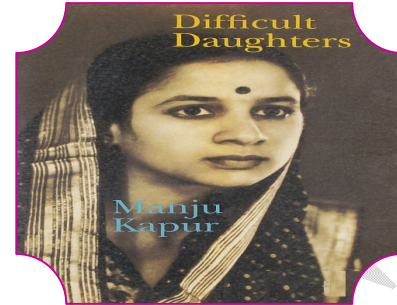




A GRAMSCIAN ANALYSIS OF THE HEGEMONIC AND ANTI-HEGEMONIC ELEMENTS IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS



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ABSTRACT

Culture as a society is maintained through traditions that are framed and maintained by a small group of people who persuade the masses to follow them willingly or unwillingly. As time passes by, these traditions are challenged due to various influences both internal and external. Oppositions are identified in the beginning itself and are checked tactfully then and there. When challenges or oppositions gain strength, there occurs a struggle to maintain and acquire the ruling position between the representatives of the opposition. The struggle is sometimes for a short period and other times for a prolonged period, depending upon the strength of the opposition. The one who gets defeated is either co-opted with the winner or destroyed. Such actions and reactions produce dislocations during the struggle which affects the society. The phases before and after the dislocation are a sort of torture for those who are involved in the challenges and also those who are around them. Relocation takes place slowly either by replacement or adjustment. This dislocation and relocation is a cycle and is always on the move. Gramsci used the term 'hegemony' to refer to the dominance of one social group over the other. This research paper is an attempt to apply the Gramscian concept of hegemony in Manju Kapur's novel Difficult Daughters to find out the principle and purpose on which it was written.

KEYWORDS: Tradition, Hegemony, Challenge, Opposition, Co-opt, Dislocation, Relocation, Replacement.

INTRODUCTION :

Every country had got its own culture. Culture refers to the specific practices, beliefs, customs and behaviour patterns of the society. Members who constitute the society attempt to maintain its culture through traditions. Traditions are framed and maintained by a small group of people who persuade the masses to follow them willingly or unwillingly. They tactfully associate them with religion or rituals. The deep rooted traditions, as time pass by, face challenges. Minor breaches are checked but when the opposition increases, it might end in chaos with broken traditions and dislocations. Harmony will be brought by the intellectuals in the society who either set right the dislocation or set up new practices as the new base for the society. Thus changes are a continuum shaping and reshaping the traditions though every step of the process takes its own time.

Antonio Gramsci came out with the key term 'hegemony', which helps in understanding the history and the structure of any society. The term 'hegemony' refers to the power or dominance of one social group over the others. It is also a method that is used to gain and maintain power. . Basically hegemony refers to

the political leadership which secures the “consent of the led” through “diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates, 352). In the modern world, technological developments have made complex methods of domination and the role of ideological influence has become more crucial. Structuring of authority and dependence gets focused in symbolic environments, while hegemony is spoken of. ‘Leadership’ is essential in order to make clear the true and genuine interests of the masses and to divert them from taking the dangerous path of reformation. The intellectuals exert an effective or rather powerful play of attraction in such a way that they subordinate the other intellectuals creating solidarity among all intellectuals with a psychological link.

The apparent indifference of the masses troubled Gramsci. He saw their apathy and indifference as indications of their subordination. If a change is to occur, the ideological fetters enforced by the ruling class should be broken. It is possible only by the hegemonic struggle through the intellectuals. Gramsci brings about the importance of ‘War of Position’ to attain hegemony. The ideological struggle is in fact the struggle between two hegemonic principles for appropriating the various ideological elements forming the organic ideology. “It is crucial to the concept that hegemony is not a ‘given’ and permanent state of affairs, but it has to be actively won and secured; it can also be lost” (Hall 333). The counter-hegemonic tendencies develop through various communication processes including interpretations, social circulation and media.

Indians were taught by the Manusmriti that gave the laws of marriage, the regulations for sacrifices, purifications and even the rules concerning final emancipation and renouncing of the world. The ruling elites “...perpetuate their power, wealth and status [by popularizing], their own philosophy, culture and morality” (Boggs 39). The rules concerning husband and wife, division of property, mixed castes, families, heretics and companies, duties of kings or rulers, women and such were not only just made but also propagated as important by giving many examples. When counter-hegemonic ideologies entered into the society, a struggle or a revolt ensued against such traditions. In the writings of women, in particular, revolt is a perennial theme which envisages dislocations.

Manju Kapur, a keen observer of the society, shows dislocations of various types in various situations in her fiction. In her novels, one of the important hegemonic ideologies – patriarchy is often portrayed as the central hegemony. Her protagonists are women whose lives are suppressed by the culture and traditions that patriarchy imposes on women in the Indian society. However, education and the influence of certain ‘intellectuals’ awaken the rebellious instincts of the women. They strive to actively break the age old traditions and carve their own life and identity. Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is also one such novel where friction occurs between the hegemonic patriarchal ideas and the revolting anti-hegemonic ideas of the protagonist Virmati. This paper entitled “A Gramscian Analysis of the Hegemonic and Anti-hegemonic Elements in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*” aims at making a study of Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* from the angle of Gramscian concept of hegemony in an extended form of application.

