

Voices Of Women As Expressed In Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughter's*

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ABSTRACT:

Interpersonal relationships have found a major place in the recent Indian writings. While Patriarchal systems have governed and still governing the society to an extent, the women too have started rising their voices against this oppression. But the sad state witnessed in the society is that, women are forced to follow the customs and beliefs not by the men, but by the women. A perfect woman in the Indian society should be calm, obedient, obeying any orders and if she raises her voice, she is called by many names. Kapur, in her novel brings out the voices of women at different levels in the society and how education helps them to survive the oppression on them.

Key Words: Relationship, Patriarchal, Indian society, Oppression, Education.

A major preoccupation in recent Indian Women's writings has been indicating the inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship. Women were not supposed to raise voices for their rights, protest against injustice or question the already existing beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. Women are structured to be obedient, quiet submissive, and passive not claiming any of their rights neither as women nor as human beings. Even the earlier Indian women novelists have been portraying woman as the silent sufferers, the upholder of

traditional values and ethics, and a strict observer of social taboos, an epitome of tolerance and patience, and a worshipper of their counterparts. Recently, there is a change with the advent of feminism. Indian Women writers reveal the explicit reality of the society and the plights of Indian women in the society. Women are no longer characterized to surrender, submit and suffer to martyrdom.

The finite dimension of the relationship between man and woman has been prescribed by man and not by woman. Her limits have been imposed on her by man who is ruled by the mastery-motive. Modern women prefer to exercise their choices and break away from their traumatic experiences. A study of the man-woman relationship as narrated in the modern literature. Women are portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view, and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past.

Kapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Her novel presents the struggle of women to establish an identity. Kapur has remained very candid and truthful in presenting the women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio-political levels.

Women are not supposed to raise voices for their rights, protest against injustice or question the already existing beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. Kapur has presented the women of 1940s, when women had no voice to assert their rights, most importantly the voice of the protagonist, Virmati. She raises her voice against male chauvinism to claim her rights of economic independence. This chapter is attempting to show the Voices of Women in *Difficult Daughters*.

Virmati, the heroine born in Amritsar in a high-minded household, except for her traditionalist mother Kasturi. Virmati always aspires for a freedom which is condemned and ridiculed in a tradition bound Indian society. Adjust, compromise, adapt that has been the demand from the women by such a male chauvinist society. Her education has helped her in inculcating her spirit of diffidence and rebellion against her family when it comes to her arranged marriage. To the lasting shame of her family, she insists on her right to be educated. She manages to leave home to study in Lahore. Kasturi understand Virmati's disinterest in marriage:

What kind of learning was this, that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education, it had got her her husband, and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading. In her time, going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one's parents. How had girl's changed so much in just a generation?. (DD, 60)

As an educated woman, Virmati is aware of the degree of control she has to exercise over her life. Her protest against the conventions is strong and its starts with her wish to continue her education after she meets Shakuntala. She feels deprived of her rights when her parents wanted her to accept the arranged marriage. But all her protests lead her to a life of depravity. And the deplorable condition deprives her from attaining the power and freedom she hopes to enjoy. Whenever she breaks away from her old prison, she is locked into the new ones. To liberate her, she believes that education is the only means but falls prey to the Professor's snare.

The repercussion of the continual illicit relationship, she suffers with the conception of the sinful burden. She feels void when she aborts the child, she laments, "That a child of their union, the result of all those speeches on freedom and the right to individuality, the sancity of human love and the tyranny of social and religious restraints, should meet its end like this!" (DD 171). She tries to contact him to find a solution to the impending danger but in vain. When the Professor meets her, she discloses the matter and proposed for her own marriage to him. But he refuses for the fear of spoiling his reputation and his family name. Then Virmati retaliates:

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 . . . and why?. (DD 149)

The formal marriage, a social and public statement is must for Virmati. It is this which will establish her identity even if it is as the Professor's second wife. Marriage thus for her means deliverance from the fear of being socially condemned, a possibility which will perhaps bring her back into the fold and relieve her from the sense of insecurity and uncertainty. The earlier generation of her mother has seen no reason to rebel. There was complete acceptance in life. Kasturi is an example of the typical feminine attitude to procreate in order to bring about life and pleasure. To run her home, first a joint family and later her own, is happiness for her.

Kasturi's case, her parents threatened to marry her. There is no question of Kasturi becoming a bride. Child marriage is evil one. Swami Dayanandji had said that marriage was a union between rational, consenting adults. He declares that the multiple marriages and child widows should be avoided. He understands that his sister-in-law is upset. Kasturi becomes the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guest. She graduates at the age of twelve then she stay at home until she married. "During Kasturi's formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education

continued in the home. 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" (DD 62).

