FEMALE EXPLOITATION: A STUDY OF MANJU KAPUR’S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS
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Abstract— Women writers like Manju Kapur, Kamala Markandaya, Gita Hariharan and Arundhati Roy have dealt with the gender issues disturbing women and presented women fighting against male chauvinism and domination of the patriarchal system. The present paper highlights the thesis and anti-thesis of feminine sensibility in Manju Kapur’s novel Difficult Daughters. The novelist has focused on women characters that raise female anxiety due to the feelings of courage and determination. Kapur has brought into light the female class of 1940’s when woman had no right to assert her identity.

Key-Words: Patriarchal system, Identity Crisis, Thesis and Anti-thesis, feminine sensibility

Feminism in Indian English novel is a very sublime concept. However, feminism seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity. The exploitation of woman is a well known fact even recognized by History. Einstein interprets the term feminism as,” In my understanding the term ‘feminist’ then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although centrally about women, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change.”¹ Suma Chitnis has described the distinctive feature of feminist movement in India:

The most distinctive feature of this movement is that it was initiated by man. It Ws only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of who champion the cause of women is long- Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. They record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu Widows and a lots of other evil practices that affected women.²

A plethora of Indian Female writers have tried to depict the female exploitation and suffering of women in the male dominated society. Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Gita Hariharan are prominent writers occupying rank with other Indian female writers who have expressed their feelings in the form of fiction and exposed the harsh and bitter realities of female psyche. Manju Kapur’s novel Difficult Daughters³ (1999), focuses on sturdy self-assured women characters who raise anxiety and show courage and determination to apprehend their goals in life. This paper is an attempt to reveal profound insight of female’s inner conflict and carve a way out of the dilemma in order to find an amicable solution. Women have been lagging behind in world literature for centuries. On the one hand, there are examples of Sita, Gargi, Rani Laxmi Bai and others who have followed their own paths but on the other if one violates the traditional norms, one is subjected to bitter criticism by the society.
Manju Kapur has realistically depicted the female consciousness in *Difficult Daughters* and tried to show the struggle a woman has to do in order to prove her identity in the male dominated society. Virmati, the protagonist in *Difficult Daughters* struggles hard for her existential identity in adverse circumstances. The novelist has woven into the text the story of three generations of the family in order to bring to fore the female exploitation not only by the male members but even by the female members. Tennyson’s famous lines are applicable in the context, “old order changeth yielding place to new and God fulfils himself in many ways lest one good system should corrupt the world” (In Memoriam). Ida, the daughter of Virmati, belongs to the modern advanced generation. She goes to the native place of her mother in order to find out the real circumstances and happenings related to the life of her mother. Virmati comes in contact with Professor Harish who has returned to India to fulfill the desire of his mother to stay with the family, “His heart he had left in England, returning to India reluctantly, and only because of his mother’s insistent demands” (36). Here one can very well assess the position of Professor’s wife who is illiterate: “It had also been five years since he had seen his wife, but his wife had been in no position to enforce her claims” (36). He falls in love with Virmati at first sight when he meets her:

The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he remembered it in all its detail even when his children had grown up. The murmur and rustle of students with scratching pens, their heads receding in rows, the whirr and the click-click of the fans overhead, and the stillness at the heart of it, enclosing him and Virmati, Virmati with her offering eyes in her open face.(47)

Virmati finds herself in no position to reveal her love for Professor to the family members who fix her marriage with an engineer: it seemed to Virmati that her family could talk of nothing else but her wedding. Every word they said had so little relation to her inner life that she felt fraudulent evening listening to them, passively, immorally silent”(70). The woman has to undergo pain and torture in order to tackle the peculiar situation. But the norms of patriarchal social system do not allow her to expose her feelings of love in order to select a suitable man for her as her life partner.

Struggle yields results in life if it is pursued with firm conviction to achieve the desired goal. As a result of Virmati’s keen desire for higher studies in Lahore, her cousin Shakuntala plays a pivotal role and proves herself to be the real mentor; “Shakuntala’s visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati” (19). She intends to go to Lahore for higher education ‘even if she had to fight her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over’ (19). The old fashioned mother Kasturi represents the generation that follows the fundamental dictum of society and is ready to sacrifice her daughter at the altar of marriage for good reputation and attach little importance to education of a girl:

‘Mati, please, I want to study...’ Virmati faltered.
‘But you have studied. What else is left?’
‘In Lahore...I want to go to Lahore.....’
Kastur could bear her daughter’s foolishness no further. She grabbed her by the hair and banged her head against the wall.

