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## SHEDDING OFF THE 'PATRIARCHAL CLUTCHES': A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF VIRMATI IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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**K.V.S.Maheswararao**

Lecturer in English

A.M.A.L College

Anakapalle, Visakhapatnam District

Andhra Pradesh, India

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### Abstract

Manju Kapur portrays modern educated and career oriented women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Her women protagonists are always concerned with themselves in their search for their own needs and identities. Most of her women protagonists endeavor to establish themselves as individuals who break the traditional constraints that grab them with fears of patriarchy and at times they shun to allow selves to be socially, psychologically, emotionally be ostracized. Her women protagonists attempt to refine their identities in tune with the changed social ambiance of the modern times. In the process of probing to dive for their identity, the women protagonists of Manju Kapur do not depend on men and emerge them with a new identity coupled with matured thought process. The emergence of the modern woman and her quest for identity, her fortitude and endurance to define herself as a person of individuality and potential on par with man are depicted authentically in her works. *Virmati (Difficult Daughters)* represents a woman torn between age-old traditions, individual views and bonds. She felt these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning, gradually learns to endure them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture her family ties. Her realization, that it could be wise to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and not to lose her identity.

**Keywords:** Women, Tradition, Identity, Freedom, Patriarchy, Transgressing and Obligations

Manju Kapur's novels comprehend into the hope of Indian Women, the choices they make and the choices made for them. As adjusted life never comforts them in some point of time, they come out of that life to live the chosen actuality. Kapur states that in India modern liberated women have started to choose their own lives and to decide for themselves, whether they want to be homemakers or more. In her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, she talks about the choices made by *Virmati* in the postmodernist manner.

In *Difficult Daughters* one never listens to the Protagonist *Virmati's* voice. She could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions, colonialism and patriarchy. She remained as an essential care taker of her ten younger siblings. Her life is smeared under the pressure of family responsibilities and she becomes mature in her early stage. She never gets

affection, love and care which she expects from her mother. All the time she is rebuked and admonished by her mother who grumbles: "You are the eldest. If you don't see to things, who will?" (DD 6).

Virmati is at the age of seventeen, even at that time, her mother becomes pregnant, because of which she could not pass through F.A Examination. Virmati belongs to an Arya Samaj family. She is sent to an Arya Samaj school and then to a Samaj college. In her case, the values taught outside the home and those insisted upon at home are the same. Virmati is trained in housekeeping at the early age of ten. She being the eldest in the family of eleven children is asked to play the role of being a second mother to her siblings. However as an eldest child and an emotional mother to her siblings, Virmati is very bossy and other children are scared of her. She is always almost seen tired and harassed due to her weary work. Torn between her household responsibilities and her love for studies, she turns into a brisk and a bad tempered girl. She becomes restless due to her endless household duties. From her childhood she was bounded by the duties of the home she never finds time for her own.

Virmati wishes to follow the ideals of Shakuntala (virmati's cousin) who invites her to move out of the house as times are changing. Virmati is full of admiration and love for Shakuntala, who has tasted the wine of freedom to do whatever she thinks fit with her life. She is a M.Sc. Chemistry graduate and has her own views about living life. She symbolizes modernity. Virmati is fascinated to hear from her that she participated in the political Gandhian movement. She is a fearless woman. Virmati comes to know that there is world beyond marriage.

Virmati also wants to continue her education and emulate Shakuntala. But she lacks the will power to go against the wishes of her mother. When she conveys her wishes, her mother is least sympathetic to her demands. After her failure in FA her mother presses her to get married but she wants to have her own space, her own identity, and wants to taste the sweetness of the freedom like her cousin Shakuntala. Virmati is the embodiment of freedom.

Virmati is the embodiment of freedom. But she doesn't get success in convincing her mother and get herself engaged with a canal engineer Inderjeet. She has to struggle a lot to continue her education after her engagement. Her family pressurizes her to accept the alliance. She agrees though passively. But the marriage is postponed to a year because of her great aunt's death. It is this year that changes the story of her life, the very course of her life. Due to the postponement of marriage, she is allowed to pursue her higher studies. The new education helps Virmati to get herself free from the bondage of patriarchy that denies her freedom and choice.

Virmati after clearing her F.A Exams enrolls in a college for B.A. Virmati finds an opportunity to get her admission to A.S College. Professor Harish is a married man and lives in Virmati's house as tenant. For Virmati, professor's love was more stimulant than Inderjeet. The undergraduate study makes her more interested in further studies. Having nothing much in common with his homely, illiterate wife Ganga, the Professor starts seeking an intellectual alliance with the fresh, inquisitive Virmati and soon found himself falling in love with her. By the time Virmati passes her FA. Exams; in the eyes of her parents, she has done enough studies and her fiancé's parents also think "...She was already well qualified to be the wife of their son, the canal engineer. They did not want too much education in their daughter-in-law, even though times were changing" (DD 4). But due to the death of the canal engineer's father, marriage is postponed.

Virmati is getting tangled in the web of professor's love. She compares Inderjeet with Harish. So she rejects Inderjeet and suggests her mother to let Indumati marry him. Classroom is the only place where the Professor sees her. And Virmati appears to be flower like against the back drop of male students. The Professor feels the pulse of love, because one day he notices Virmati intensely staring at him. But the real reason is different. She suffers from short sight. So he takes her to the eye doctor and she starts putting on glasses.

By introducing Virmati to the canons of English Literature, the great Western civilizations and the nuances of cultured living, the Professor succeeds in providing her false feeling of women's emancipation. After finishing B.A. degree, she tells the Professor about her engagement. Despite this information, the Professor is deeply infatuated with her.

