Search for Identity: Portrayal of Women Characters in 

*Difficult Daughters*

*Difficult Daughters* is a family saga by Manju Kapur where she depicts a joint family of grandfather, uncles and aunts with a number of siblings living together. But, the focus of the novel is on the female protagonist Virmati as the novel starts with her cremation that proceeds with flashbacks where the story of her life is told by her daughter Ida. The novel turns out to be the story of a young girl, Virmati whose life is a journey in search for an identity. It shows first her attempt to make for herself an identity as an “educated girl” for which she struggles hard. Her emotional attachment and physical love for professor proves miserable for her and shatters her hopes. But her departure to Nahan somehow helps to give a ray of happiness and peace out of the dark clouds of unhappiness and miseries. This time she earns her a new identity as a principal. But her journey for the search for identity ends with her recognition as the second wife of the professor that only breeds miseries and sorrows in her life. In this connection Dr. Dipika Sahai writes in “Self Assertiveness Leading to Defiance in ManjuKapur’s *Difficult Daughters*”:

The theme of the novel is the unsuccessful attempt of the heroin Virmati to defy social conventions. She is a young girl, rebellious in nature and in search of her independence gets infatuated with a married person and accepts to become his second wife. She, thus, brings disgrace to her family and despair to herself.\(^1\)

As this research attempts to deal with this concept of identity from women’s point of view, this chapter classifies identity chiefly into three types: identity as a
“feminist woman”, “traditional woman” and as “rebel”. bell hooks writes in “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist”, “It is difficult to arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is?” [A feminist woman is one who demands for equality like men in all walks of life. Though, biologically, women are different from men but they raise their voice against the differences made between men and women socially, that always results in the dominance of men and subordination of women.] Women who were opposed to patriarchy, capitalism, classicism, or racism labeled themselves “feminist”. Their expectations were varied. Privileged women wanted social equality with men of their class; some women wanted equal pay for equal work; others wanted an alternative life style.”

This multilayered identity that has been classified into different types focuses how different types of identities are connected with different female characters who appear in the novel viz Virmati, Ida, Kasturi, Lajwanti, Ganga, Shakuntala and Swarnlata. The close analysis of their lives helps to draw out specific identities they succeed in acquiring in their lives.

This chapter starts with Virmati’s search for an identity. She asserts her wish for higher education, her right to choose her life-partner. She revolts against the conventions and norms that are made particularly for women to perpetuate the dominance of man and subordination of woman. But, the identity that is given to her by the society is rebellious. Her self-assertiveness starts with her demand for higher education to make her identity as an educated girl that leads toward an identity as a principal and ends with as the second wife of the professor. What should be noteworthy here is she starts her journey to assert her identity as an independent creature but fails to complete this journey and accepts her dependence on the professor as his second wife.
Identity keeps on changing with the changing context. As Erikson, who first focused, popular and scientific attention on the meaning of identity, noted that identity reformations will continue throughout the life span as one’s biological, psychological and societal circumstances change. The physiological identity that Virmati has according to her sex is “female”. But, the societal identity that is given to her is “woman” that seems an obstacle in the formation of her psychological identity that includes feelings, interests, needs and defenses which gives one a sense of “I”. Virmati’s psychological identity includes her interest for education and her desire to have her identity as an educated girl. But being a girl, it seems difficult to satisfy her wish for education. She finds no favour with her mother to continue her studies. The encouragement she gets from the professor attracts towards him which results in the rejection of the companion chosen for her by her parents. She is not free to satisfy her psychological needs and the result is that she could not be succeeded in the formation of her identity as an independent girl. Her effort to seek independence, ironically, ends as a second wife of the professor. The question is what it is that makes her attracted towards the professor? It is perhaps initial the encouragement of professor for studies. As Indu Swami observes, “She finds demarcation line at every free step of hers; it is this forbidding situation at home that draws her near to the professor. The professor encourages her to go further with her studies and academic association with the professor results into their amorous relationships.”