May be this will knock some sense into you! She cried. ‘What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?’(59)

This is how a woman stands against her daughter and forces her for marriage. ‘Remember you are going to be married next month, if I have to swallow poison to make you do it!’(60). Mother’s only concern is her daughter’s marriage. Kasturi herself has meted out the same harsh treatment at the hands of her mother when she is ‘caught praying to a picture of Christ’. The fundamentalism of society can be observed in the reference of a mother to a daughter ‘But this witch sitting at home will have nothing better to do than think she is a Christian. Who will marry her then, I would like to know’. (61) During Kasturi’s formal education, marriage is the only aim of her parents while educating their daughter in a missionary school of Punjab. Virmati’s firm determination for getting higher education becomes fruitful after she goes to drown herself in a bid of frustration and disillusionment. The family members realize the need of the hour and send her to Lahore in the company of her cousin Shakuntala who has been a source of inspiration.
for her by extending her a helping hand in critical moments of Virmati’s life:

“You will find Viru that in Lahore people are not so narrow-minded. It is a pity the man was married, but you have done the right thing. Together we will face the family. After all I have experience in resisting pressures. Don’t worry I am on your side.’ (115)

The family plays crucial role in many ways in the development or fall of a female. Virmati’s family especially her mother behave rudely and confine her to a go down of the house like an animal in order to keep her away from the matrimonial ceremony of her sister’s marriage. She is compelled to leave the house for the sake of her freedom and education in Lahore. Ida, Virmati’s daughter represents modern woman that does not follow the traditional path blindly but chooses the rational approach to discover reality behind her mother’s troublesome past. She is keen to visit the place where her mother ‘was educated after so much trouble’ in order to know the reality about her mother’s past life:

I want to see the place that had been the Mecca for all Punjabis. Lahore, where students gathered on the river, around the mausoleums, through the mall, in the gardens, the shopping areas, the eating places, the theatres. Where anybody with their brains went to study. To learn, to meet people, hear leaders, be in contact with social, political, fashionable trends. The centre of Punjab, its heart and soul, and how much else besides.(137)

Sense of emotional attachment to a man is a female’s quality. Virmati’s miserable plight is that she is in a fix to assess her real condition after being secretly married to Harish, the Professor in Lahore:

But when Harish is here I stop thinking of other things. And when he is not here, all I do is to wait for him to come. How long do we have to be secret man and wife, hidden from the eyes of the world? I hate it, but what can I do? (140)

Manju Kapur has put forth the predicament of a woman in peculiar circumstances imposed by patriarchal system of society. Virmati finds herself in difficulty to articulate her feelings. She can’t discuss about the relationship with her roommate Swarna Lata: “In a dim obscure way, Virmati longed for that open-hearted conversation between friends that relieved the mind, and strengthened faith in one self, but she had always found it difficult to articulate her feeling.”(141)

Virmati’s friend Swarn Lata reminds women of their duty for the country in times of struggle:

As women’ it is our duty, no, not duty, that word has unpleasant connotations. It is our privilege to give ourselves to the unity of our country. Not only to the unity between rich and poor, but between Muslim and Hindu, between Sikh and Christian. Artificial barriers have been created amongst us to gain power over insecure and fearful minds. (145)

Virmati’s life moves to and fro like a wheel as time and fate play crucial roles in her life and she becomes the victim of adverse circumstances even after going to Lahore for her bright future. She can’t spend money for the newspaper ‘if I start spending one anna on the newspaper, my mother will kill me’. (146) On the other hand, her roommate Swarna Lata does not prove to be a good companion in the hostel ‘In her heart, she despises me, but we are living together, she has to pretend’. (147) She is ready to face any untoward happening in her life instead of going back to her parents in Amritsar even when the doctor prescribes medicines for her weak liver and fever. She somehow or the other wants to remain away from her family and equests the hostel authorities:

She begged them not or disturbs her parents, she was sure she would get well soon. Privately she hid the medicine; she didn’t want any drugs suppressing her symptoms. Let it all come out. Nature cure was what her family believed in, and she had never in her life taken anything remotely resembling a pill. She drank lots of water to wash away the fever. (147)

