

Saga of Indian Women in Manju Kapoor's Difficult Daughter



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Abstract

Almost half the population of the world is made of woman but she is not treated on par with man despite innumerable evolution and revolutions. She has the same mental and moral power yet she is not recognised as his equal. The portrayal of women in recent Indian English fiction is no more silent victim and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society. She is no longer present as a passive character. Here an attempt is made through the study of Manju Kapoor's novel Difficult daughter that the women of India have indeed achieved their success after Independence.

Keywords: Patriarchal Norms, Identity Crises

Introduction

Indian women novelists can be said to be highly conscious of the women's liberation movement. By and large they have portrayed women and their stories with consciousness of the injustice being meted out to women by society. These novels have a feminist undercurrent. Usually these novels have a woman as the central character. If we look at these fictional female characters, a large number of them rebel against the existing social set-up. They discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. Rebellion is not an easy process. It demands determination and a will to stand by the cause of rebellion at any cost. These heroines in the novels of Indian women novelists have often come up to paying the prize of their rebellion rather than submitting and dying through suffocation.

Awareness on the writers' part of the individual needs of women like self-fulfillment and identity formation have resulted in recent novels in patterns of alienation, communication gap, broken relationships and identity crises. Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the woman's question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian society varies from the one on the West and therefore, the Indian women novelists have tried to evolve their own stream of feminism grounded in reality. They have their own concerns, priorities as well as their own ways of dealing with the predicament of their women protagonists. At the dawn of the twenty first century Indian English novelists have been acclaimed as advent-grade in the world of creativity. Most of the literary stars and stalwarts have consolidated their position and contributed immensely to Indian English literature. In the post colonial era partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for the creative writers. R.K.Dhawan, a critic of repute rightly focuses the historical trauma snapped and highlighted it through the creative eyes.

Aim

The aim of present paper is to study the patriarchal norms confronted by women characters in Manju Kapoor's novel "Difficult Daughter" and search for their identity.

"A number of novels were written on the theme of partition, the destruction it brought and the plight of the refugees. They faithfully record the reign of violence that characterized the period and provide a sad, telling commentary on the breakdown of human values. A strain of despair and disillusionment is predominant in these novels"¹

Manju Kapoor, a noteworthy story teller who without linguistic jugglery and gimmickry presents the post modern novel in a traditional narrative thread. Difficult Daughter, the maiden venture of Manju Kapoor, is really written against the backdrop of the Indian Freedom Movement, the partition of India and war between Allied and Axis forces. Altogether it delicately tenders a threadbare analysis of modern dynamics of man-woman relationship, particularly in Indian social background. The novel

manifests autobiographical data and dimension in its syntactic norms and nuances. The novelist herself asserts that "Conflict between daughter and mother is inevitable and I suppose I was a difficult daughter. The conflict carries on through generations because mother wants their daughters to be safe. We want them to make the right choice-'right' in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married; I want my daughter to have good jobs"² in this novel Manju Kapoor presents a woman who considers marriage as the journey's end of her life-marriage and her place in the master bed room. Virmati protagonist of novel belongs to pre-Independence society. She is the eldest of the eleven children in her family-the Arya Samaji who believes in Swami Dayanand Saraswati's ideology and woman's education. Her mother Kasturi too is educated and her marriage had been arranged through advertisement in the Samajistis newspapers. Both the families are broad minded and value educated. Though they believe in education for girls, they also believe that girls must be married off. This belief still persists in Indian Society unless the daughter are strong willed and career-oriented.

The tone is set early in the novel with Kasturi and Lajwanti talking about marriage of their daughters, Virmati and Shakuntala. Kasturi remarks: "It is the duty of every girls to get married", and further "A woman's shaan is in her home". P-13

Shakuntala is Virmati's cousin and is an M.Sc in chemistry, working at Lahore. She is vibrant and intelligent and has a life of her own away from the family. She tells Virmati "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" (p-14) and further that "times are changing, and women are moving out of the house,so why not you?"(P-16). Manju Kapur portrays Shakuntala as an alternative to Virmati's old fashioned mind. The novelist presents in Shakuntala an independent working woman who does not consider marriage an ultimate aim in her life. When Virmati listen to Shakuntala, she is convinced of the other possibilities "Something other than a wife."

In the meantime, there appeared a professor who happened to be the tenant of her aunt, Lajwanti. This professor had returned from Oxford two years ago and had landed in Amritsar at the request of one of his friend's father who was on board of trustees of Arya Sabha College, Amritsar. Then the college had been looking for a good English teacher. For this, they wanted someone with impeccable credentials. Naturally, an Indian with a British degree was supposed to be an ideal one. Virmati is an easily impressionable young woman. When she meets the professor and listens to him she is all admiration for him. When Professor Harish Chandra tells her about his illiterate wife Ganga who is not prepared to learn anything, and cannot share his ideas or understand music, she sympathises with him and in convinced of his need for companionship.

