

**Tribhuvan University**

**Women at Margin: Reflections on Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters***

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By

Rupa Sijapati

Campus Roll No. : 209

Exam Roll No: 400844/069II

TU Regd. No: 6-1-38-538-99

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## Declaration

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Rupa Sijapati

March, 2017

**Tribhuvan University**  
**RatnaRajyaLaxmi campus**  
**Department of English**

**Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled, "Women at Margin: Reflections on Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, by Rupa Sijapati ,has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

.....

Raj Kumar Baral  
(Supervisor)

.....

External Examiner

.....

Pradip Sharma  
Head

Department of English,  
Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus,

Date: .....

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## Abstract

The feminist activists in third world realize that the main stream western feminism can't address the issues of the women in third world as the cultural differences matter. Western feminism is widely criticized for being Eurocentric, as the result, other branches of feminism arise such as Black feminism and Third World Feminism. Third World Feminism deals with the ordeals created by social, cultural, traditional aspects of these countries in the day to day lives of women. Kapur's female characters also have to fight with these ordeals as they live in one of the most conservative society of India. Virmati, Kapur's heroine of "Difficult Daughters" struggle through her entire life for the achievement of minimal freedom.

With the development of education, there comes awareness in an individual regardless of gender. Women in third world come to realize how they have been suppressed since centuries in their societies, specially after Second World War. As they become conscious, they protest against their suppression and suppressor. But social taboos in third world are so extreme that it's so difficult to break them. Eventually women can't get freedom until these taboos are broken. The main protagonist of Manu Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* rebels throughout her life to establish her identity as an independent woman of new era but eventually she fails. It is entirely her fault to prove herself as failure but social taboos of patriarchal society also can be considered as secondary causes. Not only the major characters, even the minor characters share the same fate of Virmati, the main character.

## Contents

Declaration

Acknowledgement

Approval Letter

Abstract

I.	Women's Suppression in Consecutive Generations	1-8
II.	Feminism and Empowerment	9-18
III.	Women at Margin: Reflections on Manju Kapur's <i>Difficult Daughters</i>	19-35
IV.	Struggle Against Suppression	36-38

Works Cited

## Chapter I

### Women's Suppression in Consecutive Generations

Manju Kapur represents her female characters as an impression of her basic Indian women battling for their rights in a patriarchal society. Their internal sentiments, longings, sufferings and battles have been plainly depicted. Kapur presents three generations of female characters having same fate of being suppressed by male characters in her well-acclaimed novel *Difficult Daughters*. However, the main protagonist, Virumati's sufferings are more focused, her minor characters, Kasturi, Virumati's mother and Ida, Virumati's daughter are also victims of brutal male domination in pre- independence and post-independence era.

Kasturi, the woman of first generation is such a naïve creature that she even doesn't know who she is. Her world is confined within only the home. She thinks marriage is the only destination made for women. Making in-laws happy, serving the husband and producing children are the duties of women for her. She projects her ideology on her daughters too, that's why, she is the most brutal to her daughter, Virumati, when she decides to pursue her further study rather than getting married at the tender age of seventeen. Virumati, the second generation of woman, tries to fight but finally fails due to various reasons. She tries to establish her identity as an individual. She is a tireless fighter She is different than her mother. She is the one who struggles against social values but can't succeed. She is able to rebel to get the authority to decide herself of her life, not her family and society, but she fails to go against the male suppression which comes in the form of her lover, The Professor. As the result, she remains marginalized despite of her long combat. Ida, the woman of third generation, is a modern woman but still not a free person. Like her mother, she is also a victim of brutal social traditions. She is a divorcee, with no husband and

children, thus has to face the harsh treatment of her society. All three women are marginalized in the name of traditions and culture. Had these women been the women of first world, they would have suffered less as the development of awareness in western country is quick

Virumati is the eldest child out of eleven children of her parents. She bears the burden of household chores since her childhood. She is compelled to be second mother for her younger siblings since her mother's health is never well due to continuous pregnancy and delivery "Ever since Virumati 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" (6). She has become the foster mother for her ten younger siblings which limits her with in traditional duty of women.

She is a rebellious character from the beginning but all her efforts to make herself free seems to go in vain at the end. She even protests of being laden the duty of home maid upon her. "Why can't Indumati also take responsibility?

Why does it always have to be me?" (6) Though, this seems to be her small efforts, it sows the seed the courage to rebel against her family.

But her mother every time makes her realize that she is born as woman, born to take care of house, born to be confined within four walls of house and born to take responsibilities of her family. "You know they don't listen to her (Indumati)" snapped Kasturi. "You are the eldest. If you don't see to things, who will?" (7) She is made realize what her typical duty is.

As she grows up, she protests for her passion of possessing education. Her father and grandfather are of progressive view, that's why she is allowed to persuade the higher education but her mother's view is not supportive towards her. Education, according to her, is nothing for a woman. Her sacred duty is just to keep the home of



her husband “What good are Shaku’s degrees when she is not settled. Will they look after her when she is old?”(22) Education is considered as nothing if it doesn’t help her to find an ideal husband.

She follows the same what her surrounding has taught her. She is no more capable of thinking beyond a woman’s duty. “Hai re, beti! What is the need to do job? A Woman’s shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Here Kasturi’s eyes glistened with emotion. “After you get married, Viru can follow” (16). Kasturi’s opinion here clears that women are confined to domestic chores, not to outer world where she can pursue her freedom.

Veermati keeps on fighting to complete her education beyond the limitation. But she uses her education and ability nowhere and accomplishes nothing in her entire life. She falls for the married man, The Professor. Rather than for her own education, the main motif for her protest is her wish to be with the man she loves. She refuses to marry with the engineer, Indarjeet, whom her family has chosen and she is engaged to, not because she wants to do BA but she wants to marry the Professor. She loses all her freedom to marry Harish.

