



Education and Dilemma in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur, an Indian woman novelist discusses women's education and its impact on the lives of women, mainly Indian daughters who face dilemma in making a choice between tradition and modernity in her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998). The novel analyses the struggle of Indian daughters to liberate themselves from the shackles of patriarchy. Their worldly knowledge gained from formal education poses a different perspective against the traditional values they have been taught to engross with since childhood. Kapur throws light on prejudices on values of education, particularly that of women's education in a traditional society where education for women is promoted to consolidate patriarchal values. She makes her women characters play a significant role in nation building widening their potentials beyond the four walls of their houses. But this attempt to broaden their horizon of capabilities and responsibilities beyond their domestic domain invites strong criticism, ramification and repercussion from their families which embody patriarchal systems causing dilemma and affecting their life psychologically. The proposed study is an analysis of dichotomy of tradition vs modernity faced by educated Indian daughters in their society. It highlights the issues of women depicted in the novel selected for study through content analysis approach.

Key Words: Education, Dilemma, Tradition, Modernity, Liberation, Patriarchy.

1. Introduction:

Education is meant for enlightenment and knowledge to erase the darkness of ignorance, to foster rationality and logic. Kipling's term – 'The White Man's Burden' signifies this importance of education to impart knowledge to the Orient in order to eliminate superstitious belief thereby enriching their logistic insights though the intention of the White Men to educate the Orient is questionable. Though the essence of education is to instil the eagerness of finding reasons behind any action, ideology, theory or belief into the learners, the reasoning power of the learned is often found to be contradictory to the traditional beliefs. Those who attempt to question the validity of those traditional beliefs face criticism for being opposed to the system posing threats to its existence. There are a few who can surpass this dilemma with determined affiliation to their reasoning capability acquired from education. But many swing pendulously in the dualism of tradition vs modernity dwindling their own reasoning power. Manju Kapur posits this dilemma of an educated woman in *Difficult Daughters*. Her protagonist Virmati suffers from her inability to affirm her position through rationality in manifold aspects. She faces dilemma in choosing between tradition and modernity that causes impediment in her growth of individualism and worldview.

2. Objectives:

- 1) To aim at finding out validity of the novelist's arguments regarding values of education in general and that of women's education in particular.
- 2) To examine the dual perceptions of women in patriarchal society due to differences between their upbringing system and education system ideologically.
- 3) To focus on the impact of education on traditional beliefs and customs of a patriarchal society.

- 4) To elucidate the feasibility of applications of author's observations in the novel on the real life situations.

3. Methods:

- 1) The in-depth content analysis of the novel is done.
- 2) The argument is based on the realities depicted in the novel.
- 3) The arguments/assumptions of the author are authenticated by referring to the critical works, novels or other literary genres of other writers.
- 4) Literary theories, specifically feminism is incorporated in critiquing the novel.

4. Discussion:

A. Education:

As mentioned above, education is to enlighten minds to free from the realm of ignorance seeking justice and wisdom in this biased world. Manju Kapur deals with the issues of education particularly education for women as a subtheme in *Difficult Daughters*. If one traces back history of the world, one will find that the demand for gender equality is foregrounded on women's education. The First Wave or the Enlightenment phase of feminism encapsulates that women should be provided proper education system similar to the one rendered to men. Mary Wollstonecraft, the Mother of Feminism, in *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* argues that reasoning, virtue and wisdom are the parameters to judge the happiness of a society. Every human being irrespective of differences of sexes should be provided equal opportunity to acquire these qualities through proper education system. Virginia Woolf also contends for the provision of proper education for women in *A Room of One's Own* incorporating Wollstonecraft's philosophy.

It is not only women reformers or critics who raise voice for women's education but male critics too express their concern for women's education in their works. But in general, it can be perceived that their aim at women's education is to reify patriarchal tradition. Rousseau in *Emile* professes women's training for traditional knowledge to imbibe tenderness to their traits as their work is to serve men. Sumanta Bannerjee mentions regarding women's education in 19th Century India that "Females are not required to be educated by the standard which is adapted to men...Women has but one resource – Home. The end and aim of her life is to cultivate the domestic affections, to minister the comfort and happiness of her husband, to look after and tend her children, and exercise her little supervision over domestic economics" (qtd. in Roy, 2021, p. 32). He further states that "The main aim of real female education is to train, improve and nourish the gentle and noble qualities of her heart" (qtd. in Roy, 2021, p. 32) intensifying the limited scope of women's education. James Tooley in the early 21st Century resonates the same biased conception regarding women's education and necessitates the radical rethinking of the approaches of women's education in his controversial book *The Miseducation of Women*. In this book Tooley disseminates that feminists posit that women can live a blissful life by rejecting their subordination and subjugation and it can be achieved through education. But their promise remains unfulfilled. It rather makes women suffer from 'Bridget Jones Syndrome' – an unhappy situation of single woman who remains frustrated after being successful in her career due to her single status and longs for a family of her own. As since childhood women are taught equal educational syllables provided to men, they feel they do not need men in their life thus discrediting men's roles in their life. "It is through their schooling, at least in part, that girls grow into the women they are, learning the lessons of independence, equality with boys and that overriding importance of their careers" (2002, p. 2). They are taught that "the greatest destiny is to glory in the market place and public space. Independence and opportunities are theirs in abundance in careers, higher education and politics" (2002, p. 2). Contrary to their expectations of satisfactions and fulfilments this way of teaching only brings them frustration and desperation as there has been a longing to be united with men from within causing a dilemma in their affiliations and choices of life. So, they have Bridget Jones Syndrome, a yearning for a familial life. Education which is meant to give light to these women only defuncts their mind. So, girls/women are 'miseducated'. To save them from this dilemma girls and boys should have different lessons. Even though Tooley's concept of women's education is controversial and is criticised severely for being biased, this prejudices against women's education are reflected in the policies of the Governments also. The Government policies of 19th century were family oriented and they promoted women's subordination in a different manner. Jane Martin in her essay "Gender and Education: Change and Continuity" points out this scenario in England:

This period (19th century) ... saw the promotion of a sex-differentiated curriculum. In 1878, for example, theoretical domestic economy became a compulsory specific subject for girls; four years later the government gave grants for the teaching of cookery. By the 1890, a significant expansion in the curriculum prescriptions for the working class girls saw the inclusion (inclusion) of laundry work and housewifery. (2006, p. 23)

What Jane Martin observes in England is elaborately discussed by the novelist in *Difficult Daughters* in the 20th Century Indian context. The author foregrounds women's education in dealing with the theme of emancipation and empowerment of women in patriarchal society. Kapur analyses the theme of education from different dimensions involving several characters in the novel. The narrative is developed through the story of Virmati who revolves around the issues of education in the novel. She aspires to gain profound knowledge

through higher studies denying the patriarchal negation of women in the domain of acquisition of knowledge through higher studies and it is a major reason to brand her with the term 'difficult daughter'. Instead of encouraging her to pursue higher studies her family only criticises her for her obsession for education: "She is so keen to study, *bapre*./ First F.A, then BA, then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an MA to Government College, Lahore" (p. 5).

Kapur uses education as a realm to reshape Virmati who is shaped with traditional beliefs. Virmati is supposed to marry Indrajit, a canal engineer after her F.A. but the marriage is delayed due the death of her grandmother and that of her would be father-in-law. Meanwhile, she is admitted to A.S. College for B.A. While she continues her study, she also ventures upon another realm of her life by falling in love with a professor in the college who is already married. Because of this relationship she refuses to marry Indrajit citing her wish for further study as a reason for her refusal. She is punished for her denial to follow the tradition and instructed to abide by the norms and marry her fiancée but she is determined to resist her confinement in the name of sacred marriage institution. She rejects to be "a rubber doll for other to move as they willed," (p. 92) and chooses independence through education.

She is sent to study in Lahore. But her study is not meant for her individual development and it is expressed in Kasturi's words: "Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family" (p. 16-17) reminding her of her duty to her family. Giving her example her mother directs her to follow the tradition rather than rebelling against it: "I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me" (p. 17). This is the fate of every daughter of the family. Virmati is no exception to allow to go beyond this paradigm. Rather she should also conform to the codes of the family by entering married life as soon as possible. She should not cherish the desires to redefine herself through education but perform her assigned roles without any argument and save the family name. She should not endorse any concept of education that the professor professes:

One of the benefits of education is that it teaches us to think for ourselves. Even if we arrive at the same conclusions that have been presented to us, our faith in those beliefs are stronger for having been personally thought out. If, as sometimes happens, our education leads us to question some of the value systems which we live, that is not to say that we are destroying tradition. The tradition that refuses to entertain doubt, or remains impervious to new thoughts and ideas, becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force. Even the smallest one of us has a social function, but that function is not to follow blindly beliefs that may not be valid. (p. 102)

But Virmati does away with all impositions and expectations combatting the tradition and customs that forestall development of her personality. She prefers to be the difficult daughter and explores her calibre in the field of education discarding the life of an uneducated person, devoid of enlightenment, who is like the earthworm living in an extremely limited domain, spending its entire life in the darkness of the soil negating its feeling or its purview beyond the provided space. With her firm determination to assert selfhood Virmati, finally, surpasses patriarchal obstacles and goes to Lahore for further studies. She gets inspirations from many learned women she encounters in her journey for personhood. She becomes more assertive and confident deliberating her identity in a new space of her own. Education gives her freedom, respect and regards as an individual.

B. Dilemma:

Kapur dissects the psychological impact of education on Virmati. She underscores the clash between tradition and modernity. Virmati is traumatised by this irresolute dilemma in making choices between traditional and modern values. Kapur portrays Virmati possessing double characters. While she exerts her assertive spirits in variegated realms she also submits to the demands of the systems to some extent. It is true that she subverts the hierarchy of patriarchal structure at a certain point. Even if Virmati unchains herself from the shackles of patriarchal orthodox system to a certain extent, she cannot completely disregard the traditional mores. For example, when her marriage with Indrajit is settled, she is insisted to remain committed for their relationship by the professor. Of course, Virmati does not have passion for Indrajit, but she cannot muster up courage to decline the arranged marriage. It is the professor who encourages her to exercise her reasoning to see hollowness in the relationship and seeks for her denial to the forceful marriage. Virmati sways in between the age-old tradition to save the name of family and individualism instilled to her by the modern values gained from education to celebrate her individual wish. Unable to make a concrete decision she attempts to suicide by drowning herself in water misjudging that by killing herself she can wipe out this dilemma. She is the eldest daughter of eleven children of her parents. On her action depends the fate of her younger sisters. Her nonconformity to the norms can scandalise her family which will ruin the lives their daughters. So, she has a vital role to play in sustaining the name and dignity of the family which is mentioned by Kasturi too:

You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father have confidence in you, otherwise would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. Now what will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it? (p. 58-59).

Despite this fear of defaming herself and her family, her inner self to celebrate her personhood cannot be subdued. Unable to bear this pressure of expectations and duties and urge for selfhood she takes the extreme step to end her life.

Kapur further demonstrates the dichotomised state of Virmati in this novel. The nuances in the practices of patriarchal tradition render her to internalise and normalise her marginalisation and exploitation. When she unfetters herself from the shackles of patriarchy as a daughter, she is again chained by the reins of the professor who is an epitome of patriarchy through her love affair. During her sojourn at Lahore the professor comes to claim his ownership over her. Even if she tries to end her relationship with the professor, the professor continues to wield his authoritative power over her and without considering about her study he deliberately creates situations to meet her. This disturbs her life and digresses her from her main aim. She is among the erudite and learned women who wish to play a significant role in the development of the country and serve the country, nonetheless she doubts her similarities with them. So, she muses:

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 in being in love. Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. And she even has a 'friend', who lives in the city. Thank God Hari (the professor) lives in Amritsar. Otherwise I would be completely engulfed. But isn't that what I want? What will happen when we marry? (p. 142)

She gets impregnated in the relationship and at her crucial moment her lover is not by her. In order to avoid the humiliation and stigma of being an unmarried mother she decides to abort her child. While she bears the shame and pain of abortion the professor enjoys his family life and becomes a father of a son. It makes her realise her foolishness in trusting the professor fully by making him her guardian, her lord. Her gullibility validates general misconception of women's education:

This was the very thing the men were afraid of, even the mothers. Education led to independence and loose conduct. Things were better than they used to be, but these fears took a long time to remove. You should have seen some of the buildings that passed for girls' schools. Dark one or two-room holes, no ventilation, no playground, all in the name of keeping them safe. (p. 155)

In "Tradition and Modernity in *Difficult Daughters*" Shaleen Kumar Singh also observes that:

The imaginative mind, longings and aspirations to soar high and high, the impressionism of new education rouses in her incessant urge to establish her own identity, have been the potent causes for the revolt against traditions and have added the clash against tradition versus modernity. Because Virmati aspired to lead different life against the norms of traditions, she succeeded in her attempt to live a life of her own. It clearly points out that modernity has defeated traditions to a great extent, but when we glance the tragic end of novel when Virmati has to suffer victimization of modernity. (2012, p. 101-102)

Despite the pain of betrayal and abandonment Virmati marches ahead to contribute a critical role in the development of the society thus advancing in her domain of selfhood. She becomes, through her own effort, a respectable principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya, a school for the promotion of women's education based on the provision of the moral ethics to the girl students at Nahan under the guardianship of the Maharani. But unfortunately for her the professor comes back to her life to reclaim his ownership. Without considering her position and dignity he comes to her workplace giving threat to her job. Because of his visit she is expelled from her post as she crosses the parameter of an ideal single woman by letting a man stay at her place. The school is a part of the patriarchal strategies to actualize and substantiate male centric regime by educating the girls. It aims to enhance women's condition which in turn will reify patriarchal mores in society. It does not encourage any individual to oppose its values and threaten its rules. So, when the authorities of the school come to know about Virmati's lover they immediately decide to dismiss her. Virmati is given no chance to explain herself. They invalidate her expertise in the field of education which is very necessary for the promotion of women's education, for a new India as her loose moral character may give a negative influence on the girl students. A slight scandal is enough to terminate her because "It is important to set a good example, particularly because there is so much readiness to suppose that education encourages girls to be independent and wayward" (p. 196). Thus, for refusing to conform to the set rules of patriarchy Virmati is punished. Her life is filled with uncertainties and confusions. This plunges her life into a dilemma, caught between choices of individuality and tradition, professional life and individual urges.

Virmati wants to end these uncertainties so she asks for her position in the professor's life. She insists him to declare their relationship publicly by marrying her. But the professor denies to give her both the social and legal status. She tries to convince him at her appalling condition and states:

I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace... and why? Because I am an idiot.

Now you want to prolong the situation. Why don't we get married? You say your family makes no difference. But still you want to continue in this way. Be honest with me. I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. (p. 149)

The professor does not consider about her situation rather showing his condescending attitudes continue the relationship to satisfy his corporeal hunger. Virmati cannot find an escapade from this dominance but accept her secondary position as: "She was his for life, whether he ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice" (p. 177).

Kapur elucidates the strong clash between traditional systems and changes brought by modernity through the character of Virmati. Virmati's dualities provide a room to introspect realities of Indian daughters who are brought up in traditional system, but are enlightened with modern knowledge. She is disturbed psychologically in her attempt to incline to both traditional and modern values and to maintain a balance in her affiliations to the doctrines of both the systems. She struggles incessantly to adapt and adopt her position in accordance with both the entities. Her excruciating journey of selfhood gives a room to her readers to evaluate the pros and cons of women's education and a series of double or dual possibilities – tradition vs modernity, career vs responsibilities and individuality vs duties, a very relevant situation faced by Indian modern women. Sushma Upmanyu in "Spinsters and Loneliness" deliberates that the "dilemma that the young women generally face is whether to sequence career and parenting roles, or try to integrate responsibilities and pursue both roles simultaneously. Conflicting expectations place young women in an irresolvable dilemma" (1994, p. 49). Kapur studies these dilemmas of young Indian women through the story of Virmati in this novel. Even if Virmati does not want to live like a puppet and desires to explore her horizon of capabilities she is entrapped again in her lover's cage.

C) Assertion and Submission:

Self-assertion is another major aspect of this novel. Even if it portrays doubts on Virmati's assertion of selfhood, the other women characters in the novel highlight women's assertion of identity in great detail. Swarna Lata is a prominent woman character in the novel who exerts her prominence not only in her familial role, but in her role as a dutiful and responsible citizen of the country taking a pivotal role in nation building. She raises above the domestic roles of women and takes part in political issues sharing her socio-political consciousness with her fellow women and colleagues. The novel is set in Amritsar and Lahore during pre-independent India. Kapur vividly presents the chaotic situations during the Freedom Struggle of 1940's in the novel. While Virmati stays in Lahore, the novelist shows the Freedom Movement reaching its climax. She gives a clear account of woman's participation in the freedom struggle through the portrayal of Swarna Lata. Swarna Lata represents the courageous Indian woman freedom fighter.

Swarna epitomises women involvement in Freedom Movement, shaping the future of the nation thus widening her scope and space for selfhood. She is a representative of Indian women who fight for unity, solidarity, integrity and freedom of the nation. The novelist brings in the scenes of the possible Partition and its aftermath in the novel. Embodying voice of Indians who uphold the ethos of unity she voices for anti- Pakistan and anti-imperialism:

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

Swarna is an independent and confident woman. She asserts as a responsible and patriotic Indian. She repudiates the fixed roles of a woman as daughter, wife or mother. She contests the fixed boundary of patriarchy that brackets women's life in the limited domestic space. She brings clarity to Virmati's conception of roles of women – "Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war – the satyagraha movement – because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream" (p. 151).

Swarna disclaims patriarchal identification of women with limited scopes for selfhood and calls women to wake up from their stale dream. She demands women's emancipation from patriarchal bondages which are engraved

on them since childhood. She questions the validity of the patriarchal standards which is paramount in relegating women to their secondary positioning. Even if she is manifested as a modern woman who upholds modern values, she does not totally discard Indian tradition. She enters into marriage institution but with consents. Marriage for her is not an imposition or an obligation to follow but a domain to attain certainty for her life (In the novel it is hinted that Swarna Lata has a boyfriend though no further detail is mentioned). "She was going to be allowed to continue her other activities, remain treasurer of the Women's Conference, go on working for the Party. Everything to do with the house they would share as much as possible. She owed it to her parents to marry. They had let her have her way in everything else" (p. 188).

Kapur encompasses the concept of an 'androgyn' to use Virginia Woolf's term possessing the characteristic features of both man and woman by a single person in portraying Swarna's character. She does not incorporate the assumptions of radical feminist with total negation of male in Swarna's life. Rather she is portrayed as a dominant character firmly determined with her way of life and clear perspectives. It can be said that she deconstructs patriarchal power structure coming from the periphery to the centre. The traditional values or practices are not hurdles in pursuance of her aim in life. She defies the codes that hinder her journey of selfhood but also encompasses its institutions like marriage institution which is, for her, not a confinement but a realm to self-fulfilment. Virmati truly conveys Swarna's character in her words – "What a girl! Her opinions seemed to come from inside herself, her thoughts, ideas and feelings blended without any horrible sense of dislocation. She was committed, articulate" (p. 135). With this commitment and insights, she does not let dilemma cause any hinderance in accomplishing her aim in life blurring her outlook.

Another woman character of important concern is Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin. Shakuntala is a symbol of women's empowerment. Despite rigorous instructions from her family to adhere to the system by entering into married life as soon as possible and conform to the systems, she determines to remain single throughout her life. Even though she is the only daughter of her parents bearing the sole responsibility to fulfil her parents' expectations regarding her conformity to the traditions, such obligatory cannot forestall her in pursuing her personal wishes. She repudiates the definition of women replicated by her aunt Kasturi – "What is the need to do a job? A woman's shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shaadi" (p. 16). Kasturi fails to acknowledge and appreciate Shakuntala's wider potentials and calibre in the field of education even if she is a source of inspiration for many including Virmati – "Such a talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for the younger one" (p. 15). Instead of appreciations for her achievements she faces social stigma for being unmarried – "You are getting very modern in your thinking. We hardly get to see you as it is" (p. 15), being a centre of mockery and stigmatization even in her own home from her own relatives and blood kins.

Such intimidating attitudes cannot detain Shakuntala from her pursuit to live a life of her own. She disowns the patriarchal parameters for defining her characters and refuses to cherish marriage as her sole aim in life. In *Desirable Daughters* Bharati Mukherjee exemplifies the compulsion of marriage in women's life satirically presenting the marriage of Tara Lata to a tree. The scene of a Bengali marriage is filled with satirical elements. Tara's bridegroom dies on her wedding day and so the father of the deceased groom demands to hand over the dowry of Tara to him. Tara's father refuses this nonsensical demand and quarrels with him. Then the bereaved father curses her to remain unmarried for her whole life. The angry Tara's father marries her daughter to a tree showing off his ego on one hand, while nullifying his opponent's curse on the other, thus being inconsiderate of Tara's life. From then onwards she has been popularly known as Tara Lata the Tree Bride. Mukherjee's story is a scathing mockery of marginalisation of women. Tara's father in order to satisfy his male ego exercises his ownership over Tara and marries her to a tree as if she is an object liable to him to bind to someone, in this case, even to a non-human. This is the fate of every daughter to be treated as an object in the hands of her father, to be traded off in his business undermining her feelings and emotions. Kapur highlights that for a daughter like Shakuntala the execution of patriarchal malpractices is difficult to materialise as she boldly faces all challenges and declines submission to the system. She sees her life beyond husband and children and leads a free life broadening her spaces of existence and possibilities – "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" (p. 17). In "The Fiction of Manju Kapur: A Feminist Reading" O.P. Dwivedi comments on her character that:

Indirectly she suggests that marriage is an obstacle in the pursuit of 'higher studies'. This may be partly true, but the reality is that it takes away the chances of freedom – freedom from male domination, freedom from economic dependence on others, freedom from physical servitude, etc. Thus, the freedom of Shakuntala aims at self-dependence and self-reliance in personal life, highly educated as she is. In brief, she is a girl of staunch feminist leanings. (2012, p. 138)

Thus, Shakuntala defies all impositions and cherishes independence through education. She shatters patriarchal bondages untangling its dominating malfunction. She exploits her knowledge to claim her selfhood and self-consciousness. She follows her instincts than her prescribed responsibilities as a daughter.

While Kapur disseminates assertive spirits of women in the case of Swarna Lata and Shakuntala unearthing several realms of self-assertion she evaluates the submissiveness of women to patriarchal norms through the character of Ganga, the first wife of the professor, who is a representative of typical Indian women engrossing patriarchal dictum as an absolute truth in this novel. Kapur makes Ganga an illiterate and due to her utter adherence to patriarchal beliefs and cultures she lives a subservient life devoid of any sense of selfhood. She is conditioned with patriarchal standard to obey the commands of her husband unswervingly. So, when the professor brings in Virmati as his second wife she tolerates his intimidation and exploitation silently without raising any question to him for his betrayal and discrimination. She confines herself within her domestic domain and as long as she is in intact with her domestic roles she has no objection to her husband's dictatorship. Her lack of knowledge of modern values and extreme observance of patriarchal tradition results in her total servitude to her husband living a meaningless life.

She sacrifices her own desires, aspirations and dreams and defines herself under the gaze of her husband. While choosing the colour of her dresses she does not choose anything blue as – “He doesn't like blue, ... I wear nothing blue” (p. 42). Whenever she has to do something or to take a decision without his advice, the question that comes to her mind is ‘What'll he say?’. So, when she goes with Virmati for sightseeing at Darbar Sahib and the Company Bagh where Virmati suggests her to stay a little longer to buy bangles from a dark, paved gully she hesitates to stay and says “No, no, it's getting late. What'll he say? ... remembering that she ought not to be away from home for so long. Without him” (p. 42). Thus, in every aspect of her life it is her husband and his choice or concern, not her. She acts as a puppet attuning to his whims and fancies dehumanizing herself as a robot following the set direction or command.

D) Struggle and Irresolution:

Kapur discusses a plethora of issues concerning women by dissecting diverse women characters from manifold dimensions in this novel. She analyses the New Woman motif figuratively through her quintessential characters like Shakuntala and Swarna Lata who show their resolute denial to their subjugation and marginalisation and redefine themselves through self-assertion in their society. But she also stresses on the character like Virmati who suffers, struggles but fails to channel her efforts and opportunities to her advantages. Swarna Lata flees from her home to Lahore once she comes to know about her parents' planning for her marriage. Shakuntala who is from the same family of Virmati, ignores the patriarchal hegemony and chooses her single status fully enjoying a liberated life. But Virmati cannot make a concrete decision of her own. She even attempts to commit suicide unable to express her refusal to her arranged marriage with Indrajit. For her disconformities to the social mores and arrogant attitudes her mother scolds her and repents for getting her as her daughter – “God has put you on earth to punish me,” (p. 111). For the sake of her individuality, she rebels against her own parents and goes to Lahore assuming that she will be free now from all the bondages – “I've come, I'm going to be on my own, this is a new beginning” (p. 112) and she cherishes her autonomy, her freedom welcoming Lahore – “any place was welcome, any place that promised to bring sense and purpose to her life” (p. 114). But she is again trapped by the professor who neither accepts her publicly nor let her be for others. He keeps her in irresolute uncertainties even snatching away her job where she occupies a prominent position. It is true that with her insistence the professor finally marries her but, in that domain too, she submits herself to his authority in many aspects. Her indecisiveness and lack of self-confidence brings her incessant sufferings. Ashish M. Sahare in “Feministic Approach in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*” opines:

In Virmati we find the incipient New Woman who is conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself; to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social restrictions, yet she lacks confidence, self control, farsightedness and is psychically imprisoned with an underlying need to be emotionally and intellectually dependent on a superior force. (2015, p. 164)

Thus, Virmati swings between her obligation to tradition and her inclination to modernity like a pendulum. Like most of the Indian daughters, she undergoes frustration, desperation, dislocation and trauma due the strong clutch of tradition that tries to suppress her urge for modernity. She is torn apart due to her oppressed and suppressed conditioning and positioning in patriarchal hegemonic culture. It is noteworthy to quote Shaleen Kumar Singh and Daisy Verma from their essay – “Voice of Protest Against Man in *Difficult Daughters*”:

Manju, Kapur seeks to establish in the patriarchal Indian society that there are women like Virmati who due to their inclination towards protest against male dominated world constantly struggle between the physical and moral and if they prefer the lives of their own, they will have to bear with the travails of illicit relationship, social antipathy and defame and also have to run against the currents of social and moral dogmas. (2012, p. 129)

To sum up, it can be seen that even though she cannot achieve total assertion of selfhood like Swarna Lata or Shakuntala but claims her personhood in her own course which is no small feat during 20th century India.

5. Conclusion:

Kapur in this novel, exhibits that in a traditional society education for women is not practised in its truest sense. Rather it is provided with a target to consolidate patriarchal dogmas thereby instructing women to interiorise patriarchal codifications conditioning them to adopt and adapt to their secondary roles. They are trained to accept the patriarchal traditional values unquestioningly treating it as a means/meaning of their existential struggle. But modern education lessons them to seek rational justification for all this erroneous tradition questioning their peripheral positioning and stereotypes. Because of the differences in the aims of traditional training and modern education women encounter an irresolute dilemma unable to determine their affiliation to any of these values. It is true that some can streamline their opportunities and knowledge of modern education to their advantage and expand their potentialities and responsibilities beyond their domestic paradigm. But for many it is challenging to channel the given spaces of exploration facilitating their own dynamics. The novelist rightfully posits that the innumerable patriarchal challenges render women an irresolute dilemma hindering the development of their individual spirit. It is a tough struggle for many to erase this dilemma. Kapur by making her protagonist suffer from this polarised state foregrounds the realities of every traditional daughter who faces dualism to align to these two separate ideologies. There are ideals like Swarna Lata and Shakuntala who are determined and rational and succeed in maintaining the equilibrium of these two different entities in their own ways. There are also typical Indian daughters like Ganga who submits to patriarchy unwaveringly and completely adheres to its traditions and customs. But there are also difficult daughters like Virmati who toils under the tyranny of patriarchy struggling to redefine herself in the patriarchal society. Thus, Kapur illustrates realities of Indian daughters who are torn apart due to their adherence to both the tradition and modernity bringing in familiar narratives in an unfamiliar tone through her fictional characters.

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