



## Analysis of Women Characters in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters

### KEYWORDS

**Paramjit Kaur**

(HOD in Applied Science), BHS Polytechnic College, Gurdaspur

Manju Kapur has written four novels *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006) and *The Immigrant* (2008). *Difficult Daughters* won the Commonwealth writer prize for the best book (Eurasia). She has received prominent status in India and in the world. Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She teaches at Miranda House College in Delhi. This novel depicts three generations of women-Kasturi, Virmati and Ida.

The paper attempts to study and analyse the main women characters in this book. The story revolves around Virmati. Virmati is the protagonist of this novel. She is a young Punjabi damsel from a very bourgeois, stark and a respectable 'Arya Smaji' family in Amritsar. This is the tale of sadness, love duty and compromise. She is a callow girl, lacerated between family duties, sensual appetite for study and illicit love for a married man who has a father of one daughter. The heroine is the eldest daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. She has eleven siblings. They live in a joint family. Kasturi is an every year pregnant woman. She is always sick lady, so all the burden of household work and younger brothers-sisters had dropped on Virmati's susceptible childhood. She spends her life under the pressure of domestic duties and mother's restrictions at an early age. The Pamper's day of her childhood, she is destroyed in domestic affair and nurturing her siblings. So, she procures maturity in an early age.

Virmati is a second mother to her ten other siblings. Her conduct with brother-sisters is very rigorous, hard and fast. Perhaps, she has heavy responsibilities on her shoulders, and never enjoys according to her own desires like the other children. Ida, her daughter comes to know about this facet of her mother after her death.

"You know, our mother was always sick, and Virmati, as eldest, had to run the house and look after us. We depended on her, but she was free with her tongue and her hands. One tight slap she would give for nothing. She would lash out if we didn't listen. We used to run from her when she came. She was only sister, but she acted very bossy. We were scared of her. She never rested or played with us, she always had some work. She was so keen to study, bap re. First FA, then BA, then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an MA to Government College, Lahore". (DD, 5).

She is a very ravenous for love, affection and wants love from her mother, but Kasturi never has the time to express her love and thankfulness to her daughter. She is always busy in her pregnancies. A mother does not realize her daughter's appetite for love. All children want to get affection from their parents, if they don't get then they will share their feelings, passions, enthusiasm with the outsiders. So, it is the main point Virmati falls in love with a married man and achieves both things from him like love and study. All time taboos and restrictions are not good for children's body and mind. Virmati looks after her brother-sisters as a second mother but Kasturi has no enchant words for her dutiful daughter. One day, she put her head into her mother's warm lap while Kasturi impels her away and says harshly, she is wasting time. There

are many things to do in the house except sitting around. Mother's love doesn't expand towards Virmati. The following lines show the dialogue between daughter and mother.

"At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. However, 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?' 'Arre, you think there is all the time in the world for sitting around, doing nothing?' 'You know they don't listen to her,' 'you are the eldest. If you don't see two things, who will?' (DD, 06).

Kasturi has exerted to Virmati into knitting, sewing and cooking after her basic qualification. Her mother recognises that a girl must be trained in all things for a suitable match and she should have study only to read and write. She thinks that Virmati is a capable for marriage and must be ready to go to in-laws home. An Indian girl must follow her family traditions and husband's desires. But Virmati is the prototype of liberated woman. She infringes all man made boundaries against modernity and family custom. Dr. Shilpi Rishi Srivastava aptly argues:

"This novel is the story of three generations of women – Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. The present research paper attempts to evaluate the journey of Virmati, the protagonist towards independent status. Kasturi is a traditional woman and she wants that her children must take interest in Pooja – Path and traditions. But her daughter Virmati breaks all the chains of traditionalism and looks like new woman".

When the protagonist was sixteen, her mother had conceived eleventh child. Her sister-in-law 'Lajwanti' comments, 'Breeding like cats and dogs', 'Harvest time again.' Kasturi couldn't get a miscarriage after using all herbal treatment. On a chilled December night, she gives birth to a feeble baby girl Paro. After this delivery, her health is totally crushed. She spends her day with heavy bleeding, weariness and giddiness. Kasturi's body needs strength and the bracing air of the mountains as soon as possible to recover. The clean and composure environment would immediately revive her broken health. So, it is decided to send Virmati to Dalhousie with her mother. Suraj Prakash arranges a lodged accommodation near the central chowk in Dalhousie. Kasturi shifts along with her eldest and youngest daughters.