She starts her search for an identity as an educated and independent girl. For it she has to revolt against the social conventions that somehow prove her “a difficult daughter” and gives her an identity as a rebellious and difficult girl. She leaves this journey unfinished and it proves her failure. This failure in her life makes her
daughter to wish, “not to be like my mother.” As Satish Barbuddhe writes: “The daughter Ida does not want to be like her mother as she does not want her voice to be suppressed by anybody.”

The picture, Kapur paints in the very beginning of the novel, during Virmati’s cremation, suggests her defeat in life. Burning on the pyre her body has been described as “shriveled body” and “dry-eyed”. Ida in her state of perplexity searches for the memorial to her mother, but fails because Virmati proved herself failure in the formation of her identity. Though unable to achieve any identity that makes her life significant, she wished to have some value even after death. As she wished for the donation of her organs:

> When I die, she said to me, I want my body donated, my eyes; my heart; my kidneys, any organ that can be of use. That way someone will value me after I have gone. And contrary to her wishes, she was being burnt with her organ inact.

The picture of Virmati painted by Ida’s aunt presents her as “difficult daughter” who attempted to be unconventional throughout her life. They says, “We depended on her, but she was free with her tongue and her hands.” But this picture of Virmati could not satisfy Ida. She says, “My relatives gave me one view of my mother, I wanted another.”

So somehow Virmati is seen as rebellious in the eye of others, especially of her mother who rebukes her most of the time, as she goes against all the conventions made in the patriarchal society. Ida wishes to reconstruct her search for an identity and draws out how she struggles to make her mark in society as an educated independent woman. Though she failed, but somehow turned to be a source of inspiration for other girls to make an assertion of their identity as independent
individual apart from her identity as woman, wife, mother; the identity given to them from the society.

Virmati is the eldest daughter of Kasturi and SurajPrakash. Being the eldest among eleven children, she is forced to look after her younger sisters and brothers as a mother even at the age of ten:

Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children. It wasn’t only baby Parvati to whom she was indispensable to her younger siblings she was second mother as well.⁸

Shakuntala, cousin of Virmati gives her inspiration to be self-assertive and be the maker of her own identity by stepping forward and defying the tradition driven society where “marriage” is called the last goal in the life of a woman. Shakuntala says to Virmati, “…women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else.”⁹

But Virmati is not ready to be the part of that social set-up where women is considered subordinate to men because in childhood her father shields her, in youth, her husband and in old age her son; a woman never earns independence. She wanted to assert her individuality and identity and to live on her own terms. She aspires to get educated like her cousin Shakuntla. Her urge for education proves her as having a wish for independence. She attempts to make a journey from tradition to modernity through education. Kapur has herself said in an interview published in Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology Female Writers:

Let me come back on the question of ‘education’ and the differences it makes was the point with which I started Difficult Daughters. You think that Education should make a difference but it doesn’t make as much difference as you think it should; in fact the starting point of difficult daughters was how educated woman lead uneducated emotional lives
education is compartmentalized and does not seem to contribute to happiness. One should have some kind of economic independence.\textsuperscript{10}

Kapur has presented Virmati as belonging to Arya Samaji family. The Arya Samaj, a group of social reform movement paid great attention to education of women:

…female education was encouraged by the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect which followed the teachings of Dayanand. By the end of nineteenth century progressive Arya Samajists recognized the importance of involving women in their reform efforts.\textsuperscript{11}

She is not allowed to be admitted for further studies because it is thought by her family that she is educated enough to be the wife of a canal engineer to whom she is engaged. But with the support of her grandfather she is admitted in A.S. College. The education awakens her to give value to her own life instead of sacrificing it for others. She opposes marriage with the boy who is the choice of her parents. So, she is confined in a room. Her love for Harish, a Professor in English, stains the family honour. She realizes that there is no importance for her own preferences because being a woman her life is governed with the conventions and norms fixed for woman. Virmati, unlike the traditional woman, finds it difficult to bear all the inflictions. As she says, “I couldn’t think and all I heard around me was talk of my marriage. If I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn’t want to live.”\textsuperscript{12}