Marriage in Indian society is an institution for suppressing women where she is suppressed by her husband and in-laws. Throughout all the plot, Virmati goes against the suppressing society, mostly her own family and displays the image of a free woman but she is rather harshly dominated by Harish. Virmati knows very clearly that her relation with the professor is nothing but only an enclosure to cage her in the male dominated society. Harish is only a typical suppressor. He rather reveals the dominating character of males. His behavior is unjust to both his legally wedded wife and with Virmati having illicit affair. He wants to possess both women, his wife for the domestic chores, without Gauri, there would be no one to iron his kurta and

dhoti, and Virmati for the fulfillment of his physical and intellectual lust. To clear it, she says:

From washing his clothes to polishing his shoes, to tidying his desk, dusting his precious books, filling his fountain pens with ink, putting his records back into their jackets, mending his clothes, stitching his shirts and kurtas, hemming his dhotis, seeing that they were starched properly, Ganga did it all. (216)

Though Virmati rebels for her education, she can't get out from the continuous domination of Harish. She is never free. One of leading writer Arpita Ghosh remarks:

Virmati fell prey to professor Harish's desire. Slowly but surely such desire swallowed up Virmati; she transgressed the laws of the threshold and got involved in an illicit affair with Harish both physically and mentally. He forcefully enters cottage and makes love without Virmati's prior consent to the act. In spite of Virmati's protest Harish beastly pounces on her and quenches his thirst for lust. Thus another violence committed in liaison, Virmati was doomed forever. (126)

Kasturi, Kapur's one of minor characters, is the protagonist's mother who emblems common women who are not aware how they are suppressed in society. Kasturi is educated but her education is only limited for getting a good husband. She only finds happiness that she has accomplished the duty of a mere woman. She is only a child bearing machine with eleven children in home." She had filled the house as her in laws had wanted" (Kapur 9). Women are considered as child bearing machine and it's her sacred duty.

Education, for her, is not the route to freedom. She is educated enough to be eligible to be daughter in law of a reputed family. She tries to pass her principle of life to Virmati but fails, “At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother” (22). Getting married and bearing child at the early age is best in Indian society otherwise she will be labeled as spinster and has to face torture from all side.

Her plight is even clearer when she even doesn't have the right for reproduction. She can't decide how many children she will have. She is compelled to have a litter of children. She doesn't have control over her own physical body. It is in the control of her husband and she never protests for this.

By the time Virmati was sixteen, Kasturi could bear childbirth no more. For the eleventh time it had started the heaviness in her belly, morning and evening nausea, bile in her throat while eating, hair falling out in clumps, giddiness when got up suddenly. How could nature make a woman trapped. (7) It is believed universally that nature itself has made women fragile and vulnerable.

She never understands and believes in the freedom of women. She is the most aggressive to Virmati who tries to live her own life according to her decision. Ida, represents the modern women but her condition is no better than her mother and grandmother. Of course, she doesn't need to struggle for education like her mother, but her pain being dominated by her husband is same as her mother.

She goes for an abortion just because her husband doesn't want a child. When Ida's husband coerces her to the removal of an embryo from the uterus, after that she gets divorce. She is a husband less and childless. Ida breaks an unsuccessful marriage. Here her condition is very pathetic. Manju Kapur clears the picture of her abortion, “I knew, mother, what it was like to have an abortion. Prabhakar had insisted I have one.

In denying that incipient little thing in my belly, he sowed the seeds of our breakup – as perhaps he meant to do. Yes, I knew what it was like” (156). Women who try to go beyond the traditional duty are taken as unsuccessful women in our society.

She doesn't have the right to reproduction like her mother and grandmother. Her grandmother is compelled to have eleven children just because she has to fill the house as her in laws wished. Her mother, Virmati has an abortion after conceiving from the illicit relation .In all three cases, women are only associated with child bearing but not according to their wish but as per the wish of male characters. Kasturi herself doesn't want to have any more baby but she has to .Virmati doesn't want to have the abortion but she has to because The Professor is not willing to marry her.

The novelist mentions the clash between tradition and modernity. Virmati, Shakuntala, Swarnalata and Ida are the paradigm of new women. They break limitations of traditional values and family customs. Regarding the condition of women, famous feminist writer Simone De Beauvoir comments, “The situation of woman is that she, a free and autonomous being like creature, nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assure the status of the other” (Beauvoir 167).

Feminist movement made conscious to the female about the domestic oppression by male upon women and then, it encouraged the women to challenge male-oriented social structure that prevented women in public life. Feminist movement gave inspiration to question the assigned role of female in the society. Feminists aimed at deconstructing male made position of women in a house to make them acknowledge the reality of female power. For a long period women's publications had been among the materials removed from the public and school

libraries. As a result, they could not write. Virginia Woolf is quite dissatisfied of this situation. She raises question about this precarious situation and vents her idea as:

The most superficial enquiry into women's writing raises a host of questions. Why, we ask at once, was there no continuous writing done by women before the eighteenth century? Why did they then write? Almost as habitually as men, and in the course of that writing produce, one after another, some of the classics of English fiction? And why did their art then, and why to some extent does their art skill, take the form of fiction? (33)

Before eighteen century, it was almost impossible for women to come public as a writer since even in western society, they were not accepted beyond their traditional role, as a writer. Few had ability to write and publish them, still many of able writers wrote under pseudonym of male like George Eliot, probably because they were aware about their social taboos. Feminists write for freedom, autonomy and self-identity of the women. They think that men should take as their necessary counterparts and help them to come in the independent arena. Women must be regarded as important human beings. Accepting such reality some male writers began to write giving the autonomous power to women character in their literary writing. Women protagonists have individuality in their texts. Consciousness about female as equal human being is somehow the contribution n of feminist movements. Feminists view that only a feminist struggle will particularly change relations between man women that concerns issues such as sexuality, violence, gender discrimination, emancipation, freedom and equality for women.

Rosemarie Tong quotes Millet's *Sexual Politics in Feminist Thought* about the male's superiority in patriarchal society as:

Patriarchal ideology according to Millet exaggerates biological differences between men and women making certain that men always have the dominant, or "masculine" roles and that women always have the subordinate, or "feminine" ones. This ideology is particularly powerful because through conditioning, men usually secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress. They do this through institutions such as the academy the church and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces woman's subordination to men with the result that most women internalize the sense of inferiority to men. (96)

Women followed their duties set by patriarchal society without any question and they never tried to challenge it. The modern feminist critic Virginia Woolf questions "Whether part of the housework was her task" (34). The male structured society compelled women to think that was their destiny and women did not think necessary to revolt against this thinking.

Tong sensed the hierarchy between male and female because of biological differences. She sees domination and restriction upon women by male culture and male oriented society. She finds women as an object for pleasing male. In such a miserable existence, she feels necessity to deconstruct male made culture and male oriented society in order to be free from any type of bondage. She writes:

Feminists have explicitly articulated the ways in which men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women's but men's needs, wants and interests-what women must do is to reconceived female sexuality, this time in the image and likeness of women. Although this preconception is difficult, it is potentiality empowering. Liberated from

the Procrustean bed of male-defined and male controlled female sexuality women are discovering the richness and diversity of the female body sensing within it the power of what some formal women spirit rising. (72)

*Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur is the story of a woman divided between different sectors that affected her life. Her duty towards her family, her desire to be academically well established, her deep love affair with Harish and her attempts to shape her own destiny stands as the main theme of the novel. Kapur highlights the two constricting forces that impede the development of the female child in India. The first one is the willful indifference to a girl's education and the manner in which her career is delimited to gear all her activities towards becoming the ideal wife loyal to her husband like Kasturi and Ganga do. And the second one is the struggle done by Sakuntala, Swarnalata and Veermati to free themselves from the domination of patriarchal society. This they do just because they have been aware about their integrity and potentiality.

