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FEMININE SUPREMACY IN MANJU KAPUR'S "DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS"

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters*, set background of India amid 1940s. It presents the issues of an upper class urban Arya Samaj Punjabi family in Amritsar. The picture of women in Indian fiction has faced many changes in the midst of the recent four decades. Many of the Indian Women writers in English write their fiction, which revealed the original state of Indian culture and its impact on woman. Manju Kapur is one of the great writers, who deal the issues concerning women in the public. In her novels, Manju Kapur speaks through her female characters as an impression of the essential Indian women fighting for their rights in a patriarchal society. Their inner longings, sentiments, battles and sufferings have been evidently portrayed in her novels. The present novel *Difficult Daughter* presents issues like female flexibility and their education. In this novel there are different sorts of women who belongs to many generations. She dives into the mind of Indian women living in joint families under male authority. The present paper expresses the women characters in the novel Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. Desirous, ambitious and traditional life study of women is described. How they ended their lives in their own way. Some of women how they accept norms of patriarchal society and some women, how they revolt against existing traditional rules. The novel portrays two sorts of women. To begin with are traditional type of women who firmly adhere to the well established traditions and values. In *Difficult Daughters* Ganga and Kasturi belongs traditional type. The other type is that of women who are very modern in their perspective. Swarna Latha and Shakuntala are representing to this category.

Keywords: Self-Identity, modernity, liberation, tradition, patriarchal society, endurance.

The images of women that we find in Manju Kapur's fiction are of unique. Her women behave in their own style assigned to them by Kapur. All women protagonists in her novels are married one. Her all protagonists belongs to urban middle class. Manju Kapur has never depicted an illiterate character in her novel. No character of her wonders in the rural area or farm as she has never depicted any character that has from rural background. Sudarshan Sharma writes, Manju Kapur

is one of the great women writers from India whose protagonists are women trying to keep balance constantly. Their hardships have made them strong and they struggle to set themselves free from the shackles of convention and various prejudices (Sharma 45).

Virmati is the protagonist of the novel. She is born in high minded and strict household in Amritsar. She is the eldest of children` in the Lala Diwan Chand Family. She becomes the second

mother of her ten siblings. She dedicates herself completely in taking care of her younger siblings. She is a liberal minded girl who works hard. Yet, she is extremely impatient. The care and love which she anticipated from her mother and family, is never given to her. From her childhood she was bounded by the obligations of the home she never has time for her own. She says: 'I'm tired of knitting and sewing,' flared Virmati. 'Besides, I'm here to look after you,' 'I can look after myself' (*Difficult Daughters* 12). She is not permitted to take after her study properly. Her, mother instruct her that there are many things to do in life than education. In her teenage, she was often scolded by her mother. Since her adolescence Virmati has dependably been working for others. Virmati's ideal is her cousin Shakuntala. She is doing M.Sc. in Chemistry. The initially seed of getting freedom and education comes to Virmati's mind after meeting her at her home. During their walk Shakuntala shares her activities such as - participation in seminar; experiments in laboratory read each other's work etc. Virmati clunges her when she leaves for Lahore and says: 'Maybe I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji,' she wept. 'I wish I too could do things. But I am not clever' (*Difficult Daughters* 18). Here Manju Kapur delineates 'new woman' in Virmati, who needs to state her right to get married and study.

As per Manju Kapur liberation for women is most important. Virmati is the embodiment of liberation. After her disappointment in FA her mother squeezes her to get marriage but she wants to have her own identity and wants to taste the sweetness of freedom like her cousin Shakuntala. Virmati wants a great practice to her English, while Kasturi feels it insignificant. Virmati fails to convince her mother and get herself engaged with a canal engineer Inderjeet. She needs to struggle to continue her education after her engagement. She joins AS College. Here she meets an oxford return Professor, Harish Chandar. He is an instructor in English. She enjoys her personality. At college, he takes a gander at Virmati with warmth in his eyes. Kapur writes: 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 (*Difficult Daughters* 46). Harish is a married man and lives in Virmati's home as tenant. For Virmati, professor's affection was more stimulant than Inderjeet. She is getting tangled in the web of professor's adoration. She contrasts Inderjeet and Harish. So she rejects Inderjeet and suggests her mother to give Indumati a chance to marry him. She is locked in the go down when her grandfather comes to know the fact that her affair with professor. Virmati feels choked out when she finds out about Ganga's pregnancy. She writes to the professor: 'Now I know there is still some life in your feelings for your wife - as it is proper there should be - it would be very wrong of me to come between you, especially when there is going to be another baby. But for the pregnancy, I would never have known. What has happened has happened for the good. In which world I was living, to be so caught up in the illusion of your love? Just as you must do your duty to your family, and your wife, so too I must do my duty to mine' (*Difficult Daughters* 107). She again decides to start her studies. She informs Harish that she is going to Lahore to do her BT. She wants to become a teacher like him and Shakuntala. Thus the journey of 'new woman' starts, who does not want to be a doll for others. She decides to close her part with Harish and burns his letters. She begins a meaning life in Lahore with her roommate Swarna Lata. She takes part in politics.

Virmati decides herself to be involved with Swarna but professor's thoughts continue hovering around her mind. Harish comes to meet her and furthermore to seek after her. He succeeds in convincing his adoration for Virmati. For the first time they enjoy physical joy. She conceives soon and has to abort the child by selling the gold bangles given to her by her grandfather. After this occurrence she again decides to cut her relationship with him. She goes to Siramaur, a hill station in Nahan to be a principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. She teaches family household and English Literature to class IX and X. Virmati very much enjoys being in Nahan. It is most likely her best period. There she enjoys a free life like a honey bee and tastes honey of her life. Her Her search for identity ends here. She needs to manage everything by herself. Here she

has no friends and family. She achieves the status of female autonomy. Virmati finds in Nahan a 'room of one's own'. Veena Singh states that, "in Virmati there struck the head and the heart, physical and moral, Virmati gives way to her heart and body" (Singh 168). But destiny has written something else for her as Harish comes here to meet her. She meets him secretly at nights. The trustee of the school finds out her guilty so she needs to abandon her job as she has lost employees' confidence. She decides to go to Shantiniketan, but on her way she meets a friend of Harish. He calls Harish at her home. She marries Harish and becomes second wife to him. Virmati feels caught in the professor's home as a second wife. She is not ready to project herself in the home. She is not permitted to wash his cloths. She has not given permission to enter into kitchen. Everything is done by professor's first wife Ganga. Virmati is self-assured yet in her in-laws home she never blooms to the full. As she is alienated from her family members and mother, she feels caught in with Ganga as a co-wife in the home. She feels that she probably done some transgression in her past. She gets the marital status but she does not able to achieve peace of mind, the thing she wanted most. However genuine feelings of serenity, the thing she required most, doesn't ready to accomplish. Elleke Boehmer rightly remarks: After her marriage, Virmati is symbolically cast out of her mother's house and forced to find her own way. Her punishing exile ends only when the massacres of partition make her family's continuing rejection untenable. It is a sign of Virmati's marginality (Boehmer 57). Virmati's life is a steady battle starting with one front then onto the next. She carries on with her life with loneliness and dullness which makes her feel miserable about herself. Ganga's children do not care for her. Her mother-in-law also disregards her. Whenever she conceives her mother-in-law takes care of her. She somehow feels nice. She gets miscarriage. It was not her fault but rather fate has written something else for her. She again starts her education. In the meantime riots happen and she is not able to see her family members and her mother. On the demise of her grandfather she is not able to go to his funeral service because of her past. She again conceives and

gives birth to a baby girl. Virmati wants to name her child as 'Bharati' but Harish rejects and named her as Ida. As tables' turn, Virmati finds Ida as a difficult daughter. We can quote Anita Myles to sum up Virmati's journey, called life: Virmati's inner strength and will power sustain her providing that there is more to life than depending on marriage, parents and other conventional value systems. At least Virmati conjures up the courage to defy traditions for the sake of her own happiness (Myles 128).

Kasturi is a traditional woman in the novel, who obeys to others for throughout her life. In patriarchal family, like, Lala Diwan Chand, she endures everything silently. She does the greater part of things by defying her own self. She works day and night in the house. She becomes drained every night because of over-burden of household duties. Manju Kapur says: Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache (*Difficult Daughters* 7). Kasturi is a mother of eleven kids. She needs to move her burden of child rearing to her eldest child Virmati. She belongs to Arya Samaj family in which child marriages are considered as an evil. In her childhood Kasturi used to go to the Mission school, however the day when she founded praying before the photo of Christ is the last day to her in that school. After some time a college for Hindu girls was built and Kasturi ...became the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by tentative assault on learning (*Difficult Daughters* 62). She learnt writing, reading, sewing and household works while she was in Hindu girl's school. Manju Kapur writes: During Kasturi's formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued at home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by impeccable nature of her daughter's qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws (*Difficult Daughters* 62). She additionally learnt ceremonies of Arya Samaj in school. She follows the rituals day by day. Kasturi is living in a patriarchal environment where a woman's ultimate destiny is to get married and she needs to work tirelessly to make her in-laws happy. Usha Kurjekar remarks: Kasturi, the mother, sees a rival in her daughter, who would challenge her world in

future.... As soon as Virmati shows signs of assertion, conflict develops between the mother and daughter, Virmati's falling in love with the Professor makes the matter worse (Kurjekar 231). When Virmati doesn't comply with her and conflicts with her wishes, she says, "God has put you on earth to punish me" (*Difficult Daughters* 111). She calls Virmati "randi" when she married Harish. Kasturi trusts that Virmati has put a dark spot on her family's reputation by becoming second wife. She breaks all relationships with Virmati. Kasturi is the epitome of old values and customs. There is another character Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin and Lajwanti's little daughter. She lives in Lahore. She is doing M.Sc in Chemistry. She is a girl with free will and liberal mind. Nobody dares try to discuss her unmarried status. She is portrayed as a force. In front of Virmati and Kasturi, Lajwanti appreciates about her daughter's qualities. How would anyone be able to see her when she has no time? Such a talented teacher, so popular, and also an inspiring example for young ones,' 'She lives for others, not herself, but what to do, everybody in our family is like that. And with all this reading-writing, girls are getting married late. It is the will of God (*Difficult Daughters* 15). But inwardly he too is stressed over the unmarried status of his daughter and about her modern outlook towards everything. The very word "shadi" makes her desperate and miserable. Kasturi worries over Shakuntala as she can see her occasionally. Lajwanti disapprovingly sniffed in the background. 'When will this girl settle down?' she asked rhetorically. 'All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should be a man (*Difficult Daughters* 16).

Shakuntala is an ideal for Virmati. It is Shakuntala who first motivates Virmati to concentrate on studies. She is a charming cousin of Virmati. Her intelligence and vibrancy motivates Virmati towards her. She tells Virmati while walking that these do not understand them. She also enlightens Virmati concerning living her life with her own terms. She advises Virmati about her friends who are miserable with their families and searching for fulfilment by working with her group. She continues: We travel, entertain ourselves in the

evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going abroad for higher studies (*Difficult Daughters* 17). She believes, if woman wish to continue higher studies she should not be married. According to woman, marriage takes away the liberation from women. For her freedom of one's self is a more essential than everything. She realizes that Kasturi considers her as an awful impact for Virmati. But Virmati denies that and clung to her when Shakuntala leaves for Lahore. Virmati reveals to Shakuntala that she also wants needs to resemble her yet she is not that sharp. In any case, Shakuntala reassures Virmati and reveals to her that, times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you? (*Difficult Daughters* 18).

In this way Manju Kapur depicts the character of a modern woman who is dismissed in her family for her bold behaviour. Shakuntala thinks beyond being as wife at home. Her way of life is exceptionally marvellous. Virmati sees the change that Lahore had acquired in her way of life. She is intelligent and delightful. Now we see the character, Swarna Lata, who is a roommate of Virmati in Lahore. The meaning of her name is golden creeper. She is dynamic in politics. She is an advanced woman with her own opinions and views. She thinks by oneself. She wishes to accomplish something more than simply marrying. She wouldn't like to wait for her man and involves herself in others. She is great at heart. She has a lot to offer to Virmati when she meets her at the first time. Swarna Lata is also a revolt like Virmati. She abandons her home for herself. She wants something more from life. She tells Virmati concerning leaving her home: I was very clear that I wanted to do something besides getting married..... And go on offering it until taken to prison. Free food and lodging at the hands of the imperialists (*Difficult Daughters* 118). When Shakuntala comes to meet Virmati in Lahore hostel, she also meets Swarna Lata. Shakuntala discovers Swarna plain. She derecognizes her identity. But, Virmati tells about Swarna Latha: Anybody would be impressed by Swarna's eyes behind her glasses, eyes, eyes that refused to smile just because they were looked at. And what about the intelligence in her round face, and the friendliness that was frank

and open? (*Difficult Daughters* 119). She is not only a roommate for Virmati. When Virmati finds herself in problem it is Swarna who advises her and furthermore helps her. When Virmati is completely in deep dilemma about her relationship with Harish, she advises her: Most families look upon the marriage of a daughter as a sacred duty - or sacred burden. We are lucky we're living in times when women can do something else. Even in Europe women gain more respect during wartime. And here we have that war, and our satyagraha as well (*Difficult Daughters* 152). When Virmati returns from Nahan, she knows that she is conceived. Swarna Lata helps her in her abortion. She is for Virmati 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' Swarna Lata is the only female who escapes life what she needs. Shakuntala and Swarna Lata are liberal women who stand against in a patriarchal society. Both are good models for Virmati. Virmati wants to follow Swarna Lata and Shakuntala. Christopher Rollason remarks: At all events, it may be said that Virmati's frustrated life is, as it were, framed- as if in a triptych- by those two other, much more successful lives: those of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, both emblematic of the educated, politicized and emancipated women. In other words, the psychological annihilation of Virmati, at the hands of her own family and her husband's, should not be read as a fatality. What happens to Virmati is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman, quantitatively or statistically, but Kapur's novel shows that other paths also exist, while further stressing that choice are by no means simple or either-or (Rollason 7).

Ganga is another woman character in *Difficult Daughters*. She is a traditional woman. She is an uneducated woman, who is married to a professor. As she is uneducated, Harish tries to teach her. In this respect Manju Kapur writes: The woman thought back to the many times her husband had tried to teach her...But the woman found it difficult to learn (*Difficult Daughters* 40). She does every household work in her home. At home she does everything from washing clothes to tidying of the desk, polishing shoes, dusting of the books, mending clothes, filling fountain pen, stitching of shirts she did it all. When Harish's poet

friends come, she makes kachoris, samosas, mathris and pakoras for them. Harish's marriage with Virmati puts her great shock. She is disappointed by his act. She thinks, if there is her fault in her husband's marriage, but couldn't find out anything. Ganga is a uneducated and submissive woman. She is one of the victims of the patriarchal society. After Harish's marriage with Virmati, Kishori Devi meets Ganga and says it is destiny, which is in God's hand. We need to just accept and nothing is in our hand. On hearing all these Ganga breaks: The tears Ganga was determined not to show anybody started pouring down her face. ... 'What have I done,' she wailed, 'that God should punish me like this....' tell me, what I did wrong? (*Difficult Daughters* 211).

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