

## DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS: A SKETCH OF WOMEN FORM THE WRITER'S PARSPECTIVE

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The man-woman differences lead feminism as a social movement sought to redress this imbalance in society by providing female stage with the same rights, regulations and opportunities as men in order to be able to take their rightful place in this world. Manju Kapur represents the craving for self-sufficiently and separate identity in her woman protagonists in this post modern novel in a traditional thread. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) presents Virmati and her intellectual thirsts. Virmati acts and behaves like a difficult daughter for her mother and also for her daughter Ida in due course of time, and she becomes a difficult daughter for Virmati. Both Virmati and Ida eventually end up bearing a disproportionate burden of coercion and exploitation. In the very first line, the exploitation of Virmati is seen and this thing not is occurred again next time, where Ida bursts out, "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother."<sup>1</sup> In the post colonial era, the partition has been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. Kapur projects the image of the rebellious but stoic women ultimately breaking traditional confines in the backdrop of a conventional narrative thread. Dora Sales Salvador in her notes to her Spanish Translation of this novel points out,

"Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life opportunities going beyond convention were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British"<sup>2</sup>

The theme of *Difficult Daughters* is the search for control over one's destiny. Virmati seeks human relations that will permit her to practice the degree of control over her life which, as an educated woman, she deserves. Virmati is the eldest child, born in Amritsar in the Punjab in 1940. Her father, Suraj Prakash is of a progressive ideas and a traditionalist mother Kasturi, is obliged to give birth of no less than 11 children. Among them Virmati, Indumati, Gunvati, Hemvati, Vidyavati, and Parvati are girls and Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishnanath, Prakashnath, and Hiranathare boys. Kasturi aspires to a freer life than that offered her by those around her. This aspiration is condemned to failure, thanks to incomprehension she acquires from both her own family and that of the man she marries. She has to think that what she receives may not be occurred with her daughters. Even though she scolded them and snapped particularly Virmati as an eldest daughter.

"Viru, at least don't ruin whatever knitting I am trying to do, said Kasturi tartly one evening, 'why can't you make yourself useful? There is so much sewing to be done for the baby. There are sweaters to be made for the other children. It's shame that your hands are idle'"<sup>3</sup>

Virmati lives under the pressure of family responsibilities she lost her childhood in bringing up her brothers and sisters, still she never diminishes her further study. She belongs to a typical traditional family that believes of marrying off their daughters after receiving the basic

qualification of housekeeping traditionally. Virmati has to face lots of problems and turns due to her desire of higher education. She might be a second mother of her brothers and sisters after returning from the hills. The children were constantly demanding

“Viru Pehnji, we need more sugar and flour. You’ll have to unlock the storeroom again.’

‘Pehnji, she hit me, and took my book!’

‘It’s really mine! Bade Pitaji gave it to me!’

‘Viru! Vidya is crying!’

‘Pehnji! The uncle in school said to tell you Gopi hasn’t done his homework for a month!’

Such statements provided the background chorus of her education, and formed her character even more surely than any book might have done”<sup>4</sup>

The struggle begins when she failed in FA. Her mother Kasturi presses her to get married. Virmati is always seen as a sentimental starved being. It comes chaos in the story when she falls in love with Harish Chandra, a Professor in English, who is already married and living as a tenant in her aunt’s home at Lepel Griffin Road with his family-a mother, wife and children. In her early stage of life she is impressed by her cousin Shakuntala and that oxford returned Professor. Shakuntala is M.Sc. in Chemistry and her own thoughts about living life, and the impact of her life style impresses Virmati because she is educated and she is educated and participates in the political Gandhian movement. When Kasturi and Lajwanti reminded her of marriage, she gets angry ‘Another word about shadi, and I’m going back to Lahore’<sup>7</sup>. Even after marriage she continues such activities. The conversation between Shakuntala and Virmati gives the clear picture of her character.

“We travel entertain ourselves in the evening, follow such other works, read papers, attend seminars, one of us is even going abroad for higher studies.”<sup>5</sup>

Virmati thinks if she were like her cousin Shakuntala, once she utters, on the time of leaving Shakuntala,

“May be I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji, she wept. I wish I too could do things. But I am not clever.”<sup>6</sup>

The above lines show Virmati wants to be free and break the shackles of the society from her early stage. At the age of seventeen her parents think about her marriage with a canal engineer, Inderjeet. During this time she came in contact with Harish who inspires her from further studies. She passes her FA exam with marks that were respectable enough for a girl, thought her parents. Her marriage is postponed due to the death of her father-in-law and she makes her attention towards further studies. She gets admission in AS College where Harish teaches where he feels attracted towards her beauty. And one day she decides not to marry but to study further. This decision disturbs the whole family and she decides to commit a suicide but is saved by her father’s servant. Then Inderjeet marries to Indumati, her younger sister, and family decides to send Virmati to Lahore for further studies. This entire thing shows Virmati’s determination and strong will power.