Though Manju Kapoor has only depicted Virmati listening to the learned professor and his western music and has not portrayed Virmati participating or discussing any literary or political

issues. Their relationship is more of a teacher-taught than of a companionship of equals on par partners. He always explains to her aspects of beauty, in nature in literature, in paintings. She is a passive listener and learner. Later when she talks about politics and women's movement, he does not like it. Though there is a love between them Harish is not prepared to marry her and yet she does not want her to marry the person her parents have chosen for her. Virmati on her own decides to commit suicide and writes to Harish of her intention. The professor is helpless and does not know what to do and so sends letter to her family. When she is saved from drowning and returns home she simply states that she wants to study and not marry:

"Study, mumbled Virmati like a mantra. She swallowed, Study-----And not to marry"-----Her silence though was not of acquiescence but refused; She would not marry" (P-80)

Virmati decide to go to Lahore to do her BT (P-99). Her move was duly supported by almost all elders of her family, particularly by her grandfather. They hoped that such an academic drive might help her to inculcate better refinements as regards her personal ideological stand in relation to her own home life, rather than her married life. Her mother herself took her to Lahore and got her admitted in one of the college for BT course. Her cousin, Shakuntla was deputed as local guardian there. She too was greatly delighted to accept this charge and discharged the same all the more sincerely and honestly. Because knowing everything fully well " Shakuntla was glad that her family was at last waking up to the fact that women had to take their place in the world, but must it always be when marriage had not worked out?"(P-103). However, her mother by on her own intended a full-proof looking after the girl. In Lahore, she meets many young women who are active workers in the cause of freedom-movement. One such woman is Swarnalata who is her room partner in the hostel. Swarnalata is a determined clear-head activist. Virmati is exposed to freedom movement and its leaders. Whereas they are struggling for freedom both political and social, Virmati is engulfed with her professor-lover and stealthy love-making.

Despite of all strict measures Prof.Harish Chandra continued his clandestine love affairs with his proper assistance, the professor succeeded in meeting with Virmati. Later he could be able to enjoy even the physical intercourse in Husain's house. Their thrilling game of love making is kept on going at regular intervals. They were virtually secret man and wife there. Since they had already experienced the very feel of being united with each other, they grew unusually bold enough to declare openly 'We cannot allow ourselves to the pawns in the skeins of fate' (P-141). Even while listening to the women leaders in the hall, she is thinking about herself and the professor:

" She saw instead of the crowded hall, image of herself and the Professor embracing, kissing, his tongue pushing its way into her mouth in a way she had initially found very strange, and then liked, enough even to reciprocate."(P-131)

The professor, who is always talking about knowledge and the happenings in the outer world and freedom, is upset and irritated when he learns of her

sickness. All he wants is to be with her and Lahore provides this opportunity to him. He does not mind if her time is wasted from her study, by being with him. In fact that is what he wants. On one hand he is having this relationship with Virmati, on the other hand he has begotten a son from his wife Ganga at home. Though he professes his love for Virmati, he does not cut off his sexual relationship with his wife. When the question of marriage is raised by Virmati he talks of his 'image' and his family's reputation. He never gives a second thought to Virmati's family, their reputation of Virmati's place and status in society. Virmati is upset:

" 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 me out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace---" (P-137)

Their continual illicit amorous game finally resulted in Virmati's pregnancy. It was the period of her BT examination. Yet such a discovery turned her completely nonplussed. On the pretext of her preparation for this examination, she anyhow succeeded in getting a long leave from the college. She rushed to her home town and tried her best to see the professor at the earliest. She was rather dying to report the matter to him with a view to finding a suitable solution for the impending danger. But all her moves proved of no avail. As Prof. Harish Chandra had already left Amritsar for his village home to get the Mundan ceremony of his son, Giridhar. She grew impatient beyond description. Therefore on some silly excuses, she came back to her college hostel as early as she could. At this juncture, she confided everything to her roommate, Swarnalata. She consoled and cheered her up with following word-"Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru-----women are coming out of their homes-----wake up from stale dreams"(P-139). Further, she came to her rescue and successfully managed everything to get her properly aborted during her BT examination. Virmati passed BT in her second attempt. When Virmati returns home she finds that he had moved away without leaving his new address. Trapped by the circumstances and the professor's absence and unwillingness to marry her, she realizes: "Nothing was hers, not her body, her future, not even a pair of paltry, insignificant gold bangles "(P-161) and feel trapped for the life.