Social barriers cause suppression in man-woman relationship. The Professor makes extramarital relationship with Virmati out of his deep love for her but the society in the form of wife, mother, and sister doesn’t allow converting this relationship into marriage. And a girl has to undergo much humiliation and face difficulties more than a boy due to patriarchal structure of society. Virmati realistically puts her real picture before her lover:

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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...........(149)

It is marriage which matters for a girl like Virmati who is not in a position to understand the real factor behind the excuse of delay in marriage ceremony. Indian social barriers and legal parameters don’t permit a man to marry many times. After her involvement with Harish, Virmati realizes the fact that he wants to ‘prolong the situation’ of marriage. Here is the realistic portraiture of a married man falling in love with the other:

How do you know of them Viru? I come to you as a haven. Except for this, my life is hell! Hell! Tantrums, sulks, sly accusations. (149-50)

The very reality of her lover’s behavior is just like ‘an act of treachery’ for a girl who has not taken care of her parents and stood against the system with the hope of her marriage to her lover.

Manju Kapur focuses our attention to the fact of fast changing scenario from the view point of women when they can participate even in the freedom struggle and the activities like education for the sake of their better future.

To conclude, Manju Kapur has vividly presented the life of women struggling against the patriarchal system of society in order to claim her right place. The novel is rather a story of a woman’s continuous struggle for her existential identity against the perception of domesticity. The novel is the miserable tale of a woman torn between her family responsibility, the passion for education and her illicit love.

REFERENCES


Predicament of Women in the Novel of Arundhati Roy’s

“The God of Small Things

BY – Rashmi Dwivedi

Indian novel after 1980’s witnessed a new wave of writers who realistically wrote about problems faced by women in male dominated society. Arundhati Roy is one of them, who have been acclaimed as a leading interpreter of brutalities in rapidly changing Indian society. Her writing is exclusively about current controversial issues like caste discrimination, environmental protection and marginalization in society especially in case of women.

In “The God of Small Things” ‘small things’ refers to overlooked events, ‘small’ people and other creatures which, in fact, deserve more attention than ‘big things’. Even from the title, one may comment that small, silent or hidden things should be heard, should be given their voice. The novel contains the stories of death, broken marriages, unreasonable hate, revenge, sexuality and violence. When overall analysis of the novel is conducted, it is not only the story of a family that comes in light, but it is also a story of suffering in a wider perspective, which does not seem to have an end. That is to say, the characters in the novel have their unfulfilled desires and are punished and silenced by the system in various ways.

In this novel the predicament of Indian women is studied in depth. It directly deals with the marginalization of three generations of women on orthodox Syrian Christian family in Kerala. These women are Mammachi, who is representative of old generation of women. Ammu, is the representative of second generation and Rahel is the daughter of Ammu, representative of third generation of women in the same family. These three women are forcefully placed on the margin of society and intentionally deprived of human rights. They are severally marginalized by male dominated society. Social institutions like family,
marriage, religion and government are responsible for their powerless and unimportant position in the society.

First of all Mammachi, is the significant character in the novel, representative of old generation of women. She is mother of Ammu and chacko. She is brutally faced marginalization. The man who is responsible for the pitiable condition of Mammachi is no other than her own husband, Pappachi. She was the victim of her husband’s brutality throughout her life. Mammachi is constantly beaten by her husband. She has exceptional talent for music, especially violin; that arouses jealousy in the mind of her husband. The matter reaches on culmination point when violin trainer makes the mistake of telling her husband that his wife is “exceptionally talented”. Later he breaks the bow of the violin one night and throw it in the river. The same jealousy she expressed again when she started pickle making is not “a suitable job for high ranking ex- government official”. Thus the marriage of Mammachi with Pappachi was full of complications and lack of understanding, love and co-operation.

The women in “The God of small Things” are mostly confronted with marital and family problems. Ammu is the second important character who is the representative of second generation was always neglected by both hands men as well as women. She is the female protagonist of the novel, being born in rich family of Pappachi and Mammachi. Naturally we expect her upbringing is with full of love and care, but in reality it shocks the reader. Ammu received no love and affection from her parent. Her parent always denies her right or love and care as a daughter. Her childhood was full of suffering and hardship, as a child mercilessly beaten her “tropped riding crop”. This inhuman action of her father is clear indication of her pitiable condition in the family with the help of violence.

