



WOMEN IN TRANSITION: SELFHOOD AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS IN DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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ABSTRACTS

The present paper explores the journey of the central character, Virmati, in Manju Kapur's acclaimed novel *Difficult Daughters*, focusing on her struggle for selfhood amidst rigid social constraints. Set against the backdrop of pre-independence India, the novel reflects the transitional phase of Indian womanhood—caught between traditional expectations and the emerging desire for autonomy. Through Virmati's personal rebellion and emotional turmoil, Kapur presents a nuanced commentary on the condition of women in Indian society, even decades after independence. The novel is semi-autobiographical, reflecting not only the author's mother's struggles but symbolizing the wider identity crisis experienced by countless women navigating the boundaries of familial duty and personal freedom. This paper examines how *Difficult Daughters* portrays women in transition—challenging societal norms, seeking education, questioning marriage, and ultimately striving to define their individual identity.



KEY WORDS : *Quest for identity, difficult daughters, dominant figure in Indian English literature.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Manju Kapur as a novelist is a leading figure in Indian English literature. Manju Kapur's novels investigate not only the problem of femininity but also they are about identity crisis and quest for identity for women. Manju Kapur is an author of few novels but she has been praised by readers because of her work. *Difficult Daughters* is her first novel which won the Commonwealth prize. Her second novel, *A Married Woman* is also remarkable and is liked by readers and critics. The third novel *Home* is emotional acuity. Her novel *The Immigrant* has been shortlisted for DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. Manju Kapur speaks for women. Among well known women writers she has chosen new path and has made her own way. Unquestionably Manju Kapur catches the concentration and social obligations and responsibilities.

2. WOMEN IN TRANSITION: SELFHOOD AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS IN *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

Difficult Daughters is the story of Virmati and her mother and daughter's plight and their thoughts in their own place. Virmati, the central character of novel rebels against her relatives as well as the diverse norms in the general public. Valuing learning and other things of a advanced order in life, she realizes that there is more to life than what it appears to be. She falls in love with a married man and even opts to be his second wife, much against the social norms or the pious order.

We see in the novel the deliberate and sure development of Veermati from an innocent girl to a woman full-grown by pain and humiliation. Her quest for self identity makes her comfortable in life. The story of Virmati sets alongside the India's independence fight. Veermati fight for independence for individual and for country, to live life on her terms and conditions is set parallel to India's fight for independence from British Rule. Virmati weaves stunning dreams and struggles hard to attain them. However, after the accomplishment of her dreams, they cease to be significant. In the struggle Veermati loses a part of her and finds herself tattered into two halves, each half in conflict with the other.

Veermati is the eldest in her family unit. She belongs to an strict family of Amritsar. A young Punjabi girl, she is the offspring of Suraj Parkash and Kasturi. She is second daughter of her ten other siblings who look up to her for the whole thing. She even lost track of her childhood years. Looking back she has no found memoirs of her earlier period. When she was thirteen years old, the family members started talking about her marriage. Her marriage was fixed. she felt revolting and breaking the age old tradition barriers and doing something different. As we listen, Man is the hand-puppet in the hands of fortune. Her fortune is pursuing her. Marriage has postponed and she meets Prof. Hareesh Chanadra. The first time Virmati met Hareesh, he played some of the sweetest tune for her, and was pleased by the look of her face. They both fall in love but the corridor to love never runs flat. The communal barricades and ethical hurdles label their affiliation 'illicit'.

Veermati was highly influenced by two personalities in her life, Shakuntla, her cousin and Swarnlata, her room partner. Both are rebellious women and took no parental pressure. They determined to carve a name for themselves through their educational recreation. They came like a new breath in her life. They were the 'new women' who guaranteed Veermati that there was much more to do in life than just adhering to the man- made codes of conduct.

Swarnlata guides her, when she opens her mind to her. In Lahore, Veermati lives a dishonorable life with the tag of a 'secrete wife'. Swarnlata says, Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war, the Satyagraha movement- because of these things, women are approaching out of their homes. Taking jobs, struggle, going to jail. Wake up from your out of date dream.

But the hurdles can't take name of stopping. She becomes a pregnant. She tries to meet Harish unluckily they can't meet and she had a abortion. She feels that now all things are finished between them but fortune wants different and again both meet where Veermati started to do job as a teacher, her talent come out here. But because of their affair she had to live job. After that they got married but she becomes the second wife of Hareesh and lives in their family with his wife and children. Her relation with her own family has shattered.

