Research Article

Challenges of the Entangled Woman in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters

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Abstract:

This study explores the changing role of women as wives in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. It examines how women experience marriage, patriarchy, family responsibilities, and social expectations in a traditional Indian society. Through the character of Virmati the novelist portrays women's struggles for identity, freedom, love, and individuality within marital relationships. The study highlights the conflict between traditional values and modern aspirations, revealing how women gradually challenge male dominance and seek independence. It also analyses the transformation of wifehood and the growing awareness of women's rights, choices, and self-identity in contemporary society.

Introduction:

Challenges of the Entangled Woman in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters: The major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been the delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture when individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas, and marital bliss and the woman's role at home are the 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" (Kumar 194). The finite dimensions of the relationships between man and woman have been imposed on her by man who is ruled by the mastery-motive.

The duties and responsibilities that a woman holds as wife are tremendous. *Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman who is torn between family duty, the desire for education and illicit love. The reason for this is the Oxford returned Professor Harish, who falls in love with his student and eventually marries her as his second wife, without divorcing the first wife. This seems to be little shocking. The existing agony of being a second wife is beautifully depicted by the novelist.

In the novel *Difficult Daughter's* Virmati, the protagonist pursues the professor Harish to marry her after a long term of clandestine relationship. He submits to her wishes and they get married and Virmati is brought to the house of the professor as his second wife. On one hand she succeeds in her illicit affair but on the other she loses both the families. Hence Virmati suffers throughout her life and her little pleasures, her sufferings, her depressing life as a mistress and finally as a second wife, all these seemed to be her personal and private sorrows about which no one is concerned. Virmati humbly accepts her fate of being a second wife without question.

Marrying a self-centered man, Virmati's marriage becomes disastrous. It is engulfed with melancholy and dislikes. She is overwhelmed with sadness, hopelessness and depression. It is pointed out in the novel that, she felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she constructed as yearning for the professor. Oh, how she longed to meet him, to throw herself on his chest, babbled out her story, 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 sorrows. (*Diffcult Daughters(* 160)

Virmati admires each and every word of the professor. She is full of admiration for him. She feels sympathetic too when he tells her about his illiterate wife who is not at all ready to learn anything. She believes and convinces herself that the professor is in need of a companion. The marriage between Virmati and Harish is arranged by none other than the poet friend of Harish. They get married and when they reach home, the response from the family members is not warm. Kishori Devi, the mother of Harish considers Virmati as a witch. She also feels that her son has been trapped by an immoral woman. Virmati shows a friendly hand to the children of Harish, but Guddiya, the daughter of Harish finds herself always busy whereas Giridhar, his son is snatched away by his mother Ganga. She says, "you want her to take him away too; one is not enough her that" (*Difficult Daughters* 203). Virmati comes across many sad events after she becomes the wife of Harish.

It is pointed out in the novel that if any Indian woman marries without the consent of her family she is regarded as an outcast in the family. Harish comes closer to her and she becomes pregnant. This is her first

pregnancy after her promotion as second wife. Unfortunately, that leads to a miscarriage. She believes that it is the punishment of God for Harish. Seeing the unpleasant condition in Moti cottage, she goes to Lahore to continue her Master of Arts in Philosophy. When she returns she finds that all the members of the family have vacated to Kanpur because of the communal riots in Amristar. The newly married couple enjoys complete privacy. Virmati conceives for the second time and the result is the birth of her daughter Ida. Virmati loses her father in a communal riot. Because of her marriage with Harish, she is not allowed to attend the funeral ceremony, but Harish is allowed to attend the function.

Virmati undergoes physical suffering, the reason for which is Harish himself who fails to understand the mental stress of Virmati. The reason for Harish to marry Virmati is that he finds no satisfaction in Ganga, his first wife. He searches for love and finds it is Virmati who can fulfill all his intellectual necessities. But the society in which Harish lives is dominated by the patriarchs which is least bothered about Virmati who carves for self-identity. Kapur comments on Virmati that, "In Ganga, she had a rival whom she did not want to see!" (*Difficult Daughters* 235) that is why Virmati hates to visit home even at holidays.