Virmati, the protagonist of the novel *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur, was from a respectable family in Amristar. Her grandfather, Lala Diwan Chand was a well-known landlord and passionate Arya Samaj activist. His sons Chander Prakash and Suraj Prakash ran a successful jewelry shop and they lived in a joint-family. Born as the eldest among the eleven siblings to Suraj Prakash and Kasturi, Virmati had to act as the surrogate mother at home. “She never rested or played with us [siblings], she always had some work” (DD 5). She was directed to take care of the food, milk, clothes and studies of the younger siblings. When she protested, her mother replied, “You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things, who will?” (DD 7). This is an example of how the hegemony, which is Indian patriarchy, instructs “...pupils in practical housework and to the formation of orderly and industrious habits” (Ackroyd, 166). Mothers, first conditioned by their own mothers and then the society, try to condition their daughters to the patriarchy.

Virmati’s worry about failing in her Fine Arts course was an unnecessary fuss to Kasturi as the ‘real’ business of her life was marriage and taking care of her own home. Kasturi too had learned to read, write, balance household accounts and sew, along with the rituals of Arya Samaj havan, Sandhya and meditations. She filled her husband’s home with children and performed her prime duty. “The education of women was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold level of learning, a genteel polish its major

achievement. And in most cases, it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon 'virtue' – a sugared word which meant obedience, servility and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity" (Millet 74).

When Virmati's cousin Shakuntala visited them at Dalhousie, Virmati wondered at the change in her manner and dress. Shaku said to Viru, "These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent" (DD 17). She also discussed India's freedom struggle and women's involvement in it. Virmati was enticed when Shaku told her how she would travel, get entertained, help others, read papers and attend seminars in Lahore. She wished to follow Shaku. She thought, "One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges" (DD 17). Shakuntala's encouraging words, "Arré, times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?" (DD 18) made her believe that she could be something other than a wife. She decided to "fight her mother" (DD 19) and go to Lahore for higher education.

When Virmati failed her Fine Arts course, her mother Kasturi said, "...leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad-tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first" (DD 21). Kasturi here represents Gramsci's 'Civil society', the area under the control of the state and where "...a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour" (Femia, 24). Virmati could not raise her voice against her mother but indirectly talked of Shakuntala's education which was just brushed off. Here one can find the play of hegemony which is the patriarchy, in a war of position against the anti-hegemonic struggles of the young female, Virmati. However, the anti-hegemonic rebellion of Virmati is defeated and the hegemonic control remains stable.

A new family settled down as neighbours to Virmati's family. Harish, an English professor, who had returned from Oxford two years ago and at present, was a professor at Arya Sabha College, settled in the next house with his wife, daughter, sister and mother. Soon, Virmati's results arrived and she had passed in the second attempt. Virmati expressed her wish to study further. Her parents felt that she had gone far enough and her marriage was fixed with a canal engineer. But the engineer's father died, resulting in the postponement of her marriage. So Virmati was allowed to join Arya Samaj College where the Professor worked. This time, Virmati's attempt in waging a war against domestic hegemony proved to be a success as she succeeded in joining higher education.

The Professor, Harish, was attracted by Virmati's beauty and they became close. Virmati's confusion between her thoughts of the professor and Inderjit, the canal engineer, extended for a period. "Early marriage and no education? No Professor, and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased" (DD 54). Her wedding date was fixed and Harish urged her to inform Inderjit that she had changed her mind. The thought of her sister Indu and the professor's wife, Ganga, made her uneasy. To quote Gramsci (1971) Hegemony often appears as the 'common sense' that guides the everyday activities and shows world as "inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed" reproducing a sort of social 'homeostasis' or "moral and political passivity" (333). Here the war between the hegemonic 'common sense' and anti-hegemonic rebellion to fulfill one's own wish can be seen in Virmati's mind.

Finally the intimacy of the professor overpowered her, giving way to Virmati's counter-hegemonic reactions. Counter-hegemonic forces act tactfully, reinventing messages of institutions for totally a different purpose. Virmati thought: "Wasn't her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body?" (DD 57). She told her mother Kasturi that she was not interested in marriage and she wanted to study further in Lahore like her cousin Shakuntala. Kasturi was shocked and unable to convince Virmati. At last she threatened Virmati, telling that she would take poison. Here the struggle between the traditional and modern ideologies attempting to overpower one another can be identified, struggling to make or break each other.