The Professor tries to dissuade her to marry Inderjeet. The Professor informs Virmati that he was forced to marry a three year old girl. His wife is an illiterate. She does not have the inclination to educate herself. Therefore she has failed to satisfy the intellectual thirst of the Professor. That void has been neatly filled in by the arrival of Virmati. The Professor cites a reason to express his love and Virmati gets trapped. She makes a choice by preferring the professor to Inderjeet. She feels "whatever might be the consequences, she must continue her course". (53)

At that time Virmati receives a letter from Inderjeet which states that as he is very busy with his bridge project he is unable to meet her and he would come to Amritsar shortly. Virmati reads this brief letter several times. In her pocket she has another letter, which is a part of a correspondence the Professor has insisted on keeping, although she has not seen the need.

Virmati places the letters, the Professor's crushed letter and the finance's legitimate letter, on the parapet. She keeps staring at them. Quickly she tore up the letter and scattered the pieces over the wall. So, Virmati has to rebel. She rejects the world of domesticity, marriage and child-bearing all that her mother stood for and accepts a new world of knowledge and self-assurance, a world to which her mother has no passport.

At the juncture of being engaged to Inderjeet, she, incited by Professor, could not understand which way to opt. This dilemma disturbs her so much that makes her to commit suicide by dipping into the Ganges. Fortunately, she is saved. Now innumerable agonies enter into Virmati's life. Though she is rescued, life has become cruel to her. Kasturi, instead of showing compassion, behaves most inhumanly to her. Virmati is confined to a store-room. She is not allowed to even mingle with her sibling. This stigma detaches her from her parents.

Virmati and the Professor continue to exchange love letters through the youngest sister Paro. Virmati's parents want a promise from her that she will never meet the professor again. They think that a person who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never make Virmati happy. In the winter nights, the family members take her out and again lock in the godown during daytime. Virmati is angry each time she is locked. Virmati does not know why she is locked in the godown like a sack of wheat or dal. The love letters to the professor seem to console her with the lines "There is a God who looks after lovers" (DD 88).

Virmati is aware of the Professor's love for her but at the same time she is also conscious of the opposition in the two families to accept their unacceptable desires. She knows that her affair would damage the reputation of her family and the prospects of her sisters. As an Indian daughter she thinks of her parents, but as an individual she longs for her lover. However,

Virmati's love for the professor makes her disobey her tradition and long for higher education. Even after knowing the fact that the Professor is a married man, she continues to entertain his love. Because it is the Professor who has made her feel that she should break all the restrictions imposed on her by the family. The Professor promises her a new life, higher education and freedom.

Virmati wants to establish her individuality, because Education provided to women helps to realize their stature and with the spread of knowledge and greater independence, now available, even oriental women have started raising the voices of the protest against oppression of any kind. Educated women demand equality, freedom and justice to bring about a radical change in their lives. Compelled by a desire to realize their dreams of leading a new way of life, women have been voicing their feelings freely. Thereafter, she chooses the company of the Professor. Equally, the Professor blames the tradition which insists on child weddings. At the same time he does not neglect the duty of a married man. So he comes forward to keep his legal wife with him. Yet the intellect and the adult passion, he feels, could get quenched only with Virmati.

Virmati decides to start her studies once again. She writes to Harish that she is going to Lahore to do her BT. She wants to be a teacher like him. Virmati notices the change that Lahore has brought in her way of life. She starts a meaningful life in Lahore with her roommate Swarna Lata. She is active in politics. She is a modern woman with her own views and opinions. She thinks independently. She wants to do something more than just marrying. She doesn't want to wait for her man and involves herself in others. She has a big heart. She has a lot to offer to Virmati when she meets her at the first time. Swarna Lata is also a rebel like Virmati. She leaves her home for her own good. She wants something more from life. She is not just a room partner for Virmati. At a time when Virmati finds herself in trouble it is Swarna who advises her and also helps her. She is for Virmati 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.

Swarna Lata is the only female who gets out of life what she wants. But, professor's thoughts keep circling around her mind. When Virmati returns from Nahan, Harish comes to meet her and also to pursue her. He succeeds in convincing his love for Virmati. For the first time they enjoy physical pleasure. She becomes pregnant and has to abort her child with the help of Swarna Lata by selling the gold bangles given to her by her grandfather. After this incident she again decides to cut her relation with him. She goes to Siramaur, a hill station in Nahan to become a principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. She teaches English Literature and household to class IX and X. Virmati enjoys her stay in Nahan. It is probably her best period. She enjoys a free life here like a bee and tastes honey of her life. Her quest for identity ends here.

Virmati has to manage everything entirely by herself. Here, she has no family and close friends. She attains the status of female autonomy. But fate has written something else for her as Harish comes here to meet her. She meets him secretly at night. The trustee of the school finds her guilty and she has to leave her job as she has lost employees' confidence. She decides to go to Shantiniketan but on her way she meets a friend of Harish. He calls Harish at her home. They get married and she becomes the second wife of Harish.

Virmati's life is a constant struggle from one front to another. Virmati as she started realizing the repercussions of her choices opted in life, she becomes silent and her life seemingly filled with dullness and loneliness which makes her feel sad about herself. She starts her studies again. Meantime riots occur and she is not able to see her mother and family members. On the death of her grandfather she is not able to attend his funeral due to her past. She becomes pregnant again and gives birth to a girl child. Virmati is a representative of modernity as she do

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not hesitate to knock at the doors of opportunity and a willing to seek a new world, for her own self/identity.

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