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Manju Kapur's Portrayal of an Evolution of a New Woman in Difficult Daughters

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ABSTRACT: During the British rule, Majority Indian women participated in the re-formist movement. They expressed their voice by writing against the British rule. As a result, Many Indian women found the writing as a powerful medium to disclose a woman's thoughts and experiences within the domestic arena. In the 21st century which was considered as the age of modernity, it gives a plenty of opportunities to the Indian women writers to express the prolonged suffering of women in the patriarchal society. They opted writing as the right medium to represent their experiences by portraying different women characters. They started narrating the struggles of women in different phases of their lives in various roles as a daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law, Grandmother etc...Having focused on the problems faced by women, the women writers have started writing the struggle of new women for getting freedom from the shackles of tradition. They are successful in narrating different issues and the problems faced by Indian women. The paper focuses on to trace the theme of emerging of a new woman by overcoming their tensions and conflicts, problems and difficulties in their lives. This paper studies how Manju Kapur is successful in depicting the character Virmati as a representative of the typical modern Indian women whose life is devastated with the patriarchy and how she fought for being independent.

KEYWORDS: Education, Love and Relationship, Independence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The women novelists have made significant contributions to Indian English literature. Authors like Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai etc. have gained the international reputation for their portrayals of women's experiences. Many of the women novelists wrote their fiction based on the experiences that they have experienced in their personal lives as well as other women in the society around them. One among the finest writers of the modern era is Manju Kapur. She is one of the leading Indian novelists of the 21st century. She is regarded as the brightest light among Indian female English writers. She is a rising literary star who has made a big contribution to Indian fiction through her work. (Rekha S, Mr. Ramakrishnan, 2021)

She is presently living in Delhi and is working as a teacher of English Literature. She was bestowed with the Commonwealth Prize for her first novel "Difficult Daughters" (1998) in Eurasia Section and the novel was one of the bestsellers in India.

The time setting of this novel is during the partition time of Amritsar (India) and La-hore (Pakistan). It is a life story of Virmati. The protagonist of the story is Virmati. She struggles for the sake of getting higher education. She tries to avoid the marriage proposal by her family and their wish to get her married to a canal engineer, Indrajeet. But she loves a married professor, Harish. Her craving for an illicit relationship, with Harish, is the conflict in the novel.

On the other hand, Virmati is being inspired by Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin. Sha-kuntula is a postgraduate. When she visits Virmati's family, Virmati observes that Every one respects her. She understands that Shakuntula's education gives her the special privileges in the house. The education, Shakuntula has got, gives her freedom to live as she wishes. She is very individualistic. She has got leadership qualities which lead her to participate in freedom movement. Like Shakuntula, Virmati is reluctant to get married. She does not confine herself to the role of woman as wife, mother or daughter-in-law. As a result, Virmati longs for education. Even after getting married to Harish, Virmati completes her higher education.

Manju Kapur has successfully presented the three generations of women by portraying three characters viz: Kasthuri, Virmati and Ida. Kasthuri, Viramati's mother and Ida, Virmati's daughter. Kasturi is a difficult daughter to her mother and Virmati is the difficult daughter to Kasturi and hence Ida is the difficult daughter to Virmati. The term difficult daughters are justified by the characters as they decide to be individuals. They fight for freedom. They don't accept the wishes of their mothers.

According to Lizy V. (2016), The novel "Difficult Daughters" is a connotation to a point that a woman, who is fighting for freedom and individuality, to search for self, is labelled as a difficult daughter in the family and the society. Kasturi, Virmati and Ida: These three generations fail to understand each other's love. i.e. love of mother and daughter. Those women characters are portrayed in a way that they protested for the rights of women and the society's obsession with its conservative opinions of women. Virmati's family was not a fictional, but it was the story of a real, middle class home with fathers, mothers and brothers and sisters. (Lizy V 2016)

An honest exploration of the psyche of an Indian woman is done in this paper through a character named Viramti. Manju Kapur presents the character Virmati as an example in the traditional bound society. The character Virmati, in the novel "Difficult Daughters", is caught between the desires for receiving higher education and for being independent in the male dominated society.