The hegemonic forces/ consensus of patriarchy, that is, Virmati's family, became alert and suspicions arose. "She had been taught by somebody... Otherwise Viru is hardly the academic type" (DD 87) they said, and believed, "She is hiding something" (DD 87). Soon, Virmati was locked up in their godown in order to cure her of her rebellious decision. The Professor was suspected to be the culprit responsible for Virmati's strange behaviour. Anti-hegemonic activities gained momentum through the number of letters written by

the Professor. The Professor's letters, sent to Virmati secretly, swayed her emotions and helped to keep her safe for him. Virmati had involved her little sister Paro now and then and the Professor had made use of his student Kanhiya Lal as a go-between and all such activities helped in strengthening the bond between the Professor and Virmati. To cheer her up, the Professor wrote to her about the reference in his horoscope to his second marriage too.

While things were going on in this way, Virmati stopped communicating with the Professor. Thus there again set in, a drawback in the activity of anti-hegemony. The 'intellectual', the professor, who led the war to the crisis became alert and tried to know the reason. His repeated attempts succeeded at last and the problem was identified. While writing letters to Virmati, on one side, the Professor was also close to his wife. He had aimed at 'double enjoyment' and Virmati got to know about it. "They have told me that your wife is pregnant. Apparently Ganga had come to announce the happy news. At first I did not believe it. How could it be true?" (DD 104). The Professor justified it as his step to bring back domestic harmony and tried to turn her again towards him by touching her emotions. But Virmati was firm and decided to remove herself from the Professor's life.

Virmati went to Lahore and to do BT so that she could also work as a teacher like the Professor and her cousin Shakuntala. The Professor decided to wait for the right time to achieve his goal. When she went to Lahore, he had his plan extended there too. He contacted his friend Syed Husain who readily gave his house for the use of the Professor. Virmati ignored the Professor's letters with different names and different references. When he tried to meet her, first she avoided him. He tried again and again and the fourth time, Virmati met him. Then slowly, he made her to come with him to his friend's room so that he could have a firm grip over her. However, hegemony will be effective only if the subordinated masses accept the ideology as "...normal reality or common sense... in active forms of experience and consciousness" (145, Williams 1976). Virmati's inner confusions are calmed by the clever intellect of the patriarch, the Professor.

Virmati's clandestine affairs with the Professor came to light when she became pregnant. Then she attempted to abort the foetus with the help of her roommate Swarnalata. The anti-hegemonic voice of Virmati went unheard again and again. Even when she was at Nahan, Harish went there and spoilt her name. She was forced to resign her job and proceed towards Shanti Niketan. When she contacted the professor's friend accidentally, he made the professor, to come over to Delhi and marry Virmati. Here the protagonist, in her rebellious attempts to free herself of the hegemonic constraints finally achieves her wish after a long struggle.

However, all is not fair after the marriage. The hegemonic society does not accept her and in its eyes she is a rebellious 'outcast' who did not confirm to the patriarchal hegemony. At the Professor's home, as a co-wife, she had to struggle for her survival. None except Harish was friendly with her. Ganga, the Professor's wife was the queen of the kitchen. Virmati was not even allowed to touch the utensils. She considered it an important matter to wash the clothes of her husband. Before the rule of the hegemony, Virmati was none other than the subaltern. She was restricted to the dressing room.

However, her conception made a change in her dull life and she imagined rays of hope in her life. Though Virmati's situation became bearable the reason was that she was about to confirm to the institution of patriarchy by giving birth to a child. But to her dismay, she had to face miscarriage and she lost all interest in life. Even the enticing words of the Professor could not bring happiness to her. So again, the patriarchal intellect looked for a way to bring about harmony at home. A proposal was made to send Virmati again to study MA Philosophy as, "It would be a civilizing influence and induce a larger perspective on life. Part of his extensive library was devoted to European, British and Hindu thought, and Virmati could use those very books. They would read together like they had done long ago, before things had become messy and complicated" (DD 247).

When the partition riots started, she returned home and settled as the wife of the Professor as Ganga had gone off to her native place. "It is crucial to the concept that hegemony is not a 'given' and permanent state of affairs, but it has to be actively won and secured; it can also be lost" (Hall 333). In

breaking the tradition, Virmati had won and the new order had come to the place of the old. Hegemony and anti-hegemony always exist and are in the state of continuous war, waiting for the opportunity to come up.

Thus, it can be seen that *Difficult Daughters* exhibits a clear pattern of hegemonic occurrences. Manju Kapur has attempted to point out how ideologies clash with one another until a resolution is made. However, the contemporary status in India is that it is in a transition from one ideology to another. Gramscian dislocations occur again and again in various ways and in various structures heading towards a settlement. The present state is one of flux which is painted by Manju Kapur in her novels. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's continuous anti-hegemonic attempts to break the hegemony of patriarchy, to succeed in the war of position, results in dislocations. However, the path to harmony towards relocation is not yet established and remains in an unstable state, a flux. To quote Raymond Williams (1977), "A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities with specific and changing pressures and limits" (112).

ABBREVIATION

DD – Difficult Daughters

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