Thus feminism awakened women with the new idea to struggle against the male dominated society to free women from the male trap. By enlightening the female, feminists advocated for emancipation and equality. But feminism as a political movement awakened them to dismantle all the disciplines of patriarchal society to address the absence of women in various academic areas by uncovering women's achievement. Female awareness tried to dismantle the conventional patterns to establish nonsexist ones. The issues like identity self-individuality and freedom became the common features for feminists to awaken women.

## Chapter II

### Feminism and Empowerment

Feminism is a broad socio political movement specially advocating women's welfare in society. Deriving upon this philosophy, many women writers, thinkers and critics have formulated a school of thought that searches for such instances in literature. The main task of the feminist literary critics seems to stand guard against the curbing patriarchal norms which have been inherited perpetually. The marginalization of women, their predicament, struggle for identity, finding their own space, celebrating the female body are the chief subjects of this trend. The protagonists of all the novels of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all odds. Manju Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels.

In India, patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies which keeps females down, oppressed by the traditional system. Arranged marriages are always preferred and love marriages are viewed as a social sin and are regarded with shame. Many Indians contend that arranged marriages are more successful than marriages in the West, where staggering divorce rates are the rule. Unwed mothers, separated, single or unfaithful women are considered outcasts. Living out of wedlock with a partner is still virtually unheard of. An unmarried daughter, seen as a spinster even in her late twenties, brings shame upon her parents, and is a burden. But once married, she is considered the property of her in-laws. The marriage of the bride and groom requires the bride's father to pay dowries to the bridegroom. In India, as there is the custom and tradition of joint family, a bride has to face her tyrannical in-laws, and traditional Hindu society still rejects divorcees women were biased in society just of their sex. In patriarchal system, man is the legal head of the family or state coincided with the



weakening of female. This system ensures that property and children belongs to the same genealogy. The women have to be lived same life and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society which is also reflected in *Difficult Daughters*. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remain an unfinished combat in *Difficult Daughters*.

In financial matters, although women are permitted to work outside the home, their rights on any household matters have always been denied. A woman has to take charge of the kitchen, even if she is a wage-earning member of the household and holds a job outside of the home. Legally, although the court recognizes that sons and daughters have equal rights regarding patriarchal property, those rights are never exercised; today as in generations past, ownership changes hands from father to husband to son and the rights of a daughter or a daughter-in-law are denied.

Kapur highlights those issues of feminism that are endemic to the situation in India in order to help us understand how difficult it is for women here to arrive at an evolved state of mind being trapped within the matrix of religion and tradition. Her novels manifest women's struggle for emancipation from economic, political and social bondages. She has tried to evolve her own stream of emergence of new women grounded in reality. Kapur's novels significantly add to the growing tradition of Indian women's literature in English.

We know all that every individual desires for self-identity, a desire for self-recognition. They want social, political, psychological, economic independence in general. However, identity also evolves out of the person's free actions: to think one's own thought, to see and feel with one's heart and having no authority to govern except the authority of one's own reason. This liberty determines a person's individual space, authenticity and self-dignity. Only in the exaltation of such liberty, a person can

experience life and love to the fullest extent. The free play of these rights does not belong exclusively to one gender or another, for both the sexes struggle to maintain their own identity in the ever changing society. However, the society does place restriction on the basis of gender and put the fulfillment of female identity at stake. Since a long time in human history, woman's identity remained submerged and pressurized under various guises like culture, religion and convention. The orientation of feminism is to help women overcome the state of inferiority and the lack of identity. The central character Virmati makes relentless struggle from childhood to death for establishing her free identity in the patriarchal society. It is the hierarchy made between men and women by the patriarchal society that has marginalized women from enjoying the social position. For a long time women could not develop themselves for raising voice for their rights. But gradually they started it. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century number of conscious women have been raising question against such discrimination and trying to stand on their own. To be direct they are highly eager to create their position in the society. They are not only willing for their identity but also working it too. Virmati is a representative character of such female figures. Her entire life journey in the novel explicitly shows her strong desire to be something in her society.

If we see in our contemporary society, still it can be easily seen that a girl child is taught by the mother to be silent, obedient and swallow from the infancy. More or less, it is the nature of every society. This forces girls to remain silent usually. This silence of woman kills herself-the essence which holds and molds an individual together in order to form a complete organism. The 'self' is the sense of individuality that supports the view that before anything else we are human. A woman without self-identity is no more than an empty shell. The orientation of feminism is to

help women overcome the state of inferiority and the lack of identity. During the course of the development of human Rights, the concept of the development of women rights can be found. Though the voice of women rights had been raised since eighteenth century the institutional effort towards women rights and gender equality as well could not be found until twentieth century. It can be said that only in the twentieth century, the formal efforts regarding to women right in the field of economic, social, political educational and all other socio-economic sphere.

It is patriarchal ideology of the male dominated society that restricts women walk freely and do as their desire. It binds women only remain inside the home and take care of her children. They are restricted from enjoying and joining the different professions. The objective of such rules is to transform them into puppet. Even most of the females under such male dominated social structures are developed against female freedom. They speak for the existing society and want their daughters get married and bear children as they have done. *Virmati's* mother in the novel has also attempted persuading her daughter to follow her, settle a family and live a happy life. But *Virmati* is not as the general females. She does not follow every rules and regulations of the society as it is. She does everything as her intuition tells her. The status of women from the legal point of view is not so bad. The sensitization of gender equality can be seemed in Indian society. The women are still unaware and incapable to enjoy their rights due to the lack of education and deeply rooted tradition, social norms and values. The necessity of female heroism in the literary texts is to keep female in social dignity. To bring women in the world of freedom and equality, it is necessary to give women the role of the protagonist in the literary texts and to help women to come in the open ground without hesitation.

Western women achieve their freedom quicker than the women of third world. It's sure the economic progress goes with the better condition of women but mainly the social taboos in Western changed rapidly comparing to the East. It's not imperative the women in economically developed country have free life, otherwise women in Gulf countries would have already got the right to vote even in this era. The women in these Muslim countries, despite of being economically developed, are deprive of their basic rights. The social values play the vital role in these countries. The women are still given the traditional duties in these countries.