The pathetic condition of Ammu is made possible by traditional patriarchal family structure, where female child always unwelcomed and treated as burden on family. However her brother Chacko, is privileged in every strata of family life. After completion of schooling, Ammu is not allowed to take further education, while her brother is sent to Oxford university for higher education. This dual nature of her parent is prime factor for her powerless and unimportant position first of all in her family and after this in society.

“Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. So Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them.”(38)
Ammu get an opportunity to meet her distant aunt in Calcutta. She grabs this golden opportunity without hesitation and marries with young Hindu. Her husband is working as an assistant manager at tea estate in Assam. She marries with him with the hope that this marriage will bring up all the love and affection which she deprived at her parental house. But her bad luck continues with her. Her husband turn out to be an alcoholic and even urges her to sleep with his boss, Mr. Hollick, after which Ammu leaves him and returns with her twins, Estha and Rahel, to Ayeman. She is not welcome on her return to her father’s house. A kind of elite leftist, her brother Chacko marginalized her. As we know a divorce woman never get any place or respect in Indian traditional family Ammu is also cornered by the family structure and inheritance laws customarily prevalent among the Syrian Christian Community in Kerola. Then she has a secret love affair with Velutha, an untouchable. This couple is neglected and discarded by the orthodox society, found solace in union. This secret love meeting goes on for thirteen days until it is reported by Velutha’s father to Mammachi. When this disastrous affair is revealed, Velutha is grabbed by police and killed on false case of rape. When she went to police station to set the record straight against Velutha. At that time police officer insulted her with remark that the “Kottayam police does not take statement from Veshyas (prostitutes) and their illegitimate children” (58). This brutal behaviour of police shows that they used his power to make the pitiable condition of Ammu.

At the end of novel Ammu is exiled from home by family member. She is separated from her children and not allowed to visit Ayemenem. She desperately tries to seek good job in anonymous places. Tired, exhausted, sick and finally she died. After death her struggle does not end. Her body is humiliated for cremation, church refused to bury Ammu. Finally she is cremated in electric crematorium. So throughout the course of Ammu’s life, She was neglected or ignore by social institution like family marriage, religion, and police. We also observe that for the decline of Ammu not only men are responsible but women like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have equall share.

The third powerless woman who is marginalized by the people is Rahel. She is the representative of third generation. But she is not treated in so bad manner as Ammu and Mammachi had faced. Still she is neglected by people because of being a daughter of neglected Ammu. Rahel faced marginalization and it’s tormenting effects throughout her life. His life totally disturbed due to the tormenting memories of past.
From this perspective, Arundhati Roy’s novel “The God of Small Things” focuses on the above mentioned points. Roy through the character of Ammu has portrayed, that the female sex is completely neglected in society. When Ammu makes physical relationship with an untouchable man Velutha, their relationship was known as illegal. In this novel, we found that both male and female are treated differently as chacko, being a man lives happily even after divorce but on the other hand, Ammu, after divorce, suffers in the whole novel. It shows different social conditions of men and women in the society which is very decisive.

This novel is a revolutionary attempt on the part of Arundhati Roy who tried to open the eye of Indian community towards hardness of treating women as objects. Women are treated as soulless being, sub-human and play thing for men. This imbalance in society explains much of unhappiness prevailing in our families and in the lives of children who are exposed to this very partial and unjust view of life. The end result is a paralysed society unable and unwilling to grow.

References:

Feminine Sensibility : A Study of Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*

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Abstract


Key-Words

Patriarchal Domination, Identity Crisis, Marginalized Female Class, Female Awareness

Feminism in Indian English novel is a very sublime concept. However, with the development of time feminism has set aside the norms of patriarchal society in India. But it is in the fitness of things to understand the term in India in the right perspective. Feminism in Indian English fiction is not a new concept and many writers have tried their hand in dealing the concept successfully and bringing to fore the astonishing variety of theme in a realistic manner. Indian women

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writers have expressed their feelings in the form of fiction in order to cater attention of readers. Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur occupy important places in Indian English fiction. These women writers have been successful in depicting the bitter reality in exposing the existing social inequality.

In Indian society, women have occupied signifying spaces by playing substantial roles in different spheres of life. As a matter of fact, younger generations have contributed at large level in progress of our country; their contribution can’t be neglected in the overall development of country. Women have played crucial roles in every sphere of life and proved themselves as important pillars, which was possible due to harmonious relationship in every sphere of life.