Her rebellion against the conventional society renders her “difficult daughter” for her family. Dr. C.Issac Jebastine and Mrs. Debarti Das suggest in “Altruistic Conventionality Versus Egocentric Unconventionality: A Critique of Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters”, “Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarnlata belongs to the
unconventional type of women who crave for a private space in their life to stand on their own. During the pre-independence period when women did not even dare to come out of their homes, these women rose against the traditional conventions.\textsuperscript{13}

In her lament her mother says, “What crimes did I committed in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one.”\textsuperscript{14} But Virmati does not surrender herself to the wish of her mother till the end. With her firm determination, she compels her father and grandfather to allow her to get admission in Rai Bahadur Sohan Lal Training College for women in Lahore. Her academic qualifications make her an excellent choice for principal of a college at Nahan. During her stay at Nahan, Harish comes to meet her secretly at night. The details that Kapur gives about the sexual intercourse between professor and Virmati, shows clearly the professor’s thirst for sexuality gets him attracted towards Virmati. In Lahore, during her BT course she gets pregnant and faces a lot of difficulties that she faces with no support of the professor who instead of helping her gets detached from her. But his thirst for sexuality again gets him to return to his relationship with Virmati. A girl is seen as a rebel against traditional and social taboos or as a violator of moral codes, if she gets pregnant, no matter if it is done willingly or forcefully. Virmati was made pregnant by Prof. Harish, she finds herself without moral courage to face others and gets an abortion done secretly without thinking about the physical pain she undergoes. The same suffering of a girl is shown by Kamala Markandaya in \textit{Two Virgins}(1973) through Lalita who is exploited by a film director, Mr. Gupta who makes her pregnant. Her parents, in order to hush up the whole affair, get the abortion done secretly. But Lalita has no moral courage to face her fellow beings.

Diwan Sahab cautions Virmati about the dangers of losing her reputation, a sexual relationship before marriage is a social setback for a woman. She is finally
dismissed from the college. Her fight for her own identity is coloured more by her emotions that by the intellect. Her early desires of a free and independence life are extinguished in the arms of professor. She wishes to be the part of the political and intellectual movement. But, all her wishes vanish soon as she becomes emotionally dependent on Harish. Indumati writes:

She thinks about her own love while her entire nation is entrapped by the fret and fever of freedom struggle. At the Punjab Women Student’s Conference, she is amazed at “how large an area of life women wanted to appropriate for themselves. But these large spaces are not for her. She wastes her time awaiting the furtive meeting with the professor inspite of the awareness that there were “myriad instances of where she felt she had been weak or wronged.15

Is it not her love for the professor that weakens her? Sitting in the midst of women who were talking about freedom and struggle, she keeps on thinking only about the professor. She fails in her search for identity only to find herself gripped in the love of professor. She herself realizes it. As she tells professor:

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 know 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.16

At last, she gets married with Harish and becomes his second wife. She remains torn apart between tradition and modernity. She steps forward to achieve modernity but retreats and again get herself tangled in the web of tradition where she tries to be
an ideal wife by surrendering her desires to Harish. As she says, “A woman’s happiness lies in giving her husband happiness,”\textsuperscript{17}

But her submission cannot be interrupted as her defeat. It would be a mistake to devalue Virmati’s struggle because she failed, for what matter was to have made the attempt. Gurpyari Jandil, one of the admirers of Manju Kapur, points out, “What is necessary, is to break the patriarchal mold and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement.”\textsuperscript{18}

Here what it is meant by attempt is her assertion of her right for education that is seen in the initial phase of her life, that vanishes as she finds herself gripped in the love of Harish. Though even after marriage Virmati gets a chance to continue her studies, but she has lost all the enthusiasm, she had for education now. It is suggested she does her MA but the subject is decided by Harish, not by her. Even during her stay at Lahore, she finds herself totally alone. But the company of Swarnlata again creates an atmosphere assertion. She talks to Virmati in the same vein. Talking about the Draft Hindu Code Bill she says,

Men don’t want family wealth to be divided among women say their sisters get dowry, that’s their share, and the family structures will be threatened, because sisters and wife will be seen as rivals, instead of dependents who have to be nurtured and protected. As a result women will lose their moral position in society, imagine!”\textsuperscript{19}