Before marrying Virmati, Harish was clever enough to enjoy both Virmati and his wife. On the one hand he keeps relationship with Virmati and on the other becomes the father of a son through his wife Ganga. Though he declares his love for Virmati, he cannot cut off his sexual relationship with his wife Ganga. When Virmati asks him about their marriage, he lectures about his status and reputation in the society. Virmati becomes a sorrow-stricken woman for her love.

Kasturi, the mother of Virmati has been brought up in such a way as to become a good wife and mother. Marriage finally becomes the ultimate solution for her, after all those illicit relations with the Harish's. It is this relation which brings identity to Virmati even if it is that of the professor's second wife. Marriage is the solution for her escape from the worry of being socially condemned. This will give her a chance to come back into the society. Marriage will also make her free from the fear of insecurity and uncertainty. The novelist presents the outlook of Ganga through the following words: "Her husband continued to be Ganga's public statement of selfhood. Her bindi and her bangles, her toe rings and her mangalstura, all managed to suggest that he was still her god" (*Difficult Daughters* 257).

Ganga, the first wife of Harish is short and plump. She is a traditional woman with two children. He is not satisfied with his illiterate wife. So he gets attracted towards Virmati. Ganga is considered as the maid of his house, as she takes care of his entire domestic needs, especially she keeps the house clean and tidy. Virmati yearns to wash the clothes of Harish but Ganga never allows her to touch his clothes. But she is capable enough to fulfill his intellectual urge. This quality is lacking in Ganga who is meek and mild. Ganga and the professor's mother force Virmati to lead a suppressed life. The professor enjoys the best of both his wives. There, he has first wife who looks after his house, washes his clothes, keeps the house tidy, takes care of the children and fulfills all the basic needs, whereas on the other side he has Virmati, who fulfills his intellectual desire which Ganga cannot fulfill. Jandial comments that Harish. The professor enjoys life both ways. At home he has his wife Ganga-a servant to wash his clothes, cook his food, worship the very ground on which he walks. In Virmati, he has an educated, intellectual, secret wife who satisfies his physical and mental needs. (125)

Harish feels that his wife Ganga should have been educated. For that, tries hard to teach her. And Virmati considers it very noble that Harish cares for women's education like her grandfather. Ganga marries Harish at an early age. Though illiterate she is very faithful to her husband. She is a typical Hindu traditional wife. According to the Kapur, it is the lot of very Indian woman to suffer and adjust in their lives. Ganga belongs to the middle-class woman of those days. There develops a sense of isolation by the entry of Virmati. Ganga knows full well that she has to fight and struggle all alone. In other words she can be called an "unpaid servant of the professor*"(DD* 125). Her importance in the life with Harish is shortened by the entry of Virmati. Throughout the novel, Ganga, the illiterate wife cannot prove herself to be an efficient soul mate for her husband. Singh opines :

Like Kasturi and Ganga, the professor's wife, marriage is a religious and a social institution, where love is not the basis of marriage. She too has a super domestic sensibility. Her cooking is enjoyed by her educated husband anglicized to a point, and who is otherwise very aloof. Just living with him and bearing his children is enough for her. (167 – 168).

When Virmati gets married, she is not accepted by her own family as well as the family of the professor. She is given the outer room and the study room of his house. She is neither allowed to cook nor wash or do other domestic work in his house. Though she is legally his second wife, her status is only that of an illegitimate wife. Due to the partition of India, the professor's first wife Ganga, Kishori Devi and children leave to their own

home town. Thus Virmati and Harish unite together once again and Virmati obtains the place of a wife and a mother of a daughter. Indira Bhatt emphatically asserts:

Once married she dissolves like a salt doll. Whatever identity she has in her father's family, she loses it and is unable to make space for herself on her own. She remains on the fringe, Marginalized, so called companion as boasted by her husband. One feels that at the end would be some meaningful relationship, a meaning to her life. But no, there is nothing except what partition of India gives her. (130 – 31).

