



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

INTERNAL EXPEDITION IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*: AN APPLICATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REVELATION

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.74.438](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.74.438)



ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan Anita Desai and Shoba De adopt to scrutinize the sociological and psychological problems of Indian women. Manju Kapur debut novel *Difficult Daughters* won her international acclaim and common wealth prize for the best first book published in 1998. By extrapolative journey as motif, Kapur has taken profound insight into woman's inner turmoil to find a place, an identity and individuality of her own in society. The centuries past, women are always back staged by patriarchal world. Literature and art and scriptures are considered women as a humble and docile creature. One who appears to be against this ideological of a framework of a feminine is considered as immoral. On the one side, in Hindu mythology, examples are Sita, Savitri to reveal Pativarta and on the opposite if one goes against these conventional norms, one is considered as the daughter of temptress, sinful Eve in Christian Mythology. In this paper to analyse how Virmati does internal suffers from sociological and psychological.

Key Words: Sociological, Psychological, Indian Women, Individuality, Identity, Internal, Suffer and Mythology,

As a feminist writer, Manju Kapur's novels raise strong protest against the male dominated Indian society. Manju Kapur's novels portray the New Indian woman's voice. 'A New Women' in search of self-identity, seeks liberation in all walks of life and replaces the traditional image of Indian women. In her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, very much evident that a stereotypical women character is transformed into 'New Women' by replacing the tradition image of Indian Women. Manju Kapur projects a new vision of Indian women in her novel, *Difficult Daughters*. She denounces the persistence

of tradition idea that marriage is essential for women. She depicts deliberately the character of two girls of two different attitudes. In her novel *Difficult Daughters*, She portrays her women of traditional and new modern outlook. Virmati, protagonist of *Difficult Daughters* represents the former category and Shakuntala, her cousin is an example of the latter category. Kapur draws a strong contrast between these two women characters.

In Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, protagonist Virmati, an educated middle class girl expounds her rebellious ideas against this male-dominated society and tries to gain her identity. She experiences a journey to her inner self. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact.

The novel *Difficult Daughters* stresses on the woman's need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, independence individuality and self-actualization. Located primarily in the India of the 1940's, Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence aspired and obtained by a nation and independence yearned after by a woman. Among the writers who have portrayed the 'New Woman' who is inclined to take the 'road not taken', and walking on their 'own road', Manju Kapur undoubtedly arrests attention. In the novel *Difficult Daughters* represents the emergence of new woman who is no longer the "chaste wife whose suffering can only make her more virtuous, the nurturing mother who denies her own self, the avenging Kali or a titillating strumpet" (Rao 242). Based partially on the life of Kapur's own mother, the novel movingly evokes the multiple frustrations encountered by the central character, Virmati, in her efforts to educate herself and establish a domestic space, she can call home. Born in Amritsar in Punjab in 1940, Virmati, the daughter of a father of progressive ideas and a traditionalist mother seeks human relations that would allow her to be herself. Her desire for self expression and self realization is condemned to failure by her own family as well as that of the man she marries. Through Virmati's character, Manju Kapur has dealt

with the theme of travails in self-identity and socio-cultural identity.

In the novel set against the bloody backdrop of partition in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore, remains a powerful portrait of a society where shame is more important than grief. The novel spans three generations of women and unveils their sense of disillusionment. The three generation of women (Kasturi, Virmati and Ida) symbolize the three stages of Indian independence. Kasturi, the mother represents as pre-independence and she is exposed as a victim of the offensive control of patriarchy. In the beginning, Kasturi is being presented as an epitome of motherhood who bears pain and suffering. "Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache" (DD 7). Through these three female protagonists, Manju Kapur has revealed the life circle of a woman who is devoted from beginning of her life. As a child, a girl has to do domestic, house hold activities (Virmati), after marriage, she has to bear pain to give birth to child (Kasturi's condition is revealed after having 11 children) and after being mother. Her whole life is dedicated to her whole family. A very pointed statement brings attention, "How trapped could nature make a woman? (DD 7)"