Women of South Asian countries suffer both economical backwardness and social barriers. Almost all countries in this region have same roles given to women. These countries have strict social norms for women. Because the development of education system is so slow in third world, so late is awareness. The women themselves don't know about their basic rights, let alone raising the voice for their freedom. Women are trained to be submissive from their childhood. They are trained to think marriage, house, husband and children are their sole duties. They are also made to accept that they are vile in front of their father, husband and son. It's their fate to have or not to have a happy life, not their deeds. In Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati and Ganga, wives of Professor Harish, blame fate which they believe can't be controlled; Virmati for befallen in the hand of Harish and Ganga for having second wife in her husband's life.

Third world feminism is a form of feminism that developed as a response to feminism seemingly focusing solely on the experiences of women in western cultures. It comes with the theory that racism and long lasting political economic and cultural effects of colonialism affect non-white, non-western women. It is originated as a critique of feminist theorist in developed countries pointing out universalizing

tendencies of mainstream feminist ideas and argues that women living in non-western countries are misrepresented.

Third world feminism also can be related to Postcolonial feminism and indigenous feminism. All of them deal with extreme and taboo topics prevail in third world. Third world feminists argue that by using the term “women” as a universal group, women are then only defined by their gender and not by social class, race, ethnicity or sexual preference. Postcolonial feminists also work to incorporate the ideas of indigenous and other Third World Feminist Movements into mainstream western feminism. Third world feminism stems from the idea that feminism in third world countries is not imported from the first world but originates from internal ideologies and social cultural factors. Logones and Spelman quote: “Third world women experience a ‘fragile psychic state’, continuously reduced to relating their exclusion rather than expressing comparison and initiating dialogues with first world women” (575). But Indian feminist like Uma Narayan has different view. She says, “Many third world feminists confront the attitude that our criticisms of our cultures are merely one more incarnation of a colonized consciousness, the views of ‘privileged native women in white face,’ seeking to attack their ‘non-western culture’ on the basis of ‘Western Values’” (3).

Extreme social taboos in third world are the main causes for the domination of women. Foot-binding in China, Sati system in India, veil system in Muslim countries, genital mutilation in African countries are only some examples. “Rape, forced prostitution, polygamy, genital mutilation, pornography, the beating of girls and women, purdah are all violation of basic human rights” (Hosken15). But these social taboos are unbreakable in the third world countries.

Western feminist scholarship can't avoid the challenge of situating itself and examining its role in such a global economic and political framework. To do any less would be to ignore the complex interconnection between first and third world economies and the profound effect of this on the lives of women in these countries. In the context of overwhelming silence about the experiences of women in these countries as well as the need to forge international links between women's political struggles, such work is path-breaking and absolutely essential. The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference which can be applied universally and cross culturally. The context of analysis can be anything from kinship structures and the organization of labor. What binds women together, either of first world or third world, is a sociological notion of the "sameness" of their oppression. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who writes against stereotyping western women as fragile comparing to first world, has been criticized by not only western feminist but also the feminist of third world themselves. One of the leading African writers, Cheryl Jhonson Odim points out that "Third world women must articulate needs through the crucial process of constructing a body of relevant feminist theory, which goes beyond mere criticism of First World Women" (324).

The average third world woman, in comparison to western countries, leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender. Women in these countries are labeled as powerless, exploited, sexually harassed implicit victims of particular socio-economic system. Women are defined consistently as the victims of male control. Women as archetypical victims freezes them into "Objects who defend themselves",

men into “subjects who perpetrate violence” and society into powerless (women) and powerful (men) groups of people.

A man is born free but the social values around him binds with different obligations. Those social values are made by human themselves, not by God as they claim, according to the benefits of certain powerful group. That’s why different “systems” are made. Within these systems, there are always dominator side and a dominated side. In caste system, for example, so-called upper caste is the dominator whereas so-called low caste is the dominated one. Likewise in patriarchy, males are the dominated and the females are the dominated group. To keep on this system, the powerful side, i.e. suppressors made certain social taboos so that their domination might not be interrupted. Females are deprived of their basic rights in the name of social taboos so that they never might be able to realize their position. Women are deliberately given the responsibilities within four walls with the intention that they never can be aware and fight back. In the societies of third world, women are represented as non-working housewives and their chores as leisure –time activities.

Gender inequality in third world countries has maintained the suppression of women and has impacted these countries with the great magnitude. The dominance of male control is currently threatening the progression of women rising above the constraints of patriarchy. Everyday in these countries, there are countless occurrences of physical, emotional and psychological abuse. It is however important to recognize specific cultural and religious practices of gender hierarchy that are accepted by women in these countries. While keeping this in mind, it is of paramount importance to keep the sight of consequences of abusing these cultural practices at the expense of women’s liberation and development. Gender equality is jeopardized at the expense of

women. The severity of this crisis is much worse in third world countries in comparison to the developed countries. Women are considered to be inferior and are not granted equal rights or protection under the law and the religions and the cultures of these countries support the inequalities, thus allowing vicious crimes against women to continue without any recourse by the victims.

Women rights promote political, social and economic equality for women in a society that traditionally confers more status and freedom to men. But in many countries, the law itself can't or deliberately don't grant the women rights because of extreme religious barriers, like in Muslim and Arabian countries. Third world women are perceived of both authoritatively and politically.

Despite many successes in empowering women, numerous issues still exist in all areas of life, ranging from the cultural, political to the economics. For example, women often work more than men, since they have the domestic duties too, yet are paid less. Gender discrimination affects girls and women throughout their life time; and women and girls are often the ones who suffer the most poverty as they are denied the rights to property in most third world countries.

Various conferences, world wise and regional wise, are held where the concerned authority, often the government representatives, claims that women's rights will be respected more, yet policies are sometimes not changed enough or at all, thus still undermining the rights of women. In some patriarchal societies, religion and tradition can be used as barrier for equal rights. *Amnesty International* points, "Government are not living up to their promises under the Women's Convention to protect women from discrimination and violence such as rape and female genital mutilation." (n.p) There are many countries who have not ratified the conventions,



many countries that have ratified it do so with many reservations. Third world countries are the place where a clear economic or cultural preference for son is given.

### Chapter III

#### **Women at Margin: Reflections on Manu Kapur's *Difficult Daughters***

The struggle to control over one's destiny, is the key theme of *Difficult Daughters* which not only refer to the independence aspired to and obtained by a nation, but also to the independence yearned by a woman and member of that same nation. Virmati, the heroine, seeks human relations that will allow her to be herself and to exercise the degree of control over her life which, as an educated woman, she knows she deserves. Born in Amritsar in the Punjab in 1940, the daughter of a father of progressive ideas and a traditionalist mother, she aspires to a freer life than that offered her by those around her. Virmati, like so many other sub continental women, is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage. She rebels against that destiny, to the lasting shame of her family, above all of her mother. Insisting on her right to be educated, she manages to leave home to study in Lahore. Nonetheless, she falls in love with an Amritsar teacher known as 'the Professor', a married man who first appears in her life as her parents' tenant. After a number of vicissitudes, including a period as a school principal in a small Himalayan state, she finally marries the man she loves and returns to Amritsar to live with him. However, he refuses to leave his first wife, and the consequences for Virmati are harsh indeed: she ends up being marginalised by her own family and despised by her husband.