Though Virmati is successful enough to marry Harish, she has no space left behind to lead a peaceful life in her husband's house. Even after her marriage, Virmati is given only the status of an outcast. She is excluded from the house, which is the territory of Ganga. Virmati is given a congested space where she is forced to submission in a subtle way. But Harish's attitude towards Virmati comforts her. According to Malik : Harish's attitude towards her (Virmati) is patronizing and demeaning. His interest in her is an extension of self-love awakening her intellect and emotions inflates his ego. Undergoing a gradual process of self-effacement, her energies are directed towards pleasing him while she herself remains pouched. (135)

Virmati crosses the tradition bound limits allotted for Indian women. She compels Harish to marry her but her status as a second wife brings many problems. She faces the hostility of both the families. She has proved herself to be the misfit for the society as the latter do not accept such a relationship. And so Virmati suffer in her married life. After becoming the wife of Harish, Virmati's condition has become a subdued and suppressed one. The ideas and opinions of Virmati are cut short and she is not at allowed to express her opinion, whereas Harish gives his detailed reasons and opinions. Virmati is not even heard out completely. Mishra opines that

Kapur never permits Virmati 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. While it does provide an escape from a loveless arranged marriage, it is itself furtive and claustrophobic, offering only a stolen togetherness behind curtained window. (106).

There is no proper understanding between Harish and Virmati. Often there rises gossip over silly issues. For instance, when Virmati suggests the name of her forthcoming child, Harish dispassionately rejects her suggestion. Harish is not at all considerate and gentle in his decisions. Instead he shouts and gives a long lecture to Virmati to silence her. Hence Virmati suffers a lot.

Only after marrying Virmati, the professor realizes that the happiest moment of his life has prevailed when they are in love with each other. So he decides to send Virmati to Lahore to do her Master of Arts. This would help her to invoke broader perspective towards her life. So it is decided that she should stay in Leela's house in Lahore. She enjoyes the days with the children of Leela. In Amritsar, Harish becomes the Principal of the Arya Sabha College and he couldn't get any time to meet Virmati in Lahore. Rollason points out that:

Virmati's married life with the professor in Amritsar turns out to be a disaster. She lives under the implacable and hostile gaze of Ganga, her husband's first wife, with whom she has to live. She loses all sense of identity: The continuation of her education she studies for a higher degree in Philosophy, but without enthusiasm feeds no more dreams of independence. In the end her individual history disappears and become all but irrelevant, swallowed up in the greater and more resonant collective tragedy of partition. (180).

In Harish's house, Virmati comes to apposition where she has to directly face her mother-in-law and his first wife. The result is that she has to bear the curses of Ganga. Virmati suffers the separation from her own family and leads an isolated dull life in the company of the professor. Hussain comments realistically on the sad plight of Virmati :

The object of her affections, the liberal professor Harish, is married. He seduces her without thought of their future. But Virmati, to her family's fury, runs away to live as his second wife. Her plight is at the heart of the novel. Sympathy, even in novels set in the past, is generally for the ousted first spouse; here, we experience the emotional tribulations of the second. (20)

Virmati in her useless attempts, she tries hard to keep Ida under her control, Ida on the other side thinks about like a woman of uncontrollable emotions. Ida belongs to the post-Independence generation. She is psychologically strong. As her husband Prabahar denies maternity, she breaks up her marriage. The loss of her marriage is also due to her forced abortion. Ida parts herself from the so called marriage bond. She says, "In denying that incipient little thing in my belly he sowed the seeds of our break up" (144). She frees herself from the conventional social structures which bind the Indian women. The strength which is lacking in Virmati is found in abundance in Ida. Virmati not only neglected her duty towards only her daughter but also seized the rightful place which belonged to Ganga and thus she victimized them both.

Virmati is bold enough to cross the borders drawn by her own parents. But inspite of that she gets trapped in another cage where she can do nothing except adjust, adapt and accommodate. Also she goes against the

expectation of the society by crossing the patriarchal rules to assert her individuality and by doing so she could easily attain self fulfilment. But on the whole she is a loser, whose behaviour separates her from her own family and is unable to create a place for herself for which she was striving hard so long. Thus Ida is justified in saying that she detests becoming like her mother. This is all because of Virmati's inability to be independent in life.

Conclusion:

Manju Kapur has presented the difficulties of woman who becomes a wife of a man. Virmathi has a painful married life, but she is a wife of her husband. Kapur pictures the Indian scenario where women suffer even after their marriage. Thus the novels of Kapur focus that the virtues required in a wife are completely self-negating, self-sacrifice, tolerance and submission. It is in the light of these repressive notions that the Indian woman's difficulty in achieving autonomy in their life.

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