Virmati, the daughter, symbolizes the country's struggle for independence on macro level. Psychologically, she reveals her rebellious nature against deep-rooted conventions of morality especially for a girl. She undertakes her journey to the path leading to one's individuality but to her, it leaves in the midway with no achievement. But her image is of a woman unfettered. Ida, Virmati's daughter is the product of post independence era and establishes herself as an independent woman. She starts her journey to find an insight into her mother's past, denies her and revolts against the ways and follies. The opening line reveals her anguish "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I started at the fire that rose from her shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept" (DD1).

The novel traces Virmati's quest for freedom and identity, her desperation for a space of her own to study. Her desire to shed the surrogate motherhood, imposed on her. Being the eldest daughter she is burdened with family duties because of her mother's incessant pregnancies. The girls: Virmati, Indumati, Gunvati, Hemavati, Vidyavati and Parvati. The boys: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishnanath, Parkashnath and Hiranath. The one cause for Virmati's frustration was her mother's continuous breeding. Virmati was never remained free. At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. But,

. . . When she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother's arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. 'Have you seen to their food milk clothes studies?' . . . 'I am just going', protest Virmati finally. 'Why can't Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?' 'You know they don't listen to her', snapped Kasturi. 'You are the eldest. If you don't see to things, Who will?' (DD 6)

A constant sufferer Virmati, nurses a desire of being as independent, defiant and assertive as her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala sows the seeds of freedom in Virmati. She symbolizes modernity as not following the conventional norms which limits daughter to an early marriage and then home and family. She encourages her for independence and for equal rights for women, thus epitomizing the post colonial emancipated 'New Woman'. New woman breaks the customs of the tradition bound society. Since the establishment of the society, woman is divided social security, political awareness, and economic liberation. In this context, Simone De Beauvoir comments: "The situation of woman is that she a free and autonomous being likes creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assure the status of the other." (167)

Both Shakuntala and Virmati come out of this ideological framework of being typical Indian woman. Shakuntala takes part in the political Gandhian movement whereas Kasturi's ideology is

confined to patriarchy and she thinks 'marriage' as the duty of every girl rather than studies. For Kasturi, Education means developing the mind for the benefits of the family and nothing more than that. But Shakuntala, like new woman, shares her view with Virmati. Lajwanti and Kasturi, on the opposite, get into clash with Shakuntala's ideas. They behold the stereotypical opinion that only a man is free to do a job, to go outside and to do his desired task whereas a girl has to take every step according to the norms of society. She does not have her own life. In one of the passage Kasturi says: "All the time in lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences, I tell her she should have been a man" (DD 16).

Catharine Stimpson has called the attention towards the "omissions, distortions, and trivializations" of women's experiences and the spheres to which women have historically been consigned, such as private life and the family" (Stimpson 17). Trying to find a woman's space and quest for her identity, Seemanthini Niranjana in Embodiment underscores a Lingyat woman Sharadamma, in this context in contrast with the activities of men. Virmati comes to know about her inner desire to find a self identity. So it was now useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside to education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore colleges. Thus, Shakuntala's visit plants the seeds of aspiration in Virmati, seeds to find her true place in society. For Kasturi, Virmati's practical education was complete but Virmati wants to study further even if she has to fight her mother. But Virmati was under household burden. All time, there were demanding noises. Eventually Virmati fails her Fine Arts. She shows a great fuss. Kasturi tells her that it is over now. Virmati, at the age of 17, was engaged to a canal engineer, Inderjeet. Virmati was outraged and frustrated at her failure. Thus, during her search to find an individual space, Virmati has to face many obstacles.

Family plays an important role in the novel. For the sake of family's name, Virmati is forced to sacrifice her study, her freedom. She is taught to be an ideal daughter. Family, the fundamental unit of society, can be seen as

perpetrating the larger patriarchal power structure. The institution of marriage makes woman an object of barter and subverts the right of woman to name children after the man. In this way, an entire sex lost its identity, in terms of socio-political and economic position and was vulnerable to exploitation. Virmati, in the novel, rejects both institutions. She rebels against stereotypical ideas provoking the honor of family relating to daughter. She goes against her family's will of arrange marriage with an engineer, Inderjit and falls in love with a Professor, Harish who is already married, who first appears in her life as her parent's tenant. The Professor was married as a child to an illiterate woman, whom he had tried to educate and had miserably failed. Professor's wife has no name till the middle of the book. She is the woman whose life's mission was to cook for and feed her family and keep the house clean. So, the Professor falls in love with his student Virmati who is passionately interested in studies. Professor and Virmati were in the same as college where Virmati always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the Professor's class and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male students.

The above lines point towards the greed to possess Virmati, in Professor. Freud discusses women as "sex objects to men. Men, he suggests split women symbolically and erotically into, mothers and sisters, on the one hand and prostitutes on the other" (Freud). The first attraction is Virmati's flower-like structure. It is to be noted that for centuries, female body is perceived as an object to be possessed by man. Seemanthini Niranjana speaking about Foucault (1978), "the body is the site of a range of institutional and regulatory discourses. The body becomes the very medium through which femininity (in its cultural form) is constituted" (Niranjana 109-110). V. Geetha talking about social attitude says: Women's bodies were often routinely viewed as objects of male desire and lust; a fact that was particularly evident in media images of women. Women's groups pointed to the range of sexual crimes that were directed at women - child abuse, incest, marital rape – to argue that their social

existence was invariably sexualized and therefore not seen as worthy of equality or justice. The family and larger kin group, they noted, actively aided this sexualization of women's bodies by valorizing against women, they insisted, which secured the patriarch's power, both at level of family and society.

Virmati's thought of her fiancé has been replaced by the thought of Professor. She was aware of Professor's paying attention to her. She was caught in Psychological conflict as on the one side there was family, customs, norms, and traditional values; and on the other was her illicit love for Professor, her desire to educate herself. Days passed and Virmati's confusion grew. "She would sometimes wish that . . . but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No Professor and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased" (DD 54). Her thoughts were splitter, by now, into two socially unacceptable pieces. Virmati has finished her BA and her marriage date was fixed. Professor insists her to tell Inderjit, her fiance about their relation. By gathering all her courage, Virmati defies her marriage. Her ideas come into conflict with Kasturi who always reminds her. Due to her modern outlook, Virmati becomes the victim of violence. Under 'mental slavery' in the male-dominated structure Kasturi grabbed Virmati by the hair and bangs her head against the wall.

The novel also traces history of India of independence and pre-independence days and by adapting the technique of flashback in a smooth manner. Though, pre-independence era is known as Modern era due to the intervention of Britishers, but traditionalistic ideas avail under the surface of modernity. The novel has a backdrop of history. The novelist's depiction of history of pre-independence days points that Manju Kapur has explored how the ideology of Britishers had shaken the roots of tradition and thus changed the stereo- typical thoughts. Kapur very skillfully, explains her psychological condition. When Virmati finds no solution to her problem of taking decision, then in the last she only tries to commit suicide thinking that death can bring solution to her worries. Her mind wandered to the thousands of mosquitoes

that hovered around the drains and all the fruit and halwai stalls in the market. Then to her father's shop, the old house, her old school, her new house, her new college, incoherent pictures jumbling about in her unhappy mind.