The whole novel is seen all the way through the eye of her daughter, Ida, who is ignorant of her mother's past which had always been kept a undisclosed from her, and her changing approach about her mother. The first line of the novel is, "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother". This is approach towards her mother. She never thought greatly about her mother as Veermati's past was always kept in hidden from her.

Veermati's daughter Ida, who belongs to the post independence generation, is strong and fully conscious. She breaks up her marriage as she is denied maternity by her husband. The mandatory abortion is also the extinction of her marriage. Ida by severing the marriage bond frees herself from male domination and power and also from conformist communal structures which fasten women. She has that power which Virmati lacks. Swarnlata, Veermati's friend, is also a fully conscious, strong woman. She too experiences pressure with her parents over the issue of marriage but unlike Virmati she canalizes her power into a new way which gives her a sense of group identity. It also breeds ideas of radicalism and militancy but what is commendable is the fact that she can build these ideas of independence into her marriage without destroying the formation of the family. Her marriage rests on the condition that it would not obstruct her work.

The fight for self-sufficiency and separate identity remains an incomplete combat and a million dollar question. During this novel ida's announcement echoes that she doesn't want to be like her mother and wants to assert her independence and separate identity. Ida wants emancipation and doesn't want to compromise as did her mother. This idea of the novel can be summed up in the

utterance of angry Ida. This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word-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 anymore. Perhaps it is this incapability of Veermati to strike independent roots and grow that makes Ida remark like this. The search is that of Veermati's daughter, Ida, as she seeks to reconstitute her mother's history. Ida, an educated woman, divorced and childless, it seems that she leads a free life than her mother's in external terms; yet inside her she feels, even if not quite so acutely, some of the same anxieties as had overwhelmed her mother. Veermati defies communal anticipation to emphasize her distinctiveness and hopes to attain self fulfillment. But what does she really get? She is a loser whose acts totally isolate her from her own family and she fails to create a space for herself for which she had been striving all along.

Today is the day following yesterday. Things might have altered, but how much really? Even today thousands of girls sit within the four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to choose their own lives, decides for themselves whether they want to be home makers or more. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for shopping with friends. Manju Kapur presented women's liberation and striving for some space in such a manner that we read not just with our eyes but also with our heart. Kapur never permits Veermati any assertion of power of freedom. Because even as she breaks free from old prisons, she is locked into newer ones. Her relationship with the professor, for instance. Even years of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to strike independent roots and grow. Finally, marriage to the man of her choice in no triumphs.

Yet, we see Veermati and Ida become difficult daughters, so also both face flame of male dominated society. Veermati and Hareesh both love each other but society forgets all the guilt's of Hareesh and gives admiration to him. When Veermati's father has died all family members suppose responsible to Veermati for the death of her father but at the same time these people welcome Hareesh and give value to them but other side they are not ready to forgive Veermati. Veermati feels bad why this happens always with woman. Both had done mistake but she alone face society. However, Prof. Hareesh Chandra never faced any kind of problem that Veermati had to. He even tried to justify his action by saying that many men in their society were married twice and stayed with two wives.

Veermati could not understand why this difference in attitude and treatment. She was looked upon as the blacksheep of the family, where as Hareesh encouraged about scot free. These entire happening in Veermati is life makes her progress from an innocent girl to a young woman matured by experience and suffering. However, not to be bogged down by anything, she decides to shape her own fortune. She caught up within a web of oppositional forces. The modern woman within her wants to revolt but her traditional upbringing places hurdles in her path. In an interview Manju Kapur states. *"In my work I aim to show rather tell"*. When she starts writing she has a theme in her mind, not a story. The story takes shape gradually. Her work is transparent and seamless. Many Indian Women writers portrays the image of suffering but stoic women who finally break free from the conventional and live life on their own terms and conditions. Manju Kapur put her foot on this way only. At the hand of Manju Kapoor, these women do not remain as simply puppets. Her central character nurtures the yearning to be autonomous.

1. CONCLUSION:

Manju Kapur wants to show how women's are adopting change of modernity by refusing the shadow of the age old traditions. Their new thinking and new attitude gives them new recognition and social worth as an individual in male dominated society. Their new attitude makes them free to live their life according to their own strategy. Her novel also highlights the life of woman, their struggle for rights, quest for identity and survival. Being an educated they become aware of their self Independence. The women character narrated in the novel are emancipated women. They are not satisfied with their present condition. These characters question why there is one rule for men and other for women. Through the characters like Veermati, Swarnalata, Ida the writer has shown the women quest for the self Identity.

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