She gets failure eventually only because she feels herself weak and in lack of confidence. Being imprudent, she devotes her life to the professor, which results in her dependence on him and in her failure in the search for identity. So it is not enough to blame Harish for having trapped Virmati. Virmati proves irrational and driven by emotion rather than reason.
Swarnlata suggests that Virmati free herself from this cloud of love and passion for Harish, “Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war – the Satyagrah movement because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dreams.” Virmati replies, “I wish people in Amritsar talked to me like this” Swarnlata says, “I wish people in Delhi would talk to me like this, laughed Swarna. “But they don’t. So here we are; responsible for our own futures.”

So, here are two women at the same surroundings, but one (Swarnlata) thinks more about the freedom struggle of India that includes the freedom of women. But on the other hand Virmati finds herself unable to come out of her dream of love and blame. The surroundings she lived in during her stay in Amritsar and her traditional upbringing where women are taught only to think about household chores and marriage ultimately win. But again, it is only failure that Virmati gets because of her irrational act. It seems that Kapur intends to show Virmati’s failure in her search for identity because of lack of confidence and irrational act.

Her study at Lahore after marriage gives her another chance to assert her identity. But this fire again gets extinguished as Virmati is called back home to reduce the expenses by cutting the spending on Virmati’s stay at Lahore, as suggested by Harish’s mother Kishori Devi. Soon she realizes that Harish is less attracted towards her. In 1947 when the struggle of independence gets more intense, Virmati wants to participate in this struggle, but again she is not allowed by Harish.

Swarnlata and Shakuntala succeed in the formation of their identity as they act rationally. Kapur adds an epilogue to suggest the story relates to the future. In the very last words Ida says, “This book weaves a connection between my mother and
me, each word a brick in a masion, I made with my head and heart. Now live in it mama and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore.”

The above words suggest how Ida reconstructs her mother’s life. The weaknesses that results in her failure makes Ida to forget it all so that she can give a fruitful direction to her life. She wants that she should not be haunted by Virmati’s failure but can be successful in her search for identity as her daughter.

Indu swami writes in “Search for Identity”:

Woman is considered to be an embodiment of sacrifice, silent, suffering, humility, faith and knowledge, she should be virtuous, chaste, submissive, homely, graceful and devoted to her husband and his family. She must seek pleasure in these relationships. The faintest of any such ideas that every being “exists primarily for the realization of oneself can never occur to her in the wildest of her dreams”

What Indu Swami writes here paints a picture of a traditional woman. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kasturi, mother of Virmati conforms to this image. The identity that she succeeds in making is of a traditional woman. She is trapped in the traditional patriarchal society where women have their assigned roles to look after the house and rear children. She, though not happy, follows this role assigned to a woman. She is never seen pining for freedom and equality with men. She accepts her duty given to her as woman in the patriarchal society and follows it. So, the identity she gets is of a traditional woman. Not only she herself, but she also forces her daughter to be a traditional woman like her. As Usha Kurjekar writes in “Mother –Daughter Relationships in *Fasting, Feasting and Difficult Daughters*”, “Kasturi does not want her daughter to form a separate identity which would make her identity fragmentary. The mother does not appreciate the freedom that the daughter demands and craves
for. In this way unknowingly, the mother becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds
these values as ideal because she has been taught so, in the patriarchal set up.”25 But
her daughter Virmati revolts and tries to break the shackles of patriarchy that turns
her into a “difficult daughter” in the eyes of her mother.

One thing on that should be paid attention to is that the word “traditional” has
been used here negatively because the work that is assigned to women such as
household chores, nursing and nurturing of children and fulfilling the needs of other
family members are given no value at all and interpreted as the duty of women that
they should do without question. That is why now in the twenty-first century a
voice has been raised to give value to these works instead of considering them as
unpaid drudgery that would result in giving an identity to a woman. These works
should be accepted same as the work of men. But as the setting of the novel is
nineteen–forties, these household chores had no importance at all and so woman,
the doer of these works, had no importance either. They only follow these assigned
roles and are considered traditional as we find in Kasturi.