Virmati realizes that a woman's life is not confined to love, marriage, education, and domestic-limbo, instead she has to play a vital role in the outer world and in to empowerment of her nation. Consequently, she decides to active in India's freedom struggle like her peer group but at the very next moment her decision is caused by her intense passion for Harish. Unlike Swarnalata, Shakuntala, and even her daughter Ida, Virmati fails to earn recognition in the society. But she is applauded for her valiant struggle against patriarchy and colonialism.

The abortion, because of the illicit relationship with the Professor leaves Virmati in a sad psychological state. Then, it was her friend, Swarnalata who brings her back stating that there is much more to life than this. She wants to do something meaningful in her life like her roommate Swarnalata, who was a freedom activist. Virmati change her mind between the demands of her heart and her yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of her time. She is moved by Swarnalata's words, who professed:

Marriage is not the only thing in life, viru. The war- the Satyagraha movement-because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream . . . Most families look upon the marriage of a daughter as a sacred duty or sacred burden. We are lucky we're living in times when women can do something else. Even in Europe women gain more respect during wartime. And here we have that war and our Satyagraha as well. (DD 151-52)

Virmati wants to participate the freedom struggle. She is not allowed to do that as Harish wants her to pay more attention to their baby. The daughter's naming ceremony takes place. Virmati wants to call the daughter 'Bharati' as it is associated with the birth of the country. Harish suggests the name 'Ida', Virmati tells him that it sounds Persian. But Harish justifies saying, "Let anybody think what they like. For us, it means a new state and a blank beginning" (DD 277). To give a name to a child seems a little matter in that consideration. Even though he didn't choose the name which his wife selects. The man who talks of freedom of country, in practice, does not allow the same to his wife.

In Virmati's extended family, her cousin Shakuntala appears from the beginning as the exemplar of the 'modern' or 'liberated' women. She studies, teaches and takes part in the political- Gandhian movement. She keeps strong on her autonomy and her freedom of action and thought. Shakuntala becomes a pole of attraction for Virmati, "Virmati listened . . . drawn towards Shakuntala, to one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children" (DD 17). She shares her liberated lifestyle and activities to her cousin, "We travel,

entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going abroad for higher studies" (DD 17). Swarnalata also leads a similar lifestyle and ultra-committed activist. In Punjab Women's Students conference she shines as an orator. "Heavy applause broke out as Swarna finished speaking" (DD 45). The qualification made them to choose a liberated lifestyle.

Virmati's daughter Ida, who belongs to the post-independence generation, is strong and clearheaded. She breaks up her marriage as she is denied maternity by her marriage. Ida's marriage bond frees herself from male domination and power and also from conventional social structures which bind women. She has that strength which Virmati lacks. Ida had never shared her secret with her mother. Ida goes on to express her feelings about her mother:

Mother, I never told you this, because you thought Prabhakar was so wonderful, and I was glad that in the choice of my husband I have pleased you. Why should I burden you with my heartaches when you had enough of your own? . . . He was what you respected, a successful academic, a writer of books, a connoisseur of culture, a disseminator of knowledge. Like my father. How many times had you declared that I would be lucky if I found a husband like my father? I had agreed with you. (DD 156-57)

Ida, who grew up struggling to be the model daughter, does not have the heart to reject Virmati, the mother. But she rejects her as a woman after having an insight into Virmati's past. Through Ida's admiration for Swarnalata, who enters into a wider sociopolitical sphere, the novelist seems to be saying 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 feels suffocated, then a voice ought to be raised and there should be a total breaking away, like Ida. A woman should be aware, self controlled, strong willed, self reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood.

The two factors which enable the modern woman to assert are education and economic independence. Virmati comes as a modern woman, being both educated and having a job before marriage. The very fact that she is able to break the patriarchal mode in the 1940s is in itself a great achievement. In comparison her daughter Ida, an educated woman, divorced and childless, leads a much freer life than her mother. In fact she has achieved much more than her mother was able to achieve. As Dora Sales Salvador, the Spanish translator of *Difficult Daughters* says, "In *Difficult Daughters*, we do not listen to Virmati's voice. She could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation" (qtd. in Rollason 52).

Difficult Daughters is the story of struggle for freedom, in this Virmati was struggling to live life on her own terms. The women in the novel are all educated and modern. They are unwilling to blindly follow the old convictions and beliefs that curb the freedom of women as an individual. They are women who wanted to prove their individuality and strive towards attaining their own aspiration.

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