Virmati's tale is told, from a present-day perspective, by Ida, her only daughter, who seeks to reconstruct her late mother's life-story, against the background of the Independence movement of the 1940s and the subsequent trauma of Partition.

The pages of *Difficult Daughters* speak not only of Virmati, but of other 'difficult daughters, who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggles for independence in their lives. At the centre of the narrative, we are confronted with a

woman who fights but falls by the wayside; but at its edges, as no doubt less representative but still symbolic figures, we encounter other women, whose relative success points the way to the future.

The happiest and most attractive period in Virmati's life is, beyond doubt that which she spends in Nahan, the capital of Sirmaur, the small Himalayan state run by an enlightened maharaja which gives her refuge for a while as the headmistress of a girl's school. It is there that she achieves the greatest degree of control over her life: there are rules she has to obey and breaking them proves her fall, but she is able to teach inside an ordered framework, and her performance wins her a deserved respect. But the particularity of Virmati's destiny, at this stage of her life, is that she has to exercise her responsibilities entirely by herself. In the micro-state to which her destiny leads her, she has no family or close friends. She attains a near-exemplary level of female autonomy. For the first and only time, she has her own place to live, and yet she falls. She believes she needs a man, and she makes the wrong choice, returning to a relationship that had already brought her nothing but suffering. The repeated clandestine visits of the fatal Professor lose Virmati her employers' confidence, and she is obliged to quit her school, house and employment. Retrospectively, the Nahan period appears as the one utopian moment in Virmati's unfortunate life. All in all, what Virmati finds in Nahan is a certain lifestyle - employment in an isolated but well-ordered state, capable of providing her with some degree of psychological and mental refuge.

Virmati's married life with the Professor in Amritsar turns out to be a disaster. She remains under the implacable and hostile gaze of Ganga, her husband's first wife, with whom she has to live. She loses all sense of identity: the continuation of her education, she studies for a higher degree in philosophy, but without enthusiasm,

feeds no more dreams of independence. In the end, her individual history disappears and becomes all but irrelevant. Yet, despite all this, Virmati has in her life's path encountered other women, who like her aspired to a different life, and who succeeded better than she did. These women are Shakuntala, her cousin; and Swarna Lata, her roommate in Lahore. Both are representatives of a certain female type that recurs in Indian literature: the emancipated woman militant. In Virmati's extended family, her cousin Shakuntala appears from the beginning as the exemplary of the 'modern' or 'liberated' women. She studies, teaches, and takes part in the political-Gandhian Movement: even after marriage, she keeps a firm grip on her autonomy and her freedom of action and thought. Shakuntala thus becomes a pole of attraction for Virmati: "Virmati listened, ... drawn towards Shakuntala, to one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children" (17). Nor is she an entirely atypical or isolated figure: she shares her 'liberated' lifestyle with a group of friends, whose activities she explains to her cousin: 'We read, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going abroad for higher studies' (6).

Later, in Swarna Lata, Virmati encounters a woman who leads a similar lifestyle; her friend, an ultra-committed activist, takes her to a meeting of the Punjab Women's Student Conference where she shines as an orator: 'Heavy applause broke out as Swarna finished speaking' (145). Swarna continues her political activity post-marriage, expressing herself on the matter to Virmati as follows: 'We have plenty of married women working with us. I'm married, aren't I?' (252). In the end, the path of political activism does not attract Virmati, as she herself recognises 'I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, being politically active, while my time is spent being in love' (142). She chooses - it

cannot be said for her own good - the road that leads to the Professor: a road not taken by Swarna, with whom she finally feels obliged to break off relations: "And Swarna dropped out of her life" (252).

At all events, it may be said that Virmati's frustrated life is, as it were, framed - as if in a triptych- by those two other, much more successful lives: those of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, both emblematic of the educated, politicised and emancipated woman. In other words, the psychological annihilation of Virmati, at the hands of her own family and her husband's, should not be read as a fatality. What happens to Virmati is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman (even if educated), quantitatively or statistically. *Difficult Daughters* is not a pure third-person narrative. Virmati's story is told mostly in the third person, but is framed by the first-person narration of a search. The search is that of Virmati's daughter, Ida, as she seeks to reconstitute her mother's history. Ida, an educated woman, divorced and childless, apparently leads a freer life than her mother's in external terms; yet inside her she feels, even if not quite so acutely, some of the same anxieties as had plagued her mother: "No matter how I might rationalize otherwise, I feel my existence as a single woman reverberate desolately" (3). It is clear from the book's pages that Ida, the narrator through whose voice Kapur speaks, has achieved more than her mother (and much more than her grandmother): and that this is so even through the simple creative fact of 'writing down' her own family history.

The women of India have indeed achieved their successes in half a century of Independence; but if there is to be a true female independence too, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat. Virmati, Kasturi and Ida struggles for their independence, but remain chained.

Feminism, like many other 'isms' in the contemporary times, is marked by complexity and plethora of interpretations. There are different schools of thought that have influenced feminist understanding in one way or the other. There are feminist thinkers who propose equality to women according to their different natures and needs based on psycho–sexual considerations. But this argument of different natures is rejected by others as constructed on the basis of essentialist binary logic that propagates hierarchical human relationships. Apart from this, the multiplicity of ideas based on specific cultural, historical and social practices informs the variety and plurality in feminist perspectives. Feminism does not function as an overarching, unitary system, rather it means different things in different national and regional locations.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* traces the different stages of women's development in a particular socio-historical context that marks the significance of Indocentric feminist perspective. In the Indian context, feminism is often considered to be a legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the constitutional rights of women, social reformational movements and spread of education. The typical nature of cultural traditions, historical background and the variety present in Indian life itself does not accept a uniform system of thought. The specific nature of the traditional cultural ethos and its long history in India does not conform to the western model of feminism. *Difficult Daughters* is a forceful expression of Indian feminism and presents it as the most suitable feminist position for the women's existence in traditional Indian society. In this novel we find Indian women attracted and allured towards the western thoughts presenting tantalizing possibilities. But their typical social and cultural background exercises a check on them and makes them explore certain means to have a viable space within the available social and cultural context.