Lajwanti feels envious of her poor sister-in-law Kasturi and plots her husband's mind against Kasturi and Suraj Prakash.

"Your poor brother, she proceeded, 'going every month to Dalhousie. In fixing his wife's health he will ruin his own. All the burden of running the shop falls on you while he is away, but you are a saint and will never say anything about your own condition. Where do we, and our two children, stand in front of that woman, and her eleven children?' (DD, 13).

Virmati's cousin Shakuntala is the prototype of progressive woman. She rejects the family tradition of early marriage.

Shakuntala visits to Dalhousie at the invitation of her mother 'Lajwanti' Virmati is highly inspired by her cousin and thinks that it is possible to be something other than a wife. Her cousin is leading an independent life on her own terms in Lahore. She has done M.Sc. in chemistry and a science teacher in a college in Lahore. Her dressing sense, activities and life style are progressive. She is not getting married because wants to live under her expectations. Kasturi says her woman's 'Shaan' is in her home. It is the right time for 'Shaadi', already you have adequate study, but Shakuntala replies, Virmati should not wait for me and get married. She explains her blissful days in Lahore to Virmati:

"We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going aboard for higher studies.' (DD, 17).

All activities of Shakuntala are oscillating over Virmati's head. She learns many new things from her cousin as study, glamorous life style, progressive idea, combat against restrictions etc. After this meeting, Virmati has to strong determine to further higher study. The novelist cites, " Shakuntala's visit plants the seeds of aspiration in Virmati." She wants to be like her cousin and leads an independent life. She hopes:

"May be I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji, she wept. 'I wish I too could to things. But I am not clever". (DD, 18).

She takes care of her mother's children. In a way, can not draw attention in her study and get failed in FA and again she making whirlpool into her mind for further study but her traditional mother neither listens to her. According to her mother, basic qualification is too much for a girl. Kasturi induces her to get married in a good Samaji family. The heroine wants to smell the aroma of the wine of liberty like her cousin. There is a long debate between marriage and study.

"Now it is you who are eating my head. What good are Shaku's degrees when she is not settled. Will they look after her when she is old?" demanded Kasturi irritably. 'At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother.'"(DD, 21).

Although Ganga is a very dedicated to him and his family. There is a lot of difference between Harsih and Ganga, their match is totally inharmonious. He is a progressive husband and also wants a good intellectual companion. He suffers a loveless marriage with Ganga and not satisfied with his married life. According to Harish, society is liable for his child marriage he writes a letter to Virmati:

"Who is responsible for this state of affairs? society, which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughters. Society that decides that children - babies really - should be married at the age of two and three as we were. As a result, both of us needlessly suffer for no fault of ours". (DD,103).

Ganga's negligence about study and lack of awareness brings Virmati to her husband's home as a second wife. Harish insists Virmati that she will not be happy with canal engineer. The heroine knows well that she has had her own aspirations, her own life and wants to lead a cheerful life according to her way. She has built a sweet house for a married man into her heart like a spider. At the time that Kasturi is making a thread at the spinning wheel, Virmati sits next to her mother and says with great endeavour, she is not interested in her marriage and wants to further study in Lahore. "Virmati is caught between familial and romantic love. Her family has been shown to be taking all the important decision of her life on her behalf, still they don't understand her love for the Professor." (Kahlon)

Ida is the daughter of Virmati and the professor. We discover that the relation between mother (Virmati) and daughter (Ida) is not cordial. Ida never enjoys happy moments with her own mother. When she looks at the photograph of her mother's youthful age, then she thinks that "I could not remember a time it had been right between us". Kasturi follows to ancient rules and patriarchal society, and she compels her daughter Virmati to concede the family tradition. But Virmati breaks the old customs and traditions of family, when Virmati becomes a mother of a daughter (Ida), then she too does the same with her daughter like Kasturi. Ida fights for her identity, dignity and self confidence, And rejects the family norms and male dominated society.

"Ida becomes the typical daughter of a "difficult daughter" Virmati. She could not develop an understanding with her mother in her lifetime and after Virmati's death this realization engulfs her with guilt" (Kahlon)

Thus the novelist has explored and traced the journey of many such young women in this award winning book. They truly reflect the complexity of female psyche.

## REFERENCE

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