She becomes the second mother of her younger sisters and brothers. From her childhood she has to bear the heavy responsibilities. She is willing to study more fervent when she meets Shakuntala. And after meeting her, she needs to make her own existence and leads a life on her own terms. If it might not meet Shakuntala, she would be a frog of the well for which the world is enough which is seen. Another thing is that if she could not be stressed to do the household

works as well she is obliged her parents and she might marry to Inderjeet. It is the lack of love which is gained from the parents and also from the rest of the family. What she wants, she had to be rebellious and then she got. She may think that she would be the string of the puppet which can be led by the family members for doing the household works. She never gets affection, love, care and attention from her mother too. When Virmati was of seventeen, even at that time her mother was pregnant, because of which she failed in her FA exams. Here Kasturi thinks that girls should be treated as a servant who has seen only the households like her.

Virmati is ready to sacrifice her family and all the principles of the male dominated society by continuing her higher studies. She wants to prove that she does not want to be a puppet whose string is in other's hands. She becomes the rebellion because she has strived hard to realize her own self. In this sense Virmati becomes the difficult daughter one for her parents because they always desire that their children must do what they said. She also becomes the difficult daughter for the difficult mother because Kasturi thinks that woman leads a life which is shown by the male dominance. Here it is cleared that woman becomes woman's opposite if she does not follow the rules which are generated by men. In the case of Virmati, she breaks the traditions and old family system. But the problem occurs is that she becomes the pendulum between education and marriage. She is treated more harshly when she rejects the marriage proposal. She just beholds each happening occurring around her and keeps silent and soon she takes her decision in spite of several unprecedented hurdles:

“Virmati, like so many other sub continental women, is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage. She rebels against that destiny, to the lasting shame of her family, above all of her mother. Insisting on her right to be educated, she manages to leave home to study in Lahore.”<sup>7</sup>

Virmati has completed her FA. Kasturi thinks that there is no need of further education, beyond the family, husband and children. She does not want Virmati to go for further studies. And they are the most important duties to do for any woman. Virmati cannot convince her mother and get herself engaged with Inderjeet. She has struggled more to continue to her education after engagement. She joins AS College for BT, college of Professor Harish. Here she becomes the target of the attractive of the professor who taught her English Literature. She has to pay the price of her education. His eyes remains fixed at Viru in most of the time. He appreciates her intelligence and capacity to understand the things in their proper direction. And by the time it turns into a romantic love. Professor does not happy with his married life, and it is true because he himself was the victim of the child marriage. Ganga, his wife is very devoted to him and cares of all his needs except his intellectual. Professor is for the first time acquaints her with romance in English Literature and saw the seeds of love in her fertile but virgin heart. As per the Indian proverb, girls are like the rivers which can be molded by the way which can be directed. Professor feels a sort of vacuum in his mind, body and heart and creates a lot of space for another woman except his wife. And this is the transition period of Virmati's life. She desires education and her dream to be independent like Shakuntala that pushed her closer to the Professor. The seeds of love rooted in her also and Harish writes to Virmati which appeal deep to his emotions which can be seen in one of his letters,

“How difficult it is to teach while you are sitting before me! Your face is the fixed point to which my eyes keep returning. Let the world-the class-notice and remark, I do not care. You are imprinted on my mind, my heart, my soul so firmly that until we can be united in a more permanent way I live in a shadowy insubstantial land.”<sup>8</sup>

Virmati finds herself in dilemma that either she has to marry Inderjit or study further she thinks when she reads a brief letter of Inderjit. She searches the words, but cannot find any sense that she is important to Inderjit. On the contrary Harish puts some words in his letter to Virmati by which she finds herself better with Harish,

“Anybody who digs in canals all day must have a soul as dull and uninspiring as the mud he deals in. What pain will he suffer? He does not even know you, has never tried to know you. For him, you are a woman that his family has arranged he should marry. For such men the individual is unimportant. It is the institution they are concerned with. If not you, then someone else.”<sup>9</sup>

The Professor is wise enough to feel the rhythm her heart. He does not miss any opportunity to trap her innocence in the net of his experience. He is an English Professor and by his effective letters Virmati shows her defiance to patriarchal authority and arranged marriage. She gets completely lost in the whirlpool of the misplaced passion for the professor. She refuses to marry Inderjit and trying to commit a suicide by drowning in canal but saved. When she begins to revolt against the family, Kasturi who always scolds her and bursts out the following words, “What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?”<sup>13</sup> Kasturi graduated at twelve in housekeeping because her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter’s qualifications. Generally, we think is always right, and she thinks orthodoxically. Kasturi believes in patriarchal values that are never revolted. Suraj Prakash, Virmati’s father is willing to study her further, and he always handles her and all her sisters with care,

“But why? Every girl has to go to her own home. This is your right, and our duty. As it is, we have taken our time, not wishing to hurry you. We have let you study, as much as any girl has studied in Amritsar.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally they locked up Virmati in the godown and arranged Indu for marriage to Inderjit. During this time the Professor has still been sending the love letters to Virmati through her younger sister Paro. The soaring balloon of the imagination of her love for the Professor gets punctured when she knows about Ganga’s pregnancy. She feels cheated. A woman can tolerate everything except another woman in her life, and it is Virmati. Here Virmati is also another woman for Ganga because she is legal wife of Professor. She can be treated as second after her marriage with the Professor. Ganga is pregnant and his double standard baffles her because he is expressing his love to her on the one hand and on the other making his wife pregnant. All these things come to know by writing letters to each other. In this state of mind she asks him to stop writing any more to her and acquaints him of her decision to go to Lahore for doing BT.

At this moment she keeps herself to be outspoken, bold, determined and action oriented. She burns all his letters and decides to have nothing more to do with him. She thinks that she never depends upon the Professor to sort out her problems. She does her strong determination for doing BT and increases the shame of family by making herself teacher and helping others. There are her patriarchal values because they believe in Arya Samaj Path and educating girls and making them powerful. Kasturi and Shakuntala go with her to admit in the college for BT to Lahore. And when the good bye takes place, Kasturi, her mother after all, moves by the tears in her eyes and also it with Virmati, unbent enough to give her an affectionate farewell. Virmati stays in hostel with Swarnalata, her room-mate, another figure like her cousin Shakuntala. She is so impressed with her that she cannot stop her saying about Swarnalata when she illustrates her to her cousin,

“Fancy Pehnji going so much by looks. Anybody would be impressed by Swarna’s eyes behind her glasses, eyes that refused to smile just because they were looked at. And what about the intelligence in her round face, and the friendliness that frank and open?”<sup>11</sup>

Here Harish tries to meet her. She even refuses to see him when he comes to meet at Lahore. But the blooming buds of individuality and self respect are very soon infected by the canker of her emotional weakness. She fails to withstand the pressure of the passion and implorations of the Professor. He brings her to his friend Syed’s guest room at Lahore where she succumbs to his emotional and physical needs. She lost her virginity and also the loss of her conscience for a moment and she cries but very soon she overcomes from the guilt and tries to rationalize. She believes that in spite of everything there is only one person in the world who is her well wisher in the real sense. But her greatest consolation is that she always thinks about Harish –a Professor who loves her, and she must be satisfied with that. But the tyranny comes when she finds herself pregnant. The irony is that Professor is not with her at the crucial moment of the termination of her pregnancy. She has torn between education and illicit love. She tired of the excuses or truths of Harish and one day she tells him,

“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.”<sup>12</sup>

She becomes more powerful than before while doing BT. At this time she participates in seminars, conferences, attending speeches, and movements. ‘Education led to independence and loose conduct’. Another mode of life begins when she starts her career as a principal in Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya in a small princely state in Himachal Pradesh. Virmati runs her school, her home, and passed the days busy and happy. Here Professor also visits her and his furtive nights stays with her spoil her career and she is expelled and compelled to resign. Again she has been raising the question of marriage. She decides to go to Shantiniketan and forget him for her good. Here she needs some treatment of departing herself from the Professor. If she has done this thing she may be happy in her rest of the life. But At that time when she does her journey via Delhi she goes to the house of Harish’ friend who knew everything about their love affair. She prefers to go there rather than wait for eleven hours at railway station. Once again his friend manages everything. He calls not only Harish but compels him to marry her also. The proverb is right that ‘a friend in deed is indeed’. Swarnalata, Virmati’s friend made her free from her unwanted pregnancy and a Professor’s friend gets them married. She becomes the second wife and goes with him at Amritsar. Ganga, his first wife has everything but no education still she has no any complaint from her life, on the contrary, Virmati is educated, and has a good looking and well-mannered husband still she has many problems had to face. In this regard education led to independence and loose conduct.

Viramti is ignored and has to face hostile gestures and gibes of all family members. She does not become only difficult daughter but difficult-in-laws also. Professor has also to face many problems. When Kishori Devi, Professor’s mother scolds him for doing another marriage so that he gets angry and said,

“I do what I can for everybody. But, to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman with whom I have nothing in common. Who cannot even read. Who keeps a ghunghat in front of my friends?”<sup>13</sup>

Virmati gets only a marginal space in the house and is not allowed to prepare food for his husband or even wash his clothes. Harish turns a deaf ear to her complaints and evasively diverts her attention by complementing her as his learned companion. Marital pleasure is the only consolation. Time is the dosage of every trauma. Her mother-in-law is trying to take some interest when she heard the news about her pregnancy. But fate doesn't cease to show its turbulence. The attention and affection that she now began to enjoy from her mother-in-law also comes to an abrupt end with her traumatic abortion. Motherhood is the blessing for woman. And the orthodox people think that any woman cannot produce a child, she might be the curse for everyone. It is done with Virmati from her mother-in-law. She is not responsible for her miscarriage. She is willing to be a mother but fate denies.

Harish's behavior is patronizing and domineering to her has enmeshed Virmati completely. Her longing to have a choice to study what and where has gone to the winds. On the other hand, she wants to visit her patriarchal home, the words like 'badmash' and 'randi' are uttered by her mother and let her go out from the house because Kasturi thinks that Virmati has done is shameful and blacken her family. On the other side Virmati also agrees that 'A woman's happiness lies in giving her husband happiness'. Professor has decided to send her to Lahore to do MA in philosophy-a subject which is dull, abstract and meaningless according to Virmati. And when she returns, she comes to know that all her patriarchal family members have gone out because of communal tension. And then Virmati finds herself pregnant again. And her mother-in-law prescribed her to sleep with her not with Harish. Virmati gets puzzled when she heard this. Finally the baby girl is come and is named 'Bharati' by Virmati on the name of our country, but Harish rejected and said,

"I don't wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred? We haven't been born. We have moved back into the dark ages. Fighting, killing over religion. Religion of all things. Even the educated. This is madness, not freedom. And I never ever wish to be reminded of it."<sup>14</sup>

Then the girl is named Ida because Harish has its own meaning. He says,

"This is the very attitude that has led to Partition," said Harish irritably. 'Let anybody think what they like. For us it means a new slate, and a blank beginning'.<sup>15</sup>

Ida wants to live herself. She is refused to show any signs of intellectual brightness in her. Ida protested when her mother asked her not to disappoint your father, she rebelled by saying "Why it is so important to please him?" It is repetition of difficulty with Ida to Virmati. The thoughts of feminism and self syndrome can be seen in her agony of deficiency when she bursts out the words in the epilogue of the novel, I grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure, pressure to perform day and night. My father liked me looking pretty, neat and well-dressed, with kaajal and a little touch of oil in my sleeked-back hair. But the right appearance was not enough. I had to do well in school, learn classical music, take dance lessons so that I could convert my clumsiness into grace, read all the classics of literature, discuss them intelligently with him, and then exhibit my accomplishments graciously before his assembled guests at parties.

My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she said it was for my own good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes. Of course, I made a disastrous marriage. My mother spent the period after my divorce coating the air I breathed with sadness and

disapproval. ‘What will happen to you after I am gone?’ was her favourite lament. I was nothing, husbandless, childless. I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society.

For long periods I was engulfed by melancholy, depression, and despair. I would lie in bed for hours, unable to sleep, pitying myself for all I didn’t have, blaming my mother, myself. Now her shadow no longer threatens me. Without the hindrance of her presence, I can sink into her past and make it mine. In searching for a woman I could know, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. The places I visited, the stuff I read tantalized me with fragments that I knew I would not be able fully to reconstruct. Instead, I imagined histories, rejecting the material that didn’t fit, moulding ruthlessly the material that did. All through, I felt the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance. 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.”<sup>16</sup>

The lines in the end match with the lines of the beginning. No doubt, her daughter Ida refuses to be like her mother but the question that hovers our mind is whether Ida-divorce, childless and not committed to anything in particular and Chhoti is not intending to marry at all, waiting for a government accommodation to house her mother and grandmother- are living meaningful, purposeful and fulfilled life? Apart from Virmati and Harish, Chhoti tries to fill the gap of her mother’s life by the innocent touch of her own. She is the daughter of an uneducated woman, Although she takes the responsibility of her own family.

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