Virmati, the protagonist in this novel, feels tempted by the way of life adopted by her cousin Shakuntala. Her mother's marginalised existence and miserable plight make her protest against the system that does not allow women to think of the possibilities of being something else than a wife only. The ultimate fate of a woman that Virmati has been taught and made to believe is marriage. The awareness of the other avenues comes to Virmati when, "She watched her (Shakuntala) ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's advice, buy anything she wanted above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything" (Kapur 15).

But Virmati does not accept this behaviour as a way of life. It simply provides the much needed impetus for Virmati to make efforts to seek new possibilities of her existence. Here these ideas inspire Virmati to refuse to accept, if not reject completely, the traditional Indian way of women's life exemplified in her mother who is reduced to the level of a child-producing machine.

Instead of thinking about some alternatives and the means to get rid of her present miserable existence Kasturi, Virmati's mother, seeks solace in prayer only, "She turned to God, so beautiful with his gifts, and prayed ferociously for the miracle of a miscarriage" (7).

In spite of all this, she believes it is the duty of every girl to get married. On the other hand, Virmati now starts thinking differently and yearns to have a meaningful and independent selfhood. This leads her to prefer education to other traditionally ascribed roles that compelled women to remain inside the threshold.

The socio-historical background against which Kasturi's experiences and the early part of Virmati's life have been presented is the early 20th century India before Independence. The depiction of the decolonization of India along with the presentation of a gradual growth of an emancipated state of women's existence have

been developed into fictional parallels. An important theme of the novel emerges in the form of Education versus Marriage. Education here is treated as a passport to freedom. Education makes Virmati aware of not only her subjugated existence but also instills confidence in her to go and lead a life of her own at Shantiniketan.

Dependence on man, in this case on Harish, gets replaced by a faith in woman's own ability. On the other hand Harish, a college teacher, is married to an uneducated woman Ganga whose lack of education is a constant source of regret and sorrow for Harish. It is education that brings Harish close to Virmati and facilitates a smooth relationship between them. Harish is attracted towards Virmati not only because of her beauty or youth but due to the fact that she has the potential to study and become an ideal companion. The significance of education in man-woman relationship can be observed from Harish's words when he says:

We have nothing in common. I once wanted to share my interests with my wife, felt her pain at my estrangement from her... Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Society which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughters. (95)

The significance of education regarding women's independence is realized even today. It is education that enables women to realize the nature of their subjugation, marginalization and suppression and helps find effective ways to check it and acquire a self-dependent, autonomous self.

In the process, the myth that marriages are in the hands of God stands challenged when we find Virmati marrying Harish, an already married man, due to social and pragmatic considerations. Similarly, the traditional Indian cultural ethos that idolizes women as mothers is contested in Kasturi's wish for a miscarriage and prayer for not to conceive again. In spite of these deviations in the thoughts and behaviours of these



women from traditionally ascribed code, the feminist position that emerges finds relevance in the typical Indian context. The women like Kasturi, Virmati and Ida, represent different stages in the life and experience of women in the changing phases of Indian social history.

An interesting aspect of the feminist views that emerges from the novel is that women's subjugation and invisibility in the present social system does not seem to be the result of oppressive and supremacist attitude of man. It rather seems to be the outcome of the subtle but powerful presence of patriarchal system that enjoins specific roles to men and women. Therefore, the feminist position that comes forth in *Difficult Daughters* does not propagate or advocate hostility against men. Women in this scenario do not show a keenness to level the male female or man woman difference. The real cause of woman's problems here is not the antagonistic attitude of man rather it comes out to be the lack of awareness in woman and in the people in general about woman's true needs and her right to attain a separate self. The patriarchy established norms have been injected so deep in the minds of the people that they fail to imagine or see women in a role different from the roles already fixed by the system. It makes Virmati's quest for a different selfhood, independent of patriarchy defined female existence, so difficult that she experiences isolation, loneliness, frustration and depression that lead her to attempt committing suicide. But education brings a new consciousness in her. It helps her struggle and find a viable space in the given social system. Therefore, she does not accept the demolition of social institutions like family and marriage.

As the woman's protest and resentment is directed against the system that imposes certain values which marginalize and silence her, she does not seem to

envisage a radical change and demolition of male-female difference in the name of woman's liberation.

The ambivalent nature of Indian feminist perspective can be observed from the role of the family. Family and kinship system facilitate the perpetuation of patriarchal silencing of women by men. Women's identity and existence remain invisible and suppressed in the name of broader family interests. But, at the same time, it is family and relationships that provide support and a sense of belonging to women. The typical Indian feminist stance that emerges from *Difficult Daughters*, turns out to be an earnest appeal for the sympathetic recognition of women's existence and a redefinition of gender roles according to the changing socio-cultural contexts. These ideas find a forceful expression through the life and experience of different women characters. In the beginning of the novel the narrator presents Kasturi's miserable and pitiable plight. She seems to be quite helpless before the social conditions. The accepted purpose of her existence and of all the women at this stage of social development in India is to be a female only. Her function is to produce children and look after the family. The only space available to her is inside the threshold. Due to the persistence of certain ideas constantly forced on women she believes "What is the need to do a job? A woman's *shaan* is in her home" (13).

And 'marriage' she considers to be the ultimate goal of a woman's life. Shakuntala's living a life of singlehood is something unnatural and abnormal for Kasturi. Her attending the conference and working in the laboratory makes Kasturi comment, "I tell her she should have been a man" (14).

Gradually, under the impact of reformation movements like Arya Samaj and the Indian Independence movement people reject the traditional views and start thinking of other possibilities for women. This development has been illustrated

through the fictional character of Virmati. In spite of the progress that informed Indian society in the middle of the 20th century it was not possible for a woman to think of living without man. Virmati defies traditional set of social rules in getting married to an already married person. But she does not think of rejecting marriage as such, nor does she accept participation in political movement that offers an opportunity for becoming independent

Manu Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Shoba De adopt to scrutinize the problems besetting the Indian women. Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* won her international acclaim and commonwealth prize for the best first book (Eurasia), published in 1998. By projecting journey as motif, Kapur has taken profound insight into woman's inner turmoil to find a place, an identity and individuality of her own in society. For centuries, women are always back staged by patriarchal world. Literature and art - and scriptures too – consider women as a weak and docile creature. One who appears to be against this ideological of a framework of a feminine is considered as immoral.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur's protagonist Virmati, an educated middle class girl, expounds her rebellious ideas against this male-dominated society and tries to gain her identity. She experiences a journey to her inner self. *Difficult Daughters* stresses on the woman's need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, independence individuality and self-actualization. Located primarily in the India of the 1940's, Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence – independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and independence yearned after by a woman. Kapur says that she is interested in the lives of women, whether in the political arena or in domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupations in all her books is how women manage to negotiate both inner and outer spaces in their lives. What sacrifices do they

have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home.