The relationship between mother and daughter is one that has far-reaching effects on the development and socialization of her daughter from birth to adulthood. The mother and daughter relationship affects her daughter’s ability to make and keep friends. If she is nourished in a proper manner, she will be able to develop healthy relationship with others and play crucial role in the development of society.

Contemporary Indian English novelists have shifted their focus on women’s sufferings in patriarchal society. Searches for the existential identity is the central focal issue of female writers. Novelists like Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur have explored human relationship and trapped their emotional and mental springs. Manju Kapur has explored many facets of human relationship in her novels like *Difficult Daughters* (1999), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The Custody* (2011), but it is the mother daughter relationship which caters readers attention when they go through the novels of Manju Kapur. The relationships between man-woman in different forms are significant aspects in the writings of contemporary Indian English female novelists. The present changing scenario of Indian English literature has covered various aspects of status and miserable conditions of women. In the past decades, the female novelists have explored silent and mimic women who sacrifice their lives and suffer miserably for no fault of their own. Manju Kapur's novels *Difficult Daughters* (1999)and *Home* (2006) are saga of three generations of women which explore a woman who is caught in between tradition and modernity in patriarchal Indian society.

In *Difficult Daughters*, the protagonist Virmati expresses her idea about the male dominated world and struggles to get her identity. She experiences a journey of her inner self. Manju Kapur’s novel *Difficult Daughters* is a story of a daughter’s journey back into her mother’s painful past who is in search for independence. This novel unfolds the details of life
of three generations of female figures Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. This is not a fictional family, but the story of real, middle class home with fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters that one has seen and lived with. The present research paper attempts to evaluate the struggling life of Virmati who belongs to a Punjabi family of Amritsar. Her mother Kasturi is a traditional woman who expects that her children must take interest in worship and other religious traditions and domestic affairs. However, her daughter Virmati breaks all barriers of traditionalism and looks for a life of modernity and regards self interest as a stepping stone for her success. Manju Kapure has described Virmati, the protagonist, and her relation with Ida, her daughter who hates her mother due to her unpleasant relationship and doesn’t know the reality related to the life of her mother till her mother’s death. Only after the death of her mother she comes to know the bitter reality regarding her mother’s life through her uncle Kailash Nath, and some of her relatives and friends and she starts loving her mother then onwards. The human psychology is that one doesn’t know the value of relationship in the life span of one’s parents and it is after their departure from this world that there is regret and longing for them. Ida thinks that her mother is also an ordinary woman who began her life as usual and ended it in a customary way. But when she comes to know about her mother’s struggle throughout her life, she is magnetically drawn towards her owing to her sense of human dignity, her pride and struggling nature. Ida becomes fond of her mother’s love after her mother’s death. Virmati is against the so called traditional conventions of morality and stands against the views of her mother who takes education very lightly. She seeks those human relations that will fulfil her hope as per her ambition. She insists on the value of education in life and leaves her home for higher studies in Lahore. In her native city Amritsar, she comes in contact with a Professor, a married man and marries him and thus ends her life like a marginalised woman disliked by her own family and despised by her husband’s. Her tragic tale is narrated by her daughter Ida, who tries to reconstruct her mother’s story against the background of freedom movement of the 1940s and subsequent tragedy of partition of India and Pakistan. On the other hand, her daughter Ida presents herself as an independent figure:

The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I started at the fire that rose from her shrivelled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered and the pyre and wept. (1)

The novelist exposes Virmati’s quest for identity in a family dominated by the patriarchal system. Being the eldest child of parents, she is overburdened by her domestic duties and liabilities. As a result of this, she passes through the sense of frustration and disappointment. She develops a desire to be assertive like her cousin Shakuntala “I am just going, protest
Virmati finally. ‘Why can’t Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?’ ‘You know they don’t listen to her’, snapped Kasturi. ‘You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things, who will?’ (6-7)

Ida, daughter of Virmati is the product of post-independent age and tries to assert herself like an independent girl. She tries to search her mother’s past and thus fulfils the duty and responsibility of a daughter. After Virmati’s death, Ida goes to the native place Amritsar in order to find out her mother’s past. Her relatives narrate the responsible nature of her mother along with her qualities of independence “We depended on her, but she was free with her tongues and her hands”(5). The relatives of Virmati give only the partial information regarding her past but her daughter seeks to explore another facts “My relatives gave me one view of my mother, I wanted another”.(5)

Manju Kapur exposes the weak and hollow social practices where a woman is considered like a machine made for giving birth to children. The daughter Virmati ‘is attuned to signs of her mother’s pregnancies as Kasturi herself’(6). Even Virmati has to work hard to fulfil the domestic responsibilities assigned to her being the eldest child of the family. She is also fond of her admiration but her mother comes heavily against her for no fault of her own ‘you think all the time in the world for sitting around, doing nothing’(6). ‘Breeding like cats and dogs’ are the ironic and biting comments of her sister-in-law for Kasturi. She thus becomes a victim of the offensive control of patriarchal system of society. Kasturi experiences agony of giving birth to eleven children:

When Kasturi was finally allowed out of bed, she was still bleeding heavily...........Why should she look after her body? Hadn’t it made her life wretched enough?.......The hakim declared he could not answer for Kasturi’s life if she had any more children. The vaid also said the same thing. A Wesstern allopath declared that repeated births deplete the body and no medicine could help Kasturi through another pregnancy.(11-12)

The novelist traces Virmati’s continuous search for identity and freedom in an atmosphere of heavily burdened responsibilities of looking after the entire family. Her personal life is spoiled in the mundane busy assignments of caring her mother, her brothers and sisters. She is influenced by her cousin Shakuntala who is modern in her thinking and behaviour:

Virmati, looking at her glamorous cousin, marvelled at the change Lahore had wrought in her. What did it matter that Shakuntal’s lectures were not good? She looked better than merely pretty. She looked vibrant and intelligent, as though
she had a life of her own. Her manner was expansive, she didn’t look shyly when she spoke or acted.(16)

Virmati is living for others in the real sense of the term but her cousin Shakuntala takes her out of this world of responsibilities ‘beyond a husband and children’. She stresses on leading the life of independence. “These people don’t really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent.” (17) The words of her cousin become the ‘most vivid thing on the horizon’ and thus nourish her feeling of identity. She wants to lead a life like that of Shakuntala’s practical world of entertainment and freedom. Lajwanti and Kasturi stand against Shakuntala’s views. Kasturi’s ideology is that of a patriarchal woman who considers that a woman should educate herself for the betterment of her family and devote herself in fulfilling domestic duties like marriage.

Virmati is attracted by the pleasure giving world of Shakuntala ‘I want to be like you, Pehnji’. Shakuntala invites her to come to Lahore, “times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you”(18). She is ready to fight her mother in order to go to Lahore for educating herself. On the other hand, her family does not allow her to higher education. It hardly makes a little difference to her attitude of being educated in Lahore like her cousin Shakuntala and to get rid of household burden. At an age of seventeen years, her mother thinks of her marriage to a canal engineer which Kasturi considers the real aim of life for a girl.

Family also plays a crucial role in Difficult Daughters. It is for the sake of family liabilities that Virmati is not allowed to go out of the narrow boundaries of her house. According to R.J.Kalpana:

. The family is at once the source of women’s affirmation as well as their subordination. They are heralded as martyrs of the struggle and as a source of regeneration and yet they are denied leadership position.(30).

Lajwanti like Virmati defies the established norms of society to remain united under the guardianship of her father-in-law. She is responsible for division of ancestral property and instigates her husband Chander time and again for separation from the united family. She seeks opportunities to detach herself from her sister-in-law. Her father-in-law Lala Diwan Chand is against any separation in his family. Moreover Virmati also stands against the established social norms and the idea of her marriage to an engineer by her parents, “It seemed to Virmati that her family could talk of nothing else but her wedding. Every word they said had so little relation to her inner life that she felt fraudulent even listening to them, passively, immorally silent”(70). Virmati rebels against stereotypical ideas regarding the honour of her family. Thus the readers come to the conclusion that Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters is a story of
Virmati’s continuous struggle for her career and identity against the prevalent ideology of domesticity. The novel is woven around a woman who is torn between family responsibility, the desire to education and love. While India stands against the British Raj and its policies, Virmati fights for her personal freedom and finds that her struggle for identity has created unfavorable circumstances around her. The novel can be called as a journey of woman’s inner conflict in order to get her suitable place in society.

References: