

Difficult Daughter: “A Reflection Of The Struggle Of Women For Autonomy, Independence And Education”.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores various themes such as societal expectations, gender roles, and the clash between tradition and modernity. Education, Marriage, autonomy, independence are significant aspects of the novel. This paper intricately focuses on the multifaceted struggle of women in the context of autonomy, independence and education within the complex of socio-cultural milieu of post-colonial India. The narrative revolves around the protagonist, Virmati, who grapples with societal norms, familial expectations and personal aspirations in her quest for self-determination. Virmati's journey is emblematic of the broader challenges faced by women because of patriarchal norms which are deeply entrenched in Indian society. Researcher highlights the oppressive structures that inhibit women's autonomy. The societal constraints, familial pressures and gender expectations place formidable barriers in their path and their journey becomes a reflection of the broader feminist movement seeking to redefine women's role in society. Virmati's pursuit of education becomes a powerful vehicle for challenging these structures, as she seeks knowledge and self-realization in defiance of societal expectations that limit women to traditional roles. So, the paper highlights the struggles of women in a conservative society and their quest for self-realization. In this male- driven society, where men are free to do anything freely, women's only duty to get married and have children. Education is not considered as important as marriage. So, this paper analyzes the text through the lens of feminist theory by *Simon De Beauvoir* and *Marry Wollstonecraft*. This paper shows how the female characters of this novel following their traditional gender role but when they want to live a life on her terms and conditions, they have to go through all the trial and tribulations.

Keywords: Education, Freedom, Self-Identity, Male-Domination, Oppressive Culture

“Empowering Women is a prerequisite for creating a Good Nation” (Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam)

Introduction:

Historically, societal expectations and conventions have had a crucial influence in influencing the lives of individuals, particularly in terms of gender. Girls and boys have been allocated unique roles and duties throughout history, perpetuating gender stereotypes and inequality. While both genders encounter difficulties, girls have long been exposed to a slew of cultural expectations, many of which limit their independence and prospects. Girls continue to encounter educational challenges in many regions of the world. Discriminatory practices and conventional attitudes that promote boys' education over girls' education hinder girls' access to high-quality learning environments, limiting their intellectual development.

Abuse is characterized by the exercise of power over others, coercion, threats, and violence against them, coercing them into taking actions, frightening them, inflicting pain and suffering on them, and manipulating and taking advantage of their behavior, ideas, and thoughts for a variety of ends. As Demirblek says in his research paper “Educational Abuse of the Child” (2021) that “The optimistic approach to education can be abused from time to time by various stakeholders (family, laws, private schools, capital owner etc.) and can become a means of realizing the goals of other individuals or institutions by exceeding the child's self-

actualization and subjectivity. This approach can also show itself in the definitions of education” (p.60). “Thus, as valid definitions in Turkey, Sonmez defines education as “a means of changing human behaviors in the desired direction or the process of creating desired biochemical changes in the brain”. Erturk defines it as “a process of creating a deliberate and desired behavioral change in an individual’s behavior through one’s own experience”. Demire defines it as “deliberate enculturation” and Fiden defines it as “the process of educating people for certain purposes” (Mesut Demirblek 2021, p.60).

The novel “Difficult Daughter” by Manju Kapoor deals with the theme of struggle for freedom, education and self-identity of the female character Virmati. This is the first novel of Manju Kapur which got commonwealth award in 1998. Actually, this novel has some autobiographical touch in its sense. As Virmati, Manju Kapur also teaches in a college in Delhi University. She had also brought up in a traditional setting as her mother also wanted to get married her daughter. As a result, this chapter analyzes the theme of education and the role of education in the lives of women, and how education makes them aware about their rights, decision making and lead the life with courage. Education has been recognized as the most important tool for improving women's oppressed status in society. It not only develops individuals' personalities and rationality, but also qualifies them to perform particular economic, political, and cultural functions, therefore improving their socioeconomic level. “One of the direct expectations from educational growth in a society is a reduction in individual inequality, which is why education is mentioned as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Manisha,2011, p1). Education serves as the cornerstone of personal and societal development, shaping individuals and communities. In Manju Kapur’s “Difficult Daughter” the interplay between education and intellectual freedom takes center stage, weaving a narrative that explores the transformative power of knowledge and the challenges posed by societal norms.

The novel opens with the words of Ida saying, “*The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother*” (Kapur 1998, p.1). Ida, who is the daughter of Virmati does not want to live her life like her mother because she thinks that her mother was a failure in all her attempts. Ida took divorce from her husband. Ida who is a narrator of this story, distanced from her mother but after her mother’s death she is determined to unveil the past experiences of her. She goes to Amritsar as this place was associated to her mother. Virmati who is the eldest daughter of eleven children was very keen to study. She had studied F.A, B.A., then B.T. and M.A. in Lahore, so the novel explores the struggles faced by major characters, with some viewing them as problems and struggles, while others accept them as life and move forward. As Mishra and Dabir say, “The novelist expresses her absorbing ideas of women relationship, women sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage, gender roles and self-discovery. Kapur has made Virmati more vocal for her right for education and economic independence” (qtd. in Jayajothi Lakshmi, V., 2023, p.1174).

The protagonist’s journey in “Difficult Daughter” epitomizes the struggle for education and intellectual freedom in a traditional setting. The story unfolds against the backdrop of a society that often restricts women’s access to education and attempts to curtail their intellectual pursuits. This reflects a broader societal issue where rigid norms and gender biases impede the progress of women. This chapter intricately explores the multifaceted struggle of women in the context of autonomy, independence and education within the complex socio-cultural milieu of post-colonial India. The narrative revolves around the protagonist, Virmati, who grapples with societal norms, familial expectations and personal aspirations in her quest for self-determination. The journey undertaken by her serves as a symbolic representation of the more extensive obstacles encountered by women due to the firmly established patriarchal norms prevalent in Indian society. The researcher emphasizes the oppressive frameworks that impede women's independence. The limitations imposed by society, familial obligations, and societal expectations based on gender create substantial obstacles in their way, and their journey becomes a reflection of the wider feminist movement that aims to redefine the societal position of women. As a result, the examination of female masculinity emerges as a prominent issue in this paper, providing complex viewpoints on gender roles and identity in contemporary Indian society. Kapur's story explores the nuances of femininity and masculinity, challenging conventional wisdom and emphasizing the fluidity of gender expression. Kapur creates a captivating portrayal of Virmati, a woman who defies societal expectations by embodying attributes associated with masculinity while negotiating her environment's patriarchal confines. As Apsara Ghimire posits in her thesis entitled “Female Masculinity in Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughter”-

“This novel presents a heroine Virmati with masculine nature who like males’ revolts against the society and does not affirm the social norms, values and practices of Amritsar. She is a valiant girl attributed with masculine traits like courage, combativeness and revolution who rebels against the social practices of confining women within the four walls of a house” (Ghimire A. p.14, 2019).

The concept of masculinity has traditionally been associated exclusively with the male gender. Being male is regarded as a position of advantage, attributed with desirable qualities such as bravery, activeness, strength, combativeness, ambition, and more. Similarly, in contrast, the traditional perception of femininity is seen as characterized by cowardice, emotional receptivity, passivity, and other traits. In “Female Masculinity,”

Halberstam posits that masculinity is not exclusive to men but can be embodied by individuals of any gender. Female masculinity disrupts traditional notions of femininity, encompassing traits such as assertiveness, independence, and defiance of patriarchal norms.

The main character in "Difficult Daughter," Virmati, is shown as a woman ahead of her time with a fiery independence and fortitude that defy traditional gender stereotypes. In the framework of Indian society, Virmati exhibits traits typically associated with masculinity, from her rejection of subordinate duties to her pursuit of education and job goals. Virmati's vision of life, her drive for freedom and independence, and her desire to attend further school in Lahore during partition all reflect masculine tendencies. Kapur challenges the binary construction of gender by deftly capturing Virmati's internal battle as she navigates her identity within the constraints of an inflexibly patriarchal society.

The novel is set in the turbulent times of Indian freedom struggle and partition. It portrays a woman's need to be loved, to be needed, meaningfully by the mother, as a young daughter, in her parental family, in her youth, by a man and lastly in her married life.

Parental preference for male children continues to be a significant factor influencing household choices and behavior about children's educational and life possibilities. When it comes to their children's education, impoverished parents from disadvantaged backgrounds make decisions that are best for their sons in practically every state.

The women in Manju Kapoor's novel are strong, intelligent, courageous and ready to face any challenge which is exist in this traditional society. The main center of this novel reflects Virmati's character who is the eldest daughter of her family, assist her mother in the household chores and affectionate sister of her siblings. She represents the new woman of the forties who aspired to walk alongside men. She rejects her mother's way of life and advocates for women's independence and social position. She wants to get higher education, but she spends a lot of time to take care of her siblings and her mother Kasturi who was bearing a child one after another gave birth eleven children and now tired of seventeen years of relentless child bearing. The main problem with the women is that they are confined only to kitchen and child bearing. "The novel Includes Kasturi's helplessness in giving birth to eleven children which completely deteriorates her health" (Kondapally, 2016). "A Western educated allopath declared that repeated births deplete the body, and no medicine could help Kasturi through another pregnancy" (DD, 9).

So, this story revolves around a young girl who is torn between duty of the family, the aspire for education and love. In the novel, there are another two characters, Shakuntala and Swarnalatha, who are living their own lives, chose the path of independence against the will of their parents, they prefer their career, job and duty over the marriage. Shakuntala says to Virmati "These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry and nothing else" (DD, Ch-IV, p.17).

"Though the novel represents patriarchal set up, the male characters are highly compatible in caring the other gender by encouraging women education and their welfare. The instances of Chander Prakash, Suraj Prakash who supported Shakuntala and Virmati respectively for their daughter's further higher education (Kondapally, 2016).

According to Kasturi, "Education means developing the mind for the benefit of the family" (DD, Ch-iv, p.16-17).

Kasturi unwittingly becomes a patriarchal voice. She considers those principles desirable because patriarchy has trained her to do so. And when her daughter rejects those values, she interprets it as a rebellion against herself. The conventional view held by Lajwanti and Kasturi is that only men are free to work, go outside, and satisfy their needs. They contend that a woman must rigidly adhere to societal conventions. Her family's cause should be her exclusive focus throughout life. When Virmati argues to her mother Kasturi for further education, she says; "What good for Shaku's degrees when she is not settled. Will they look after her when she is old. At your age I was expecting you, not fighting with my mother" (DD, Ch-IV, p21-22).

Kasturi insists Virmati to get married because she believes that education makes her daughter bad tempered. On the other hand, her fiancé's parents think that she is already well qualified to be the wife of their son, the canal engineer as they did not want too much education in their daughter-in-law. In spite of all the difficulties Virmati enters A.S college amidst for hundred boys and six girls. To Kasturi, marriage was destiny and was never forgotten. Virmati learns that her family speaks of nothing else but her marriage (Kondapally, 2016). "All I heard around me was talk of my marriage. If I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn't want to live" (DD, p.92, Ch-xiv).

Beauvoir asserts that "The girl is taught to be immanent to adjust herself to reality, to imitate, to be passive, to submit".

De Beauvoir emphasizes the transformative power of education in challenging the status quo. By providing girls with equal opportunities for education and intellectual growth, society can undermine the stereotypes that

limit women's potential and reinforce their subordination. She says; "*Marriage is her only means of support and the sole justification of her existence. Woman's function is also to satisfy a male's sexual needs and to take care of his households. These duties placed upon woman by society are regarded as a service rendered to her spouse*" (Beauvoir, Ch-XVI, p.449).

Beauvoir feminist theory is the quest for women's freedom and liberation. She advocates for women to break free from societal expectations and redefine themselves as autonomous individuals, asserting that true freedom lies in transcending gender roles. She believed that education is a powerful tool for the liberation of women. She argues that women like men, should have equal access to education to break free from traditional gender roles. Beauvoir was critical of the objectification of women in society. She saw education as a means for women to transcend their objectified status. According to her, education helps women realize their full potential beyond being mere objects of desire. She stated; "*She (woman) is defined and differentiated with reference to a man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute- she is the other*".

According to UNESCO (2005) and World Bank (2007), when women have less educational possibilities, they have a lower chance of achieving equal rights, including financial independence. Feminist theory aims to promote women's rights to equal education (and its associated advantages) around the world. "Feminist theory aims to understand the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education, as well as their societal repercussions. Like many other institutions of society, educational systems are characterized by unequal treatment and opportunity for women. Almost two-thirds of the world's 862 million illiterate people are women and the illiteracy rate among women is expected to increase in many regions, especially in several African and Asian countries.

Traditional beliefs that prioritize boy's education over girls have led to disparities in educational opportunities. In communities where girls' education is undervalued, girls are often denied access to schooling or forced to drop out early. This lack of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty and reinforces traditional gender roles. The subjugation and suppression of women due to tradition persist despite significant progress in gender equality. The globe has reached the new millennium, yet it is a painful truth that women in India and other nations have been mistreated for centuries in our male-dominated culture. She is stripped of her autonomous identity and treated as a commodity. She is not only robbed of her dignity and pride by the men outside, but she may also become a victim of abuse by her saviors within her own four walls.

As Milhoutra has rightly said in her article that "The title of the novel "Difficult Daughters" is an indicator to the message that a woman, who tries in search of an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well (p.163).

Gender Disparity in Education:

Education is often hailed as the cornerstone of societal progress and development, acting as a catalyst for economic growth, social change, and individual empowerment. However, despite the global strides made in promoting inclusive education, gender disparity remains a persistent challenge, particularly in developing countries like India. "Gender disparity in education is characterized by the differences in educational opportunities, outcomes and experience between males and females. It encompasses disparities in enrollment, dropout, literacy, academic achievement and access to tertiary education" (GGI Insights, Jan 21, 2024). Understanding the gender disparity in Indian education requires a historical perspective. Traditionally, societal norms favored male education, relegating women to domestic roles. The colonial era further reinforced gender biases, perpetuating a hierarchical educational system. In many parts of the world, girls and women face severe barriers to education, resulting in lower attendance rates than their male counterparts. This inequality has an impact on individual development as well as broader societal ramifications, such as economic growth and social progress. Dropout rates frequently disproportionately affect females and women, owing to circumstances such as early marriage, pregnancy, financial restraints, and cultural traditions that prioritize boys' education over girls.

Gender disparity is largely the result of deeply ingrained patriarchal systems. Discrimination against women begins before birth, and it is referred to as systematic subordination. Gender inequality in India is a complicated issue that affects both men and women. Equality and equity in education are inextricably linked to societal democratic development, with the goal of producing knowledge makers capable of making the best use of their acquired knowledge. "The majority of the nearly six million out of school children in India is girls. Between 2006 and 2010, only 26% of girls completed high school, compared to 50% of boys. Gender disparity is evident in India's childhood literacy rates 82% of boys are literate and only 65% of girls can read and write, according to 2011 census of India. Statistics show that about 10% more girls enrolled in Indian high schools by 2019 compared to 2011. While this is a significant increase, much remains to be done to ensure that girls receive the same education as boys" (Nagar Damini, 2021). According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) the literacy rate of women in India is 70.3% whereas that of men is 84.7%. this gap is representative of the disparity with regard to education of women in India If a family finds itself in a situation where they must make a choice between providing education for their son or daughter due to financial limitations, they typically opt for the male child. The negative mindset of parents towards educating their daughters can also serve as a hindrance to

a girl's pursuit of education. Numerous parents view investing in their sons' education as a prudent decision since they will eventually be responsible for taking care of their aging parents. Conversely, parents may perceive investing in their daughters' education as a squandering of resources, as daughters tend to eventually reside with their husband's family, resulting in the parents not directly benefiting from their education.

Breaking the shackles of tradition:

“My mother keeps saying that all my education has achieved is the destruction of my family. How I am supposed to respond, I don't know. They want nothing from me but an agreement to marry” (Virmati, Ch-xiv, p 99-100).

This paper talks about the challenges and age-old societal norms that restricts women's ambitions and desires. Virmati's aspirations go beyond the typical role of a wife and a mother and she yearns to acquire an education, a pursuit that is frowned upon in her conservative family. Her yearning for knowledge and independence sets her on a journey filled with obstacles, as she defies tradition to enroll in a college, breaking free from the confines of her orthodox upbringing. Beauvoir asserts that *“Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition” (p.474, Ch-XVI).*

Beauvoir highlights the monotonous and seemingly unending nature of domestic chores that have traditionally been assigned to women, which can hinder their pursuit of intellectual or professional aspirations. She discusses the challenges faced by women who aspire to achieve greatness or challenge societal norms. She argued that women are often confronted with resistance when they seek to break free from traditional gender roles. Throughout history, women have faced social deficits and differing expectations, often facing disadvantage and struggle in Indian society, particularly in terms of education.

Smith argues in *“Female Masculinity”* (1998) that women are endlessly victimized within systems of male-power. Woman within such a model, is the name for those subjects within patriarchy who have no access to male power and who are regulated and confined by patriarchal structures (p.17)

Educating boys was deemed more important than educating girls in families, as supporting their mother at home and dealing with household chores were thought to be girls' primary responsibility rather than attending school. Male and female inequality takes many forms, with societally given gender roles and specific cultural customs contributing to the discrepancy. Due to gender disparities, women are less able to participate in democratic processes, get resources, take advantage of economic possibilities, and engage in other spheres of social life.

“Whatever value masculine and public sphere norms may have; gender difference theorists argue that their designation as universal standards are inappropriate and places women in a double bind. When the generic ideal of the educated person emphasizes cool dispassion, for ex; and that quality is associated with masculinity, educated men qualify as both educated and masculine; women are forced to choose between being seen as either uneducated-but-feminine or educated-but-unfeminine” (Audrey Thompson, 2011, p.26).

Daughters are limited by their expectation to be passive and nurturing, generally obedient and to assume many of the domestic responsibilities. Although Virmati's family is not opposed to her education, her mother finds it upsetting that her daughter is pursuing a higher degree because her opinions have never extended above a certain point. For Kasturi, the true purpose of education for a girl is to learn household chores and become an expert in them. She believes that Virmati is most likely deranged. But Virmati, a woman adhering to strict Hindu society norms, chooses not to marry due to her desire to study and settle down first. The manifestation of Virmati's masculine character appears to be conspicuous in her demeanor and aspirations. She aspires to deconstruct the prevailing social conventions, values, and behaviors with the aim of redefining the established distinction between males and females and the associated societal expectations regarding gender roles. The impetus for this transformation stems from within the society itself.

“The final determination of Virmati accords her the status, she has been yearning for. She emerges as a strong and educated lady and by her zeal for education; she earns a name of her own” (Singh Neeta et al., 2019, p225).

The dilemma of Virmati's Ambition and freedom:

“If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself. There is a time in the cycle of life for everything. A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings. When I was your age, continued Kasturi, ‘girls only left their house when they married. And beyond certain age....’ Her voice quavered and she stopped (DD, p111).

Virmati's pursuit of higher education not only defies societal expectations but also pits her ambition against the wishes of her family, particularly her mother. The conflict between Virmati's dreams and her mother's desire to see her settled in a traditional domestic role creates a poignant dilemma that many women face even today. This chapter portrays the emotional turmoil experienced by women who find themselves torn between their own ambitions and the duties and expectations imposed on them by society and family.

Difficult Daughters, is the story of freedom struggle. While India fights for freedom from the British Raj, Virmati fights for the freedom to live life on her own terms (Ghimire, 2019, p.6).

Virmati defies her family members advise to get married and have children in order to fulfill the anticipated feminine gender roles in society. She is an assertive and confrontational person who prefers to stay outside of a house. She travels to Lahore in defiance of what her family and society expects of her and in order to pursue her dreams of independence and education. As Virmati says; "Marriage was acceptable for her family, but not independence". (DD, Ch-xv, p.115).