II. VIRMATI EMERGING AS A NEW WOMAN

The backdrop of the novel, "Difficult Daughters" is set in Indian independence movement. The story revolves around a girl, named Virmati who is living in Amritsar, India, during 1940s and 1950s. She is a 17 years old young girl at the beginning of the story. She has hailed from a conservative Punjabi middle class family. She is very intelligent and ambitious woman and she defies the societal expectations and challenges the traditional women roles of woman. The story in the novel begins in the burial ground where Ida mourns on the death of her mother, Virmati. Ida, along with her uncle, Kailashnath, collects the remains of her mother Virmati after death.

As the novel progresses, Virmati evolves from a Punjabi girl to a school principal. She has tasted the fruits of freedom in Lahore where she has completed her Bachelor of Teaching. The education, that she has got, gives her knowledge to realize the things which are more important than marriage. After being with Swarna, her roommate in Lahore, Virmati has become the part of the Indian independence movement.

As the novel progresses, Virmati evolves as a new woman in several ways. They are:

2.1 Education and Independence

Since Viramti is the eldest one in the family, she has to be the custodian of taking care of her younger siblings like clothing, bathing and nursing them. She goes to school after completion of all household works. In the words of Kasturi:

"You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you." (Difficult Daughters: 59-01)

Virmati engages her time by helping her ever-pregnant mother with the housework, taking care of all her younger siblings. (Lizy V 2016)

Rekha S, Mr. Ramakrishnan (2021) commented that in Manju Kapur's writings, the dominance of the mother is more obvious than the dominance of the fathers.

Virmati strongly believes that education is the only way to lead her own life. After the visit of Shakuntala's to Virmati's home, Virmati decides to oppose her mother and family. Virmati starts to involve in fulfilling of her wish to get education which she believes to lead her to personal freedom.

As Lizy V stated (2016), The protagonist, Viramti, is crushed between desire for love and her responsibility of her family. Thus, internal and external conflicting experiences, and expectation caused the damage of Virmati's life.

The Visit of Shakuntala (Cousin of Virmati) to Virmati's family add fuel to Virmati's desire of receiving education. Virmati understands that the education is only the rea-son of Shkuntala being the centre of attraction in the family. Shakuntala has com-pleted post graduation. The education provides Shakuntala to lead her own life. It strengthens her leadership qualities. She has got her own feministic attitudes and ide-ology. These qualities attract Virmati a lot and Shakuntula 's life style has become blue print for Virmati. Virmati wants to live like how Shakuntula does. Virmati under-stands that everything comes if she is well educated.

“Shakuntala's visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. It was possible to be something other than a wife. Images of Shakuntala Phenji kept floating through her head, Shakutala Pehnji who having done her M.Sc. in Chemistry, had gone about tasting the wine of freedom.”(Difficult Daughters: 19-01)

Virmati desired to get education and her journey has started towards self-discovery after joining in a college in Delhi. There she experienced more freedom and progres-sive environment. This exposure gives her confidence to question the traditional cus-toms and beliefs that restrict woman's progress and aspirations. In the words of Priyanka Kumari, Niraj Dang(2021),The educated women are aware of their rights and expressed their opposition to their own social exploitation

She rebels against the role assigned to woman by the male dominated society. Despite her family disapproval, Virmati pursues her education. She completed her Bachelor of Teaching and she got Masters degree in Literature too. In this regard, Priyanka Kumari, Niraj Dang(2021) mentioned that the character of Virmati is portrayed by the novelist as a woman who is on the verge of self-discovery the sudden decision to take control of her life. As Lizy V (2016) stated, Virmati emerges as a fighter and survivor by facing the hardships in the every stage of her life.

Manju Kapur has used the Indian independence movement as a backdrop and the struggle for freedom of India from the clutches of the British is to be clearly compre-hensive that an Indian woman who fight for freedom from the hands of conservative patriarchal society.

