

Conversion from tradition to modernity in Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters'

A. IMTISENLA. LONGKUMER

Assistant Director

Directorate of Higher Education, Kohima, Nagaland

Email: sen.longkumer@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper attempts to interpret the novel of Manju Kapur's, namely *Difficult Daughters* (1998), which fetched her the Commonwealth Prize in Eurasia section. The interpretation is limited to the kaleidoscope study of deep entrenched traditional values contrasted with modernity in her work. This research paper peruses at how Manju Kapur depicts the struggle between age old customs and tradition and modernity in her novel via her characters and how her novel depict the consciousness of Indian middleclass women who struggle for their basic rights for education and quest for an identity and survival. As a result, the present research work seeks to examine the concerns of Indian middleclass women trapped between the 'taken for granted' way of life and the slow seeping of modernity in their midst. The protagonist of Manju Kapur's novel, *Virmati*, "in *Difficult Daughters*", revolt against culture and try and fulfill her inner voice and come out of the cocoon of tradition to emancipation but at a cost; singe by the flame of tradition and drawn by the whirlpool of modernity but nonetheless, the pioneers.

Key Words: Tradition, modernity, identity, independent, asserts, typical, gender.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Manju Kapur is an eminent face of Indian women novelists akin to Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Markanday, Bharti Mukherji who deals with the complex identity of the Indian Cosmo society. Her first novel 'Difficult Daughters' was published in 1998. Her second novel 'A Married woman' in 2002. Her third novel 'Home' in 2006 and the fourth novel 'The Immigrant' in 2008. *Difficult Daughters* set about the time of the infamous 'Partition' where she talks about the yearning of education of women and who after getting a whiff of education starts to think and question the basic values and hypocrisy of the society. *Virmati*, *Shakuntala* and *Swarna* choose not to conform to society's standards but to rise above the domestic ambitions and to be counted as an individual and not the typical nomenclature of a 'happy-housewife'.

They thought of themselves as separate identities, focusing on their lives, going for higher studies, participating in the Satyagraha Movement and choosing not to get married for identity in the society. Society isolates them and the isolation is painful and at the same time reactionary as it was a new experience for the Oriental to be later on called the global experience.

From an ensconced tradition of servility and the typical rarity of the "continent" and the country where women were expected to be devoted to the family and to be within the parameters of the family scope of a good family, Manju Kapur's characters thirsts for a life outside and this comes in conflict with the age old ethos. It is the coming of age and women who asserts and shed their tag of the concomitant and rightfully demand to be counted as equals.

The research paper depicts how the portrayal of a way of life has gone through an alternate, the not too smooth transition from culture to modernity and in 'Difficult Daughters'. The protagonist has that difficulty, her not being difficult but the society who is difficult for her as she searches for her identity," exposing the gendered spaces and hierarchies of power to a stage where liberation, autonomy is gained at the cost of isolation alienation" .S. Ramya.

A facet of young, modern Indian women's struggle is an irony in itself for the grasp with the tradition stems from the mother who are mostly conventional and so deep rooted are their comfort in the patriarchal overview that they think that as it was followed for ages, so it was foolproof and so any deviation on the daughters part are frowned upon with trepidation. Dr. Shaleen Kumar Singh writes: "Manju Kapur has effectively portrayed the battle of culture and Modernity in her characters. *Kasturi*, *Virmati*, and *Ida* are three chief woman characters whose relationships are a good deal affected with the ailment of era gap, this is every other modified time period for conflict of tradition as opposed to

modernity.” Kasturi complies with social norms and patriarchal society. She additionally compels her daughter Virmati to concede to her own family tradition, however, Virmati does not care about the conventional phrases and eliminates her mom’s view. She will become a difficult daughter for her mother even as she becomes a mother of a daughter (Ida) and she too does the identical with her daughter like her mother Kasturi. Manju Kapur writes, “My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she stated it was for my very own right. As an end result, I’m continuously seeking out break-out routes.” Satish Kumar Harit additionally avers in the following strains: “lifestyle is deep-rooted in India and inside the traditional machine, Indian society is prepared round gender department, giving extra space to male for dominance., right from the wedding, the bride’s incorporation into the family starts off evolved. She is guided and educated into the way of life of her husband’s family but in spite of all efforts to devote herself sincerely to the wellbeing of her own family she is taken into consideration, at best, as an intruder.”

Difficult Daughters (1998) is set in the backdrop of India's Partition in the 1940s but can be symbolically taken as the partition of the physical and the consciousness, the physical dominated for centuries by social norms but the consciousness or realization floating above waiting for the opportunity to grab the moment and that moment came in the era of Independence and with it new rebirth of ideas and feminist values.

2. The seed of an idea:

As the consciousness for women rights comes with spare time at hand and with a sprinkling of education, it is but natural that the diatribe usually comes from the middle upper-class echelon of the society and that awareness usually comes when the men come back home with everyday adventures at work and unending tales of schemes and intrigues which sounds interesting for the home confined, yet educated wife and the question comes to her mind that if her husband can have an interesting life why not her, not confined to the threshold of the house and her quarrels with the servants in the house. Therein awakens the curiosity of the difficult daughter who wants to broaden her horizon, only time will tell if it is for the better or her lot was better under the wings of domesticity and the age old tested formula.

3. The narrative as it unfolds to be analyzed:

It must be understood that Kasturi is the mother of eleven children and she wished secretly that her wombs would dry up instead of fertility " Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache" (Kapur 7) , yet she wished her same fate for her daughter Virmati and Virmati realizes that her parents wanted nothing less but " an agreement to marry" (Kapur 100) . Virmati had an inkling of idea that her mother's lot was not an enviable one even though they were not in want and that doubt was cleared by her cousin Shakuntala, an independent woman who told her, " times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, why not you". (Kapur 18). Against the wishes of her mother for whom a woman is