, Ganga. Virmati lives in a cramped space and is forced into submission though in a very subtle manner. *"Indeed any sophisticated structure today functions not by direct, visible exploitation but by making the victims willingly, freely and happily give in to its imperatives"*.

The attitude of Harish towards Virmati is patronizing and demeaning. His interest in her is an extension of his self-love and even awakening of her intellect and emotions inflate his ego. Undergoing a gradual process of self-effacement, her energies are directed towards pleasing him while she herself remains parched. Her only means of escape was to go for Master's in philosophy although, she found this subject dull and meaningless. Virmati wishes: *Harish had thought another subject suitable for her. She also wished it was not an uphill task, being worthy of him.* (237)

Virmati remains *"difficult"* only as a daughter – towards her grandfather who always championed her cause, her father who was very understanding and allowed her to study further and towards her mother who certainly had Virmati's good at heart.

It is absolutely true that she dares to cross one patriarchal threshold, she is caught into another where her free spirit is muzzled and all she does is *"adjust, compromise and adapt"*. She could have put her foot down saying *"she will be her own mistress and relate to him with dignity. Perhaps the words were at the back of her mind, testing her tongue with their shadowy sounds"* (236) but she does not. Maybe her mind had gone *"soft and pulpy with repeated complying"* (236). Obviously, there is an incipient New Woman in Virmati who is conscious, introspective, educated, wants to crave a life for herself. She even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current societal codes yet she lacks, confidence, self-control and farsightedness. She is psychically imprisoned with an underlying need to be emotionally and intellectually dependent on a superior force, thus underlying the basic idea through which patriarchy works. She fails to break the *"dependence syndrome"*.

Trampling patriarchal norms, Virmati defies societal expectation to assert her individuality and strives for self-fulfillment. But she remains a loser and her actions completely alienate her from her own family. She is not able to create a space for herself in the family for which she had been striving all along. Perhaps it is this inability of Virmati to strike independent roots and growth that makes Ida remark *"The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother"* (1).

It is absolutely possible to trace the feminism implicit in the novel through Ida's impatience towards the weakness of her mother. When her Parvati Masi says that Virmati was a very simple girl at heart, Ida gets infuriated and bluntly says. *"I hate the word 'simple'. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways"* (207). To Ida, the woman who dares to spurn patriarchal protection can afford to be ignorant, simple or naïve. Surely Virmati's pregnancy before marriage followed by abortion is absolutely unpalatable to Ida who finally breaks all marital ties with her husband, Prabhakar, because he had forced her to have an abortion: *In denying that incipient little thing in my belly, he sowed the seeds of our break up"* (144).

Very clearly, Ida is a new woman of third generation and she openly revolted against the patriarchal behavior of her husband. But in Virmati's case passion had blindfolded her. She destroyed the family of Ganga and gave a setback to the much needed feeling of sisterhood among women. The concluding lines of the novel reiterate Ida's rejection of Virmati not as a mother, but as woman: *The book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me any more* (258).

Ida, who grew up struggling to be the model daughter, does not have the heart to reject Virmati, the mother, but her rational self rejects her as a woman after having an insight into Virmati's past. She exhibits social awareness typical of a new generation.

Through Ida's admiration for Swarnlata, who enters into a wider socio-political sphere, the novelist seems to be pointing out that a woman can maintain her individuality and pursue her interest without spoiling and threatening the family structure. To Manju Kapur a woman should basically strive towards a fine, reliable, faithful and interdependent partnership. But if she feels tortured and suffocated, then voice ought to be raised immediately, like Ida. But merely transcending societal norms is not enough.

A woman must be enlightened, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in her inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful and necessary change can be brought about only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense. In this context, Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters" is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women but because she "has understood a woman both as a woman and as person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts (Jaidev, 68).

It may be noted in the novel that the two factors which enable the modern woman to assert and resist are education and economic independence. Virmati is presented as a modern as well as a new woman; educated and having a job before marriage. The very fact that she is able to break the patriarchal mode in the forties is in itself a great achievement. In comparison, her daughter Ida, an educated woman, divorced and childless, leads a much freer life than her mother. In fact, she has achieved much more than her mother was able to achieve, which proves that both were new women during their own times. As Dora Sales Salvator, the Spanish translator of "Difficult Daughters" says: *In Difficult Daughters, we do not listen to Virmati voice. She could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation.*