The physical pain that she suffers due to continuous child bearing and
extraneous household chores is accepted by her as an inseparable part of her life:

Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet
and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and
carrying her children was a strain, even when they were young.26

In Kasturi one can see the picture of a traditional Indian woman who is lost in her
domestic world. She can be seen weak mentally and physically due to the burden of
child-bearing for seventeen years. Kasturi was married to Suraj Prakash who
impregnated her almost every year and left her with a tiredness of seventeen years of
relentless child-bearing. She suffered much during the birth of her eleventh child,
but she suffered the pain silently. She was nurtured in a traditional family where woman's mastery over household works was considered essential. After five years of education, it was considered that she had acquired all that it was ever going to be useful for her to know:

Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter's qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws. How? Let me count the ways. With all the breads she could make, puri's with spicy gram inside. Luchis big as plates; Kulchas....

She got her upbringing in a traditional patriarchal family. Kapur narrates the childhood of Kasturi in Sultanpur and after that in Punjab. Even in her childhood, she was pressured for marriage. It was her uncle who gets her sister-in-law to make her understand that child marriage is an evil practice and supports her for further education. She knows the importance of education, yet she does not give support to her daughter Virmati. Her upbringing carves a proper path for her:

Her father, uncle and teacher made sure that this step into modernity was prudent and innocuous. Her head remained modestly bent over her work. No question, no assertion. She learned reading, writing, balancing household accounts and sewing.

Education during the time of forties was not related to career as is found in the present era. The education given to Kasturi is only to make her competent because the first thing that a woman should know is household work:

After five years of this education, it was considered that Kasturi had acquired all that it was ever going to be useful for her first and last outside exam, performed creditably, and graduated at the age of twelve, to stay home until she married.
According the *Status of Women in India: A Synopsis of the Report of the National Committee of the Status of Women* (1971-74), “…aim […] of education was to use education to make women more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as wives and mothers had not to make them more efficient and active units in the process or political development. The colonial authorities generally supported this limited view of women’s education.”

She remains a traditional house-wife and mother without accepting the changes that she finds in her daughter Virmati and her cousin Shakuntala, the daughter of Lajwanti. There are found some women who have internalized patriarchal value to such a great extent that they themselves become agent of oppression for women. She observes the change in the mental set-up of the women of new generation because of education but interprets it negatively because it is making the women libertines and disastrous and Kasturi wonders like that:

Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster!
What kind of learning was this that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education: it had got her husband and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading in her hours with the pleasure of reading. In her time, going to school had been a privilege, not be abused by going against one's parent. How had girls changed so much in just a generation?

Virmati's rejection of marriage with the boy who has chosen for her makes her mother angry. She does not allow her daughter to come out from the designed world of woman where she has to surrender her happiness for the happiness of her family. So, Kasturi emerges as a traditional woman who is ready to be the part of the domestic world inspite of all the pains and her predicament as she is ready to suffer silently.
The other character is Lajwanti who comes in the same category of traditional woman as Kastui. She is wife of Surya prakash’s elder brother. She is seen as jealous of Kasturi. One thing that most of the feminist thinkers point out is that women instead of helping women try to be obstacles in their path. Most of the feminist thinker makes women aware of the fact that their cooperation only can help in women’s upliftment. During her lecture at Centre For Women’s Studies in University of Allahabad on 15 Jan, 2011, Bulbul Dhar from Jamia Islamia has advocated for monitoring and networking with females. What Manju Kapur shows here is how women’s irrational behavior with women turns disastrous for women. Lajwanti always felt jealous of Kasturi and plan to increase her miseries. As it can be seen when Kasturi is send to Dalhousie for recouping her health, instead of helping Kasturi, she starts making a fuss about it. She demands for the division of the property. One thing that is noteworthy is that though Kasturi lives in a traditional patriarchal society, she is not an obstacle in the path of her daughter Shakuntala who continues her studies and remains firm on not getting married, unlike Kasturi who tortures her daughter Virmati for rejection for the marriage and for the demand for continuation of her studies. So Lajwanti remains herself traditional woman following the tradition and system of patriarchal society, but does not impose this traditionalism on her daughter. Image of Laiwanti that comes in the reader’s mind is the image of the traditional woman as she lives according to the tradition made for woman.