Based partially on the life of Kapur's own mother, the novel movingly evokes the multiple frustrations encountered by the central character, Virmati, in her efforts to educate herself and establish a domestic space, she can call home. Her desire for self-expression and self-realization is condemned to failure by her own family as well as that of the man she marries. Through Virmati's character, Manju Kapur has dealt with the theme of travails in self-identity vis-à-vis socio-cultural identity.

*Difficult Daughters* remains a powerful portrait of a society where shame is more important than grief, the novel spans three generations of women and unveils their sense of disillusionment. Kasturi, the mother, is shown as a victim of the offensive control of patriarchy. In the beginning, Kasturi is being presented as an epitome of motherhood who bears pain and suffering. "Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache" (7). Through these three female protagonists, Manju Kapur has revealed the life circle of a woman who is devoted from beginning of her life. As a child, a girl has to do domestic, house hold activities [as Virmati does], after marriage, she has to bear pain to give birth to child [as Kasturi's condition is revealed after having 11 children] and after being mother, her whole life is dedicated to her whole family. A very pointed statement brings attention: "How trapped could nature make a woman?" (7)

Virmati, the daughter, reveals her rebellious nature against deep-rooted conventions of morality especially for a girl. She undertakes her journey to the path leading to one's individuality but to her, it leaves in the midway with no achievement. Ida, Virmati's daughter, establishes herself as an independent woman. She starts her journey to find an insight into her mother's past, denies her and revolts against the

ways and follies. The opening line reveals her anguish: “ 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 shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept” (1).

The novel traces Virmati’s quest for freedom and identity, her desperation for a space of her own to study. Her desire to shed the surrogate motherhood, imposed on her. Being the eldest daughter she is burdened with family duties because of her mother’s incessant pregnancies. The girls: Virmati, Indumati, Gunvati, Hemavati, Vidyavati and Parvati. The boys: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishnanath, Parkashnath and Hiranath. The one cause for Virmati’s frustration was her mother’s continuous breeding. Virmati was never remained free. At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. But – “ When she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother’s arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. ‘Have you seen to their food – milk – clothes – studies?’ . . . ‘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)

A constant sufferer Virmati, nurses a desire of being as independent, defiant and assertive as her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala sows the seeds of freedom in Virmati. She symbolizes modernity as not following the conventional norms which limits daughter to an early marriage and then home and family. She encourages her for independence and for equal rights for women, thus epitomizing the post -colonial emancipated ‘New Woman’. New woman breaks the customs of the tradition bound society. Since the establishment of the society, woman is divided far away from social security, political awareness, and economic liberation.

Both Shakuntala and Virmati come out of this ideological framework of being typical Indian woman. Shakuntala takes part in the political Gandhian movement whereas Kasturi's ideology is confined to patriarchy and she thinks 'marriage' as the duty of every girl rather than studies. For Kasturi, Education means developing the mind for the benefit of the family and nothing more than that. But Shakuntala, like new woman, shares her view with Virmati: "These people don't really understand Viru . . . women are still supposed to marry and nothing else" (17). Lajwanti and Kasturi, on the opposite, get into clash with Shakuntala's ideas. They behold the stereotypical opinion that only a man is free to do a job, to go outside and to do his desired task whereas a girl has to take every step according to the norms of society. She does not have her own life.

Virmati feels influential impact of Shakuntala and at once blurts: 'I want to be like you, Pehnji . . . I wish I too could do things. But I am not clever' (Kapur17-18). Virmati comes to know about her inner desire to find a self -identity. So it was now useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside to education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore colleges. Thus, Shakuntala's visit plants the seeds of aspiration in Virmati, seeds to find her true place in society. For Kasturi, Virmati's practical education was complete but Virmati wants to study further even if she has to fight her mother. But Virmati was under household burden. All time, there were demanding noises. Eventually Virmati fails her FA (Fine Arts). She shows a great fuss. Kasturi tells her that it is over now. Virmati, at the age of 17, was engaged to a canal engineer, Inderjeet. Virmati was outraged and frustrated at her failure, on this Kasturi says: "Leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first" (21). Thus, during her search to find an individual space, Virmati has to face many obstacles. Family plays an

important role in the novel. For the sake of family's name, Virmati is forced to sacrifice her study, her freedom. She is taught to be an ideal daughter.

Family, the fundamental unit of society, can be seen as perpetrating the larger patriarchal power structure. The institution of marriage makes woman an object of barter and subverts the right of woman to name children after the man. In this way, an entire sex lost its identity, in terms of socio-political and economic position and was vulnerable to exploitation. Virmati, in the novel, rejects both institutions. She rebels against stereotypical ideas provoking the honour of family relating to daughter. She goes against her family's will of arrange marriage with an engineer, Inderjit and falls in love with a Professor, Harish who is already married. The Professor was married as a child to an illiterate woman, whom he had tried to educate and had miserably failed. Professor's wife has no name till the middle of the book – she is the woman whose life's mission was to cook for and feed her family and keep the house clean. So the Professor falls in love with his student Virmati who is passionately interested in studies. Ida writes as per her aunt recalls:

Professor and Virmati were in the same college where – Virmati always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the Professor's class and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male students. The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he remembered it in all its detail . . . the Professor's desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind. (46-47)

The above lines point towards the greed to possess Virmati, in Professor. Freud discusses women as sex objects to men. Men, he suggests split women symbolically and erotically into, mothers and sisters, on the one hand and prostitutes on the other.

The first attraction is Virmati's flower-like structure. It is to be noted that for centuries, female body is perceived as an object to be possessed by man. Like Shakuntala, Virmati herself demands to go to Lahore for further studies.

In Lahore, Virmati, like Shakuntala, finds 'autonomy' and 'freedom'. Here, she is also under the impact of Swarnalata who is an ultra -committed feminist and who takes her to a meeting in Punjab Women's Students Conference where she, after listening to her speech joins a combat in her mind. Her inability to resist Harish is pointed when Virmati asks the question to herself in heart:

She feels – Am I free, thought Virmati? I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. She felt out of place, an outcaste amongst all these women. She thought of Harish who loved her. She must be satisfied with that. (142)

Nowhere, Virmati finds her identity in the arena of 'new woman' and also in her traditional family she feels herself an outsider. She realizes that "These larger spaces were not for her" (144) whereas Swarnalata comes up an assertive character:

I was very clear that I wanted to do something, besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support me for two more years I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer Satyagraha along with other . . . but they agreed because they knew. I meant what I meant. (107-108)

Swarnalata and Sakuntala are only two women who dare to challenge the social taboos of their surrounding. Unlike Virmati, they are quite successful because they are clear what they want. Virmati lacks resistance for Harish which is the only one cause



of her fall. In one side, Kapur presents two powerful women, on the other side, Virmati seems to be easy victim for Harish, even though she is well aware how she is only being used, she barely protests against it. She does protest only once that is in Lahore where she says “Men do take advantage of Women!” (149) Here she clarifies that women are seen as the means of commodity on the hand of men. They are all aware how women are made vulnerable in traditional societies of India and don't lose the chance to take advantage of women as they wish.