In the words of Shkuntala:

These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still Supposed to marry, and nothing else.” (Difficult Daughters-17)

2.2 Love and Relationship

Virmati's longing for affection becomes a sign of change in the plot of the novel. Because there are some situations like Kasturi is annoyed and push Virmati away when she put her next to the baby who is being fed by her. In the view of Lizy V(2016), The absence or lack of love and affection form her own family at home causes these daughters to search for sympathy outside which in turn results in deceiving the family. they face challenges from family and society and the challenges they throw at family and society, become a long saga of struggle, resulting in pain that spans motherhood of three generations. (Priyanka Kumari, Niraj Dang, 2021)

Love and relationship is the central conflict of the novel. The character named Virmati is the protagonist of the novel “Difficult Daughters.” Virmati is introduced as a 17 years girl. The whole family depends on Virmati. She is busy in completing the household work along with taking care of her younger siblings. Ajaz Ahmad Bhat, Showkat Ahmad Wani, Dr.Alka Gopal(2016) commented that Virmati is the second mother to her younger siblings. She never thinks about herself and dedicates herself for caring her siblings and family. She is starving for love from her own family. But she fails to receive love from her own family.

Virmati falls in love with Harish, her neighbour. He has returned from the UK. He is a professor, who is already married. He is a father to a child. His wife's name is Ganga. He has a mother and sister. Viramti has to face the societal pressures for being an unmarried woman involves in an illicit relationship with a married man is unaccepta-ble to the conservative society of that time. Harish marries Virmati as a second wife. He takes her to his home Harish's mother gets shocked to accept the sight of her son's second marriage after a while, she accepts and welcomes her into her family. But Harish first wife, Ganga can't digest it. Ganga is unable to question him as well as her mother-in-Law for what her son has done. Virmati herself invites a lot of rejection from society as well as from her own family for

breaking the social norms in the pa-triarchal society of those days. As a result, she is not allowed to be the part of death rituals of her father.

2.3 Virmati's struggles and sacrifices

At first, Viramti has to face opposition from her own family for her education though she has taken care of her young siblings. Second, She has fallen in love with the pro-fessor which is not accepted by the then Society. Because he is married and a father. After the professor married Virmati as a second wife. Professor lands Virmati in his house. She has to live in the same house where his first family resides. She feels iso-lated. She spends her time lonely until Harish comes from school. Because except Harish, No one is speaking to Virmati. She sacrifices her whole life for the wrong deed that she has done with the professor. Because, she is not comfortable even after getting married to Harish. To say, Virmati is the victim of love.

“Virmati became better, but not less dull. One abortion and one miscarriage. She was young, she told herself, years stretched out before her. Years of penetration, years of her insides churning with pregnant beginnings.” (Difficult Daughters: 246-08)

After all this turmoil she encounters, she remains as a steadfast in fulfilling her per-sonal desires like getting married to Harish and getting education. Virmati's character is portrayed in the novel as a woman seeking a break from traditional roles and expectations. These key aspects in the novel “Difficult Daughters” are very clear evident about the Viramti's transformation from a girl to a new woman.

With the passage of time, the roles of a woman shifts and changes. The protagonist of the novel is generous, suffering, humble, and calm. They are models of confident, emphatic, cultured, protesting, and ambitious individuals who are aware of their needs while proving their identities to the world. (Priyanka Kumari, Niraj Dang, 2021)

III. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

After reading the story of Virmati, the character itself gives lot of strength and confi-dence to the people who are striving for individuality and live on their foot. The no-vels of Indian women writers reflect the culture and the lives of women at their time-sin India. After reading Manju Kapur's “Difficult Daughters,” the reader will under-stand how important it is to a mother to understand the love of her daughter. Because, as a mother Kasturi and Virmati fail to understand each other's love. Virmati and Ida fail to understand each other's love. The outcome of their lives is being unsuccessful. They have to keep their endless search for love and freedom.

In fact, this novel gives a strong feministic perspective which gets transformed from generation to generation in terms of the roles of a woman as wifhood, motherhood and above all womanhood.

The reader would get clarity after reading the novel that women should be strong both physically and mentally. However, they were caught in the web of the patriarchal system. They should be in a position to realize their strength to achieve their individuality. Finally, this paper concludes that a gradual change, into the minds of women, has come from generation to generation. Women novelists are very successful in representing women's conditions through their characters.

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