"Kasturi doesn't want that her daughter forms a separate identity. The mother doesn't appreciate the freedom that the daughter demands and craves for. She doesn't realize that her daughter wants her own existence. Virmati wants to transport herself into a new world, a world of knowledge and self-assurance. thus, she excels in the end and fights against the engulfing and oppressive power of patriarchy. It is not important here that her voice was not heard, what is more important is that she at least tried to raise her voice" (Kurejkar, 2008). Wollstonecraft rightly said here; "*Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience*" (p.24).

Wollstonecraft advocated for women to break away from blind obedience and pursue their own lives, urging them to break free from traditional roles like housewife or mistress, and embrace greater power.

"Patriarchal society creates the differences by describing men as superior to women. consequently, women become subordinate to men in society. Each culture values girls and boys differently and assigns them different roles, responses and attributes. All the social and cultural 'packaging' that is done for girls and boys from birth onwards is 'gendering' (Yadav Sushila, et al. 2022, p.5).

"Kasturi as 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. Like Kasturi, for Ganga the professor's wife, marriage is a religious and a social institution, where love is not the basis of marriage. She too has a superb domestic sensibility. Just living with him, and bearing his children is enough for her. However, in Virmati, there is struggle between the head and the heart, the physical and moral" (Zagade, 2015).

Societal Pressure and Sacrifices:

Cultural and religious limitations on girls are widespread and have long been a problem in many civilizations across the world. These constraints are strongly established in traditional ideas, practices, and religious interpretation, and they frequently limit females' autonomy and opportunity. Some cultural conventions and beliefs value females' access to quality education above boys' education. This limitation may seriously impede their intellectual growth and future chances. "Ill treatment for women has been a ritual in this society since ages. For centuries the unjustified treatment is going on, and women are not allowed to enjoy their rights. There was absolutely no freedom to choose their own way of lifestyle or job and so on" (Baydahi Roy, 2022)

As Virmati continues her education and defies societal norms, she has to confront the harsh reality of the sacrifices women often have to make for their ambitions. Virmati's dreams come at high cost, including strained familial relationship and a sense of alienation from her own community. This study serves as a poignant reminder of the societal pressures that women face, forcing them to choose personal fulfillment and societal acceptance. "Virmati is ill- treated by her own family after she refuses to marry the canal engineer chosen by her parents, her mother threatens her of consuming poison if she denies marrying the following month (Kondapallay, 2016).

Females are frequently assigned certain gender roles and obligations in the home. This may imply that females are expected to perform domestic tasks and care for younger siblings, thereby limiting their ability to pursue education and other interests.

"Virmati's relationship with her mother is the most problematic one as she has to play the role of a mother to her eleven siblings. As she is only busy doing the household chores, she has no time for her own self. The mother looks upon her daughter as the governess of her children. The daughter has lost her individuality, where her education is treated secondary (Kurejkar, 2008).

Marriage as the ultimate destination not Education:

"*They want nothing from me but an agreement to marry*" (DD, Ch-xiv, 100).

It is an age- old belief that marriage is the sole path to fulfillment and happiness. In a society steeped in conservative beliefs, where marriage was often perceived as the ultimate validation for women. The protagonist Virmati, navigates a world where societal expectations dictate her choices. However, her journey unfolds as she recognizes her aspirations beyond the confines of marriage According to Kasturi, education means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. When Virmati was around seventeen, Kasturi insists Virmati to get married because she believes that education makes her daughter bad tempered. According to her mother Kasturi, a girl getting married and staying at home is better than education. When Virmati asked permission from her mother to pursue her BT in Lahore, this made her, a difficult daughter for Kasturi. As Beauvoir said;

“Girls are not raised the same way as boys their physical, mental and moral development is directed toward a single goal – Marriage” (Simon De Beauvoir).

Beauvoir highlights here that the real gist of a girl’s life is marriage. Education is not as important as marriage. Since childhood they are prepared for this purpose only that one day, they have to get married and go to another home so there is no use to get higher education. It is a waste of time and money. They are encouraged since childhood to do the household chores only. She says that;

“We open the factories, the offices, the faculties to woman, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her a most honorable career, freeing her from the need of any other participation in the collective life” (SS, 143-144).