Set against the backdrop of the turbulent years of Indian freedom movement and partition of India, Kapur has unostentatiously intertwined both the political upheaval of fifties and the changing feminist perspective of modern times in her novel. While depicting the women of three generations with the mind sets, they possess the relationships they hold, she has taken into account the increasing complexity of life, different power structures and values and solidarity in relation to socio-cultural scenario of the epoch. In order to portray, women's journey of liberation clearly, she has made an attempt to juxtapose the position and perception of women of different generations; a woman dependent on men for her social and sexual identity and economic needs i.e., Kasturi, the mother of Virmati; and another woman who is trying to cross the threshold of the patriarchal system and becoming self-directing through various trials and tribulations of life through the character of Virmati. Manju Kapur has brilliantly sketched the mental conflicts, the restlessness, the percipient accumulated personal screams and simmering revolt in the minds of women characters through Virmati, Swarnlata, Shakuntala and Leela. The novel thus draws a parallel between the state of the country and women by converging on the issues like the awakening of the country for freedom, women education and feminine emancipation.

Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, which stirred millions of Indians to raise their voice for political freedom, also provides an insight to Virmati, the cult of women liberation for focusing on her personal salvation. A corollary to this thinking of hers, the battle for her own independence, which she started in her youth, she takes it up again. The conflict between her desires and reality intensifies and thus ensures an inner struggle in Virmati's heart as she is drawn into a life of chaos and confusion. The inner voyage of Virmati in the novel is greatly influenced by what Virginia Woolf maintains: *Life is not a series of gig-lamps arranged systematically; life is a luminous halo, semi-transparent envelop surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.*

Virmati has sacrificed so much in her life but remains insouciant for her own identity. She also took the first step towards the journey of women liberation from the clutches of the egoist male society but her daughter Ida takes this voyage to culmination. She vehemently opposes male-supremacy and wishes to exercise her right to equality. She categorically repudiates the roles of being victims at the hands of dominating males of the society. Ida is able to sense clearly that women need to staunchly believe in the strength of their womanhood if they want the world to recognize their existence. She completely castigates the patriarchal uphold. She recognizes the weaknesses of her mother while tracing her life events, she becomes aware of the pugnacity that Virmati undergoes for creating a space for herself.

Manju Kapur also points out that knowledge and education fail to inculcate emotions and feelings. It only provides them (Professor and Prabhkar) with a superhuman nature, something to be awed at or looked up as great and emulated by women like Virmati and Ida. Men fail to understand motherhood in a woman. It appears to be alien concept for them. Virmati burns under the hostile gaze of Ganga and loses all sense of identity and her education feeds no more dreams of identity and independence. In the end, Virmati feels that some other women who aspired a different life, succeeded better than she did i.e., Shakuntal and Swarna Lata.

Insidiously and violently, men have been led to hate women, to be their own enemies to mobilize their immense strength against their own selves, to be the executants' of their virile needs that can rightly be called anti-narcissistic, a narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got. They have constructed the infamous logic of anti-love (Helen Cixous, 336). Towering this line of thought on which Manju Kapur has written her novel "Difficult Daughters", Ismat Chughtai rightly quotes:

It was a man's world, made and marred by man – woman was just part of this world – the means for his expression of love and hate. He either worships her or rejects her depending on his mood. Women have to resort to feminine wiles to achieve their goals – patience, cleverness, intelligence and the ability to make a man dependent on her. For this she has to be coy while fixing buttons, to die making rotis, to do with her own hands those trivial, facile jobs that could quite easily be done by servants and to take his excesses with a bowed head so that he would ultimately be shamed into falling at her feet. To me, femininity was a hoax- to my mind a display of contentedness, cowardice and hypocrisy- deceitful (Ismat Chughtai: the Heart Breaker Free)

Consequently, in this novel Manju Kapur realistically portrays the sufferings of women in the traditional Indian society and their yearning and efforts for a meaningful and independent life through the experience of her woman character, Virmati. The variety of woman characters presented in the novel Difficult Daughters bring out Manju Kapur's understanding of the multiple aspects of woman's existence, her problems and compulsions in the given social setup. There are women like Kasturi who are happy with their lot that results from the lack of an awareness of their rights. On the other hand, there are women like Virmati who raise a protest against patriarchy and face the consequences. There are women like Ganga and Virmati's mother-in-law who teach a lesson of adjustment and compromise. There are even woman like Shakuntala and Swarna Lata who are ahead of their times and believe in living life according to their own terms and conditions. There are also women like Ida who make an effort to come to terms with their life as a result of cultural crisis. They try to conform to the traditional role conferred upon them as well as keep

track of their own individuality. All these women in the novel, in one way or the other, cross the patriarchal thresholds and emerge out as new women during the times of partition in India.

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