Virmati becomes a pendulum between education and marriage. When she is compelled to marry the canal engineer, she protests and writes a letter to Professor Harish whom she loves dearly and says: "I couldn't think, and all I heard around me was talk of marriage...So you of all people should understand my actions!" (DD 92) Like an Epistolary novel, Manju Kapur has devoted a complete chapter of her novel *Difficult Daughters* to the letters of Virmati and Professor Harish. In one of the letters Virmati says 'no' to Harish for further love meetings and ends up with him as she comes to know about the pregnancy brings calm and soothes Kasturi as for Kasturi, her daughter is safe now, but it shakes Virmati completely as on the one side Professor draws his intense love on Virmati and on the other, he is also involved with his wife. How can a man be faithful and loyal to both sides? Professor, very cunningly does not want to leave young Viru and also not his domestic and devoted wife.

This attitude of Harish is a criticizing one. Here, Stereotypical ideology related to gender bias is depicted by Kasturi "It will be a boy, and this is what, everyman wants, even if he is educated" (104). Thus, a girl is neglected in our society; hence, the result is female feticide. Professor, on the other side, justifies himself by saying the words that he does all this 'to bring back domestic harmony'. But now Virmati inclines towards her deep rooted traditions and norms "I am proud that I belong to such a family, and I must keep up its traditions" (107). Thus, she finds herself in cultural identity. Now she thinks: "This is the real punishment for what I have done" (109). But after that Virmati is treated more harshly. She just holds each happening occurring around her and keeps mum but soon she takes her decision to go to Lahore to do her BT (Bachelors of teachers Training) in spite of several unprecedented hurdles.

Kasturi makes one last attempt to make her daughter see reason before they departed. She appeals to her: "If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself" (111). Kasturi curses her by saying: "God has put you on earth to punish me" (111). In Lahore, Virmati, like Shakuntala, finds 'autonomy' and 'freedom'. Here, she is also under the impact of Swarnalata who is an ultra committed feminist and who takes her to a meeting in Punjab Women's Students Conference where she, after listening to her speech joins a combat in her mind. Nowhere, Virmati finds her identity in the arena of 'new woman' and also in her traditional family she feels herself an outsider. She realizes that "These larger spaces were not for her" (144) whereas Swarnalata comes up an assertive character.

In Lahore, Virmati, very innocently, convinces at Harish's words. She goes to meet him but she reacts adversely on Harish's irresolute attitude. She directly scolds him when he shows his helplessness to marry her:

I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace . . . and why? Because I am an idiot . . . I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right. Men do take advantage of Women! (149)

The last line in the above passage clearly indicates the original side of Harish. Harish always seduces Virmati through culture, sending her Petrarchan sonnets and through referring to Machiavelli and the Greek tragedy. The Professor, in actuality, wants to have Virmati not as his wife but as a woman to gratify intellectual needs. However, although Virmati believes that she and Professor are bound together by the bonds of intellectual compatibility, it is only the physical lust that overpowers them, whenever they are together. It is interesting to note that Virmati talks of her identity, her freedom but her freedom is confined only to

her body and heart. She does not attempt to utilize her education as Shakuntala did.

Virmati struggles between the physical and moral; the head and heart. Finally she gives way to her heart and body. Virmati is engaged to an engineer initially but series of incidents propel the family members to postpone the wedding. This incident paves way for Virmati to begin an illicit relationship, with the married Professor living next door. Virmati undergoes the trials and tribulations of a love that has little hope of social acceptance. The Oxford returned Professor finds little to share with his uneducated wife and is unable to resist the charms of Virmati, who is innocent and hungry for knowledge and love. Bound at the hands of her love, Virmati becomes pregnant and due to this startled finding in her belly, she does not appear well in her exams. Manju Kapur has equalized her condition to that of 'Fool' character of Shakespeare's plays: Now, each of Harish's words echoed in her mind with an irony he had taught her to recognize in Shakespeare's texts, Tragic irony, comic irony, how he had loved to expand on them. Which species was this? It lacked the epic proportions of tragedy, and the love-courtship-marriage theme of comedy.

Virmati splits into pieces when she finds her love Harish for whom she revolted against each emotional and social part of her life is indifferent to her state. She herself goes for an abortion to be done. After abortion she realizes half the meaning to be called woman and the illusion of romantic love. Ida says: "That was all she wanted to do. Forget, forget, forget. She felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she construed as yearning for the Professor... feel his love and sympathy, his regret that he wasn't there pouring over her in a great tidal wave that would cleanse her of all guilt and sorrow!" (173). Ida, listener of the story, thinks of her own abortion when her husband Prabhakar insisted her to do so. She becomes hard toward Harish on meeting but Harish again justifies. It is important to note that Virmati lacks 'resistance'. She does resist towards family and society, but fails to resist towards Harish's love. She is compelled to lead a life of compromises quite in prosecution with her ideals from which she finds no escape. After a

series of vicissitudes, including a period as a school principal in a small Himalayan state, Virmati finally marries the man she loves and returns to Amritsar to live with him. However, Harish refuses to leave his first wife. In the house of Harish, she is not considered an identity but the second wife of Harish who has snatched the rights of his first wife Ganga she has to live like an outsider in the family; marginalized by her in laws.

Virmati went to the Angan to bring the clothes. She was bare except for her own, hanging forlornly at the end. She took them down, and clenched her lips. She wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life. Virmati's mother-in-law holds Virmati solely responsible for the marriage: "If she had not gone after him, he would not have strayed" (DD 192). And she also believes that "He was a good son. How was it his fault if he was caught in the trap of some shameless young Punjabi" (193). Virmati is being realized that she has done wrong. She feels "I should not, cannot, will not marry you. It will not be fair. And now she had married him, but the old words were still springing to her lips, so many futile noises in the air" (212). Being the second wife of Harish, she loses all sense of identity: the continuation of her education feels no more dreams of independence. Virmati undergoes the humiliation and decides to "walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had created out for her" (196). When Virmati's father Suraj Prakash dies, she is blamed Baoji always looked pale and tired. After what his daughter did he was never the same. And the next day, Virmati's grandfather Lala Diwan Chand is expired. At this news, Virmati feels a hardening around her heart that she thought nothing could remove. Her father had died without forgiving her, and now her grandfather too. Her condition becomes wretched: "It was almost as though she had gone mad. Forgotten who she was, who she was married to, and all her obligations." (240)

In the end, Virmati's story disappears and becomes irrelevant swallowed in the greater tragedy of partition. It is only after Virmati's death that her daughter, Ida sees her as a lonely woman who had committed the unforgivable sin of carving

an identity of her own. She is considered as a sinner to the backbone. When she dies, she is neither cremated according to her wishes nor her voice and her identity is recognized by anybody. Even her daughter does not consider the ways of her mother justified. Any parent who believes what is written in the book would lock up the daughter again, because it is better not to give the daughter any freedom because it will be so grossly 'misused'. The story tells the tale of a difficult daughter Virmati. Such kinds of daughters are difficult to rear. It is only Virmati who is the difficult daughter in the prosperous merchant family of Lala Diwan Chand. While in the generation of Kasturi, woman's role was confined to childbearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati took some bold and radical steps in joining the political movement for India's freedom, asserted the need for women education and independence. "As a non-chalant representative of the middle generation, Virmati breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women." (Milhoutra 164)

The story tells the tale not only of Virmati but of other difficult daughters who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggle for independence in their lives. Virmati's daughter Ida is shown as leading a free life than her mother in external terms, yet inside her she feels the same anxieties as her mother "I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society" (DD 279). Ida admits that "this 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 anymore" (280). Ida is the narrator through whose voice Kapur speaks. In *Difficult Daughters* we do not listen to Virmati's 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. Though, at the center of the narrative we see a woman who fights, but falls and fails, Kapur's novel shows that what happens to Virmati is the representative destiny of Indian woman. However, Gur Pyari Jandial correctly points out that it is a mistake to devalue Virmati's struggle just because she failed, for what mattered

was to have made the attempt, "to break the patriarchal mould, and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement." (Jandial 47)

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