Cultural traditions, patriarchal values, and poverty often prioritize daughters' marriage over education, leading to many girls being married before completing their education. “Education in itself is viewed as a modernizing force and as an agency of change The Education verses Marriage arguments is reiterated many times in the novel. Virmati’s life according to her mother is only meant to be a wife and a mother, are the consciously inculcated idea of the Indian feminine role” (Sree, 174).

As Beauvoir says that “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. Marriage is her only means of support and the sole justification of her existence (SS, p.447,449, Ch-xvi).

Oakley says in “The Sociology of Housework” that “Despite a reduction of gender differences in the occupational world in recent years, one occupational role remains entirely feminine: the role of housewife”.

In many areas of the country, education is still a far thing for girls. It is a matter of fact that if a girl is getting education, they have to take part in household chores necessarily. Virmati’s lifestyle was also like that. She wanted to get education but the importance has not been given for her education. She was very much impressed by her cousin Shakuntala who was getting higher education. She became her ideal. So, Virmati has realized that her happiness lay outside the house.

“To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges” (15).

It is quite disheartening that our society ignores girls' education, causing challenges for them throughout their lives. If a girl wishes to pursue an education, she is labeled as difficult. Kapur sheds light on this issue, as well as the importance of educating girls in order to maintain social balance and development. Other girls in the novel are likewise portrayed as challenging. Shakuntala and Swarnalata are difficult because they challenge patriarchal hegemony and value the experience of being modern women. Somnath, the family's son, too deviates from some family norms, yet he is not labeled as a difficult son..... “But despite all the pressure, nothing would induce Somnath to change his mind about marriage” (DD, p32).

Wollstonecraft rightly state; “The whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point: - to render them (men) pleasing” (p26)

A Reflection of timeless Struggles:

Religion, customs, long-held biases, and other factors have placed Indian women in a subordinate and exploitable position in many areas of life. Women are dependent on male people and other institutions of authority such as the family, community, and society due to low rates of participation in school, lack of economic independence, value biases acting against them, and so on. They are typically unaware of their rights, and even if they are, they do not have easy access to justice. In certain societies, girls may face restrictions on their mobility and freedom to travel independently. This limitation can impede their access to educational and economic opportunities and hinder their personal development. “A report published by the United Nations titled “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): The Gender Snapshot 2022 indicates that it may take close to 300 years for full gender equality to be achieved.

“Gender equality is not a woman’s issue, it is a human issue, it affects us all” (qtd. in Drishti IAS, Essay, 2023). As there are other women characters in the novel Lajwanti, Kasturi, Kishori Devi, Ganga, they all conform to patriarchal system of family because they think being submissive to men matter of pride. “According to them, domesticity, marriage and child bearing are the duties of women. Kasturi was brought up upon the tradition that marriage is the ultimate destiny of a girl and she has to please her in-laws. According to her, a woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings” (Nathan et.al. 2017). In their view, “A Woman’s shaan is in her home” (DD, Ch-iv, 16).

The idea that woman’s natural place is in the home, it is a historically and culturally specific notion (Audrey Thompson, 2011, p.19).

Kasturi was an educated woman but she was brought up in a traditional family where the ultimate goal of a girl is marriage. So, she couldn’t understand why her daughter Virmati is denying to get married and have a family. She desired for her daughters to receive an education as well, but not at the expense of traditional values. She wished for them to remain grounded and refrain from taking to the sky on the wings of learning. Kasturi attributed all of Virmati's failure to meet her expectations to her education (Phukan Ritu Baby, 2016). But despite facing immense pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, Virmati prioritizes her own autonomy

and self-fulfillment. Her decision to pursue education and independence, rather than succumb to the expectations of marriage and domesticity, underscores her embodiment of female masculinity.

“Cultural practices, such as when adult sons are expected to be financially responsible for aged parents, may result in parents receiving greater returns from a son’s education than a daughter’s. When girls “marry out” of their own family and into their husband’s family, parents recoup little, if any, of the pecuniary returns from a daughter’s education. As a result, parents may invest more in a son’s education” (Hill and M.King, 1995,p.23). Virmati's character presents itself as non-traditional, seemingly obtaining all her desired elements in life such as education and marrying her beloved. Nevertheless, Manju Kapur effectively illustrates the consequences Virmati faces for defying societal norms and pursuing her individual journey. Virmati endures isolation, disregard, an erosion of her sense of self, and a lack of familial affection. Beauvoir asserts that “Parents raise their daughter with a view to marriage rather than to furthering her personal development” (SS, P,144).

"Difficult Daughter" continues to hold significance in the modern era, despite its early 20th-century setting, due to its ability to resonate with the contemporary challenges faced by women in their pursuit of ambition, self-identity, and liberty. This particular chapter prompts the reader to ponder the progress society has achieved in relation to gender roles and equality, compelling them to reflect on the extent to which traditional expectations continue to hinder women's aspirations. Women lacking education often encounter difficulty in recognizing or preventing domestic violence. Education leads to self-empowerment; therefore, a lack of education may deprive women of the capacity to recognize abuse as wrong and to take action when it occurs. Women without education are unable to earn a living. This frequently results in circumstances in which women are unable to escape an abusive environment because they rely financially on the abuser. As Beauvoir states: “Women are still for the most part, in a state of subjection. It follows that women sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her” (SS, Beauvoir, 169).

That females' education is neglected by our society is quite disheartening, as this causes issues for them all their lives. Girls are considered challenging if they want to go to school. The significance of educating girls in order to preserve social balance and advance society is also highlighted by Kapur. Zagade points out “The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat” (2015, p.2). Wollstonecraft rightly says that “Teach them (women), in common with man, to submit to necessity, instead of giving, to render them more pleasing, a sex to morals (Wollstonecraft, p.35).

Conclusion:

This literary work authored by Manju Kapoor presents a compelling depiction of the predicament encountered by women as they endeavor to reconcile their aspirations and yearnings for autonomy with the expectations imposed by society. By following Virmati's journey, this scholarly article emphasizes the significance of acknowledging women's agency and their entitlement to pursue their aspirations. This scholarly article highlights the persistent obstacles confronted by women in their pursuit of personal satisfaction and serves as a crucial reminder of the ongoing need for concerted efforts towards gender equality and empowerment. Apparently, it is a fact that though women have attained education and social experience, still they are bounded emotionally to their families.

Beauvoir states that “Woman is not allowed to do something positive in her work and in consequence win recognition as a complete person. However, respected she may be, she is subordinate, secondary, parasitic” (p.480, Ch-xvi, SS).

Throughout the novel, Kapoor highlights the significance of women's liberation and release from repressive societal conventions. The journey of Virmati is not solely a process of individual development and self-realization, but also serves as a symbol for the wider fight of women striving for empowerment and acknowledgment of their entitlements. This examination accentuates the necessity of societal and cultural transformation in order to establish a fairer community where women can pursue gratifying lives on their own terms. Despite progress in promoting gender equality in education, considerable discrepancies remain globally. Gender equality in education is a fundamental human right that contributes to social and economic growth. The bias against daughters can only end if women's education is accompanied by social and economic empowerment, concluded a study conducted over a period of 30 years in Gove, Maharashtra, by Carol Vlasoff, a professor at the University of Ottawa. “We must educate our women and children so that they can carry on the legacy to the upcoming generations and take a part in building a nation” (Roy Baydahi, 2022). Education plays a vital role in empowering women and narrowing the gap between women and men in terms of socio-economic opportunities; it has the potential to diminish gender-based inequalities and reshape the long-standing disadvantage that women have historically experienced.

Kapur articulates with remarkable eloquence the concept of independence and the novel, situated amidst the backdrop of partition, tackles subjects such as women's education and the pursuit of feminine liberation. She

dives into the mental and emotional states of Indian women residing within joint families, subjected to male dominance, and expounds upon the intricate layers of the Indian experience during both the colonial and post-colonial eras. Furthermore, she contemplates the devastating impact of partition and the specific challenges faced by women.

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