The other character is Ganga. Like Kasturi, Ganga is also encircled with the conventional thoughts and conceptions that “home” is the limited circumference within which a woman must move. When Virmati tries to bring her out from her confined world by offering a visit to Company Bagh, she at once rejects her
proposal. Though, finally, she goes with Virmati but she keeps on thinking about “home”; her own world. The fear, perplexity and hesitation reflected on her face during her visit to Company Bagh resemble the haunting perplexity of Sita, the mythical figure in Hindu epic *Ramayan*, when she crosses the Lakshman Rekha. Kapur gives a true expression her mind, “No, no' it's getting late. What'll he say?” hesitated the woman remembering that she ought not to be away from for so long without him. She is illiterate. Her husband tries to educate her but she feels herself unfit to learn how to read and write, though she knows the importance of education as she says to Virmati when she comes to know that her mother is educated, she says, “She is lucky. For him, too, studies are very important. He even tried to teach me. But I am too old.”

Her acceptance of her deficiency is the outcome of traditional thinking that for a woman the mastery of household works is essential not the knowledge gained from the books. She is taught everything that is needed to maintain a home when she is about to get married. So, in Ganga, Kapur gives the picture of a traditional woman who is ready to endure all the atrocities but not ready to expose herself by coming out to the four boundaries of home.

Now the focus shifts to Shakuntala, a cousin of Virmati. She speaks passionately about the changing times, that electrifying era when India was embroiled in the fight for its independence and stultifying nature of the attitude of society towards it female member:

> 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.
She demands a change in the social set-up so that a woman can also have her identity instead of being a subordinate to man. This change in social set-up will uplift the status of woman and reduce the crimes related to woman. As Chloe Taylor writes, “I agree that we need to think about social transformation that will prevent sex crimes....”35

Shakuntala is independent. She possesses inner strength and prefers to stay alone in a hostel though she is the daughter of a conservative Arya Samaji where a woman’s glory is in her home. She is educated and an enlightened person who yearns for her identity and individuality and somehow succeeds in it if compared to Virmati. She does not express any grudge for being a woman but endeavours to broaden the narrow mentality of tradition-driven society so that woman should be allowed to live on her own terms. She presents herself as a model to emulate:

Virmati watches her (Shakuntala) ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's advice, buy anything she wanted without thinking it a waste of money. Casually drop in one all the people the family knew. Above all she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything.36

She comes out as emancipated woman. She takes part in the political-Gandhian movement. She is an entirely autonomous and isolated figure. She lives in a world in which single women are looked at askance, as an aberration. But Shakuntala tenaciously clings to her single, unmarried state, in the face of violent opposition from her mother Lajwanti who tries to put a brave face on it by saying, “With all this reading-writing girls are getting married late.”37

Shakuntala is her own woman. She dresses as she pleases, is confident glamorous leads an independent, interesting life in Lahore and never seems to entertain doubts
about herself. Her mother tells her she should have been a man for all her qualities and attitudes are seen as appropriate only to the male of species. Virmati admirers her for she appears to be “one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children.”

38 She exposes herself in the outside world. She takes part in the Indian struggle for freedom and with the independence of India, she achieves independence for herself. Though India gets freedom along with its partition but she herself remained integrated without being affected by partition. She says, “After partition, I came to Amritsar, where I had my house and a job as principal of a girls' College all ready waiting for me. I was one of the lucky ones.” She is 'one of the lucky ones' because she succeeds in asserting her identity and securing a place for herself. She lives an independent life and feels herself free to live on her own terms.