She accepts the conventional view of the purity of a woman's body. Her body is not her own but is of Harish only. Later on she joined as the Principal of the Pratibha Kanya Vidyalyaya run by Maharani Pratibha of the state of Sirmour. Her family agrees to the proposal of the Diwan since Virmati is determined not to marry. If she so wanted, she could have married some one of her family's choice. But she is determined to marry Harish or not at all, and Harish is not prepared to marry her. Her life in the state of Sirmour is well-organised and she feels a sense of satisfaction, of achievement. But she is unable to forget Harish and keep writing to him, and he in his letters "talked much of romance and beauty. He came to be the specter that lay between her and her life as principal, So that she too began to look upon her stay

there as a period of waiting rather than the beginning of a career"(P-170). Although the novelist blames Harish and compares him to a fly-arrow of Arjun that hunts down the stillbird Virmati, one feels that it is Virmati's wish and choice that enables Harish to find her and revive their relationships. Virmati is portrayed as a strong-willed daughter who rebels against her parents, she is very dependent and weak vis-a-vis the professor, knowing full well that her job would be at risk, she permits him to stay with her in her cottage.

When she was dismissed from her job, she has nowhere to go and decides to go to Shantiniketan. It is the professor's friend, who settles the matter and forces Harish to marry her. After the marriage she finds that she is not accepted either by her family or by his family. She is kept in the outer room and his study room. She is not permitted to cook or wash or do anything for him or his family. Though she is legally his second wife, one feels that her status is of the other woman and of a wife. To avoid unpleasantness, Harish sends her away to Lahore for her further study. Here too she is not given any choice. It is only the partition of India that takes away the first wife and the family to their home town and Virmati gets really united to Harish and her own family. Once they shift to Delhi she acquires her coveted place of the wife and mother of a daughter-Iida.

Manju Kapoor has presented a picture of middle class educated woman of Pre-Independence time and her social status as a second wife. She has presented various choices for Virmati but has shown her as emotionally dependent upon and exploited by the man who, though western educated is of a wavering mind, talking of liberalism but indecisive in marrying his loved one and giving her the right place in his life and society. Virmati's responses are limited, her only, desire is to marry Prof. Harish. The novelist has presented Virmati's life-story from her daughter's point of view though it becomes a multi-points of view. The novel at first arouses the expectations of the readers to go back in time and experience the social and political situation in which the protagonist is placed. But she remains an observer by the road-side of the political happenings in the country. Manju Kapur does not effectively perceive the realities of the Protagonist's existence from the inside, her dependence, her own created captivity. Once married she loses her identity. Whatever identity she has in her father's house, she loses it and unable to make space for herself on her own. She remains on the fringe, marginalized, so called companion as boasted by the husband. One feels at the end that there would be some meaningful relationship, a meaning to her life. But no, there is nothing except what partition of India gives her. Thus, in Virmati we see the incipient New Woman who is conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal code yet she lacks confidence, self-control, farsightedness and is psychically imprisoned with an underlying need to be emotionally and intellectually dependent on a superior force, Prof. Harish, and it is precisely this knowledge through which the patriarchy works. She fails to break the "dependence syndrome"³ and halts on the path to full human status.

Trampling patriarchal norms, Virmati defies societal expectation to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self-fulfillment. But what does she really get? She is a loser whose acts totally alienate her from her own family and she fails to create a space for herself for which she had been striving all along. Perhaps it is this inability of Virmati to strike independent roots and grow that makes Ida remark "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother". It is possible to trace the feminism implicit in the novel through Ida's impatience towards her mother's weaknesses. When her Parvati Masi says : "I hate the word 'simple'. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways"(p-207). The novelist through Ida's admiration for Swarnlata, who enters into a wider Socio-Political sphere, wants to convey that a woman can maintain her individuality and pursue her interest without threatening the family structures. Thus a woman should basically strive towards a fine interdependent partnership. But if she fails, then voice ought to be raised and there should be total breaking away, like Ida.

Conclusion

The novel enables us to study three generation of women-Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. These three generations of women represent the attitudinal change with the passage of time. Kasturi represent complete acceptance, Virmati adjustment and Ida complete non-adjustment. The novel enables us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against biases. The novel discusses the period during India's struggle for freedom. While reading the novel one gets the impression that a woman's life is like the life of a nation. Like an investigative journalist Ida struggles to reconstruct her mother's life. In this novel, the quest for identity is look at as a phase-either temporary or historical. It is finished when the woman protagonist ultimately readjust to her life situation and environment. The novel represents the turmoil of woman who tries to overcome her cultural identity and forge 'a self-identity', an attempt which leaves a woman hard hearted, and desolate.

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