The last line in the above passage clearly indicates the original side of Harish. Harish always seduces Virmati through culture, sending her Petrarchan sonnets and through referring to Machiavelli and the Greek tragedy. The Professor, in actuality, wants to have Virmati not as his wife but as a woman to gratify intellectual needs. However, although Virmati believes that she and Professor are bound together by the bonds of intellectual compatibility, it is only the physical lust that overpowers them, whenever they are together. It is interesting to note that Virmati talks of her identity, her freedom but her freedom is confined only to her body and heart. She does not attempt to utilize her education as Shakuntala did.

It is important to note that Virmati lacks ‘resistance’. She does resist towards family and society, but fails to resist towards Harish's love. She is compelled to lead a life of compromises quite in prosecution with her ideals from which she finds no escape.

After a series of vicissitudes, Virmati finally marries the man she loves and returns to Amritsar to live with him. However, Harish refuses to leave his first wife. In the house of Harish, she is not considered an identity but the second wife of Harish who has snatched the rights of his first wife Ganga she has to live like an outsider in the family; marginalized by her in laws. “ In the evening, Virmati went to the *angan* to

bring the clothes in. The line was bare except for her own, hanging forlornly at the end. She took them down, and clenched her lips. She wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life.’ (215)

Virmati’s mother-in-law holds Virmati solely responsible for the marriage: “If she had not gone after him, he would not have strayed” (192). And she also believes that “He was a good son. How was it his fault if he was caught in the trap of some shameless young Punjabi” (193). Virmati has realized that she has done wrong. She feels – “I should not, cannot, will not marry you. It will not be fair. And now she had married him, but the old words were still springing to her lips, so many futile noises in the air” (212). Being the second wife of Harish, she loses all sense of identity: the continuation of her education feels no more dreams of independence. Virmati undergoes the humiliation and decides to “walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had created out for her” (196).

Women were biased in society of their sex. In patriarchal system, man is the legal head of the family or state coincided with the weakening of female – female bond and especially the dissolution of mother-daughter relationship . The women have to be lived same life and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society is reflected in *Difficult Daughters*. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains an unfinished combat in *Difficult Daughters*.

Feminists write for freedom, autonomy and self identity of the women. They think that men should take as their necessary counterparts and help them to come in the independent arena. Women must be regarded as important human beings. Accepting such reality some male writers began to write giving the autonomous power to women character in their literary writing. Women protagonists have individuality in their texts. Consciousness about female as equal human being is

somehow the contribution of feminist movements. Feminists view that only a feminist struggle will particularly change relations between man women that concerns issues such as sexuality, violence, gender discrimination, emancipation, freedom and equality for women.

Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters* presents the image of the suffering but stoic women eventually breaking traditional boundaries in the back-drop of traditional narrative thread. In Post-Colonial era, partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. A number of novels were written on the theme of 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 on human values. Manju Kapur has invigorated the English language to suit narration of what she felt about her women and their lives in post modern India in a culture where individualism has often remained an alien idea and marital bliss-the women's role at home is a central focus.

## **Conclusion**

### **IV. Resistance Against Suppression**

Feminism is a movement which deals with the issues of women rights. Though feminism movement started from Europe, specially after French Revolution, it made a quick impact on Asian countries like India, here after independence. Many female writers in India have written their literary arts being based on feminism. They present the realistic condition of women in their society. In reality, women in India have gained much less even though India is surging as a superpower in world economy. It's quite real that women have to struggle hard for minimal freedom due to its stereotypical role of women. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* presents its heroine's strong but to be futile struggle for her freedom. She rebels against her parents for her education but fails to prove herself as an ideal woman. Rather, she gets entangled in an illicit relation and ends as mere second wife of her lover. She achieves nothing, neither educational excellence nor a good career, neither respect as a wife nor love of a daughter. She even feels at the end that she shouldn't have married her lover for whom she did all the struggle.

Manju Kapur has fully understood the women's status and their power in society. Thus the portrayal of Virmati's struggle in *Difficult Daughters* can be taken as a female's effort for creating equal status in the society. It can be concluded that Kapur has demonstrated Virmati as a conscious, bold and courageous woman who fights for women's right against patriarchal society. Her courage and behavior help her to challenge the patriarchal society and get victory over it in order to attain the autonomy and identity in her life. She realizes that it is useless to look for answers inside the home. A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. The fight for

autonomy is an unfinished attempt of Virmati. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense. The women of India have indeed achieved their successes in half a century but it remains many to be done.

The whole novel shows the feminism of Virmati who opposes her all family and continues her study against the wishes of her family. Virmati is bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented revolutionary but she is a loser whose actions totally alienate her from her family and society. She fails to create her own identity which she had desired. It is Virmati's inability to strike independent roots. She had come to Lahore to fulfill her dream but she gets involved in a useless love, doubtful marriage and unwed pregnancy. The fight for freedom is an unfinished attempt of Virmati. She could not break the patriarchal boundaries but rather she has been caught by traditional norms and values of patriarchal society.

Not only Virmati, but other minor female characters of the novel, like Virmati's mother, Kasturi, Ida her daughter, Gauri, the first wife of her husband share the same fate of being suppressed by males. Among them, only Virmati dares to fight for her freedom. All other simply accept their destiny imposed on them. The most successful characters in her novel are Shakuntala, her cousin and Swarna Lata, her room-mate at Lahore College. They both are successful at their social life as well as personal life.

From the very beginning, Virmati goes against her family's traditional belief, specially her mother, because she wants to be a free individual in which she partially succeeds. She seems to be strong enough to live her life as she wishes but the reality is she can't break the traditional rules of her society and finally fails. She struggles for a long time just because she is conscious of being an individual, a free human but she is always seemed as a woman who has sole duty toward her husband and family,

nothing else. Women in India and other third world countries suffer much more in comparison to the women of Western countries just because the social values are given more priority rather than the freedom of an individual. So, in these countries the condition of women is pathetic even in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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