The post-colonial concepts of emancipation of woman, education of girls, of opposition to child marriage are apparent while giving the portrayal of the woman of the third phase. Swaranlata who is Virmati's friend, manages to combine dexterously, the fiery enthusiasm of the struggle for freedom and equal rights for women with a romantic relationship (which later ripes into marriage). Betty Friedan writes in her book *The Feminine Mystique:*

“A woman who has no purpose of her own in society, a woman who cannot let herself think about the future because she is doing nothing to give herself a real identity in it, will continue to feel a desperation in the present-no matter how many hours off she takes. Even a very young woman today must think of herself as a human being first, not as a mother with time on her hands, and make a life plan in terms of her own abilities, a commitment of her own to society with which her commitments as wife and mother can
be integrated."  

The other character is Swranlata. She asserts her individuality and integrates it with her commitment to the society as a home maker. Her self-assertive nature is reflected when she talks to Virmati, “I was very clear that I wanted to do something besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support for two more years. I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer Satyagraha along with others.”  

She succeeds in her search for identity. She makes the marriage on her own terms. She sets down certain conditions which are accepted by her spouse and thus fulfills her duty for, as she writes to Virmati, “She was going to be allowed to continue her other activities, remains treasure of the women's conference, go on working for the party. Everything to do with the house they would share as much as possible. She owed it to her parents to marry.”  

Ida, the narrator of story, tries to weave the past of her mother with her own present. She belongs to the third generation. The first information the readers come across is that she is the divorced daughter of Virmati. It is better not to interpret her condition as pathetic but to accept her as a new woman who has the guts to manage her life without having a male companion who is supposed to be her bread-winner for woman, though being single she becomes an object of pity for the relatives, as she says, “I know my relatives feel sorry for me. I am without husband, child or parents. I can see the ancient wheels of my divorce still grinding and clanking in their heads.” Ida herself is engulfed by melancholy because her mother accepts her divorced daughter as nothing and helpless. This lamentation of her mother hurts Ida. So, she says, “..now her shadows no longer threaten me.”  

She does not want to be like her mother who remained torn between tradition and
modernity but like Swaranlata. In her meeting with Swaranlata she observes the
difference between her mother and her. Swaranlata talks about the political affairs
during the time of struggle when she meet her, while she finds her mother obsessed
with love for Harish (her father) and did not want to do anything that would alter the
professor's undying love for her.  

Ida wants to give herself an identity but she grew up struggling to be the model
daughter when she is forced to act according to the wish as of her father, “Why is it
so important to please him?” Ida protested to her mother. She wanted to please
herself sometimes, though by the time she grew up she was not sure what self she
had to please.”

She is forced to bear an imposed life and so she got married to a man to fulfill her
parents but it results in disastrous marriage because she is divorced soon. But now
Ida is left free. When she says, “Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be, do not haunt
me any more”. It seems that now she shall live for herself and try to give herself
recognition.

Thus, Manju Kapur portrays the three generation of women at different points of
nation’s history and shows how with the changes of time their aspirations change.
Kasturi and Lajwanti, the women of the first generation live according to patriarchal
society without any demand of change and are found traditional. Ganga, though a
woman of the second generation, comes out as the same because of her illiteracy.
Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarnlata, the women of second generation demands for
the change in the patriarchal system and come out as modern. Ida, the woman of the
third generation comes across as more modern equipped to compete with the society
in her attempt to make a change in the patriarchal set up and to make it more
supportive for women and place them equal with men.
References:-

1 Cyber Literature, vol. xiii.no. 1,June 04. p.9.


6 Ibid., p.1.

7 Ibid., p.5.

8 Ibid.,p.4.

9 Ibid., p.17.


15 Ibid., p. 129.

16 Ibid., p. 149.

17 Ibid., p. 227.


19 Ibid., p. 230.

20 Ibid., p. 151.

21 Ibid., p. 232.

22 Ibid., p. 240.

23 Ibid., p. 270.


27 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

28 Ibid., p. 62.

29 Ibid., p. 62.


31 Ibid., p. 60.

32 Ibid., p. 42.
33 Ibid., p.39.
34 Ibid., p., 15.
36 Manju Kapur, p, 18.
37 Ibid., p.15.
38 Ibid., p.17.
39 Ibid., p. 271.
41 Manju Kapur, p. 118.
42 Ibid., p, 188.
43 Ibid., p.4.
44 Ibid., p, 280.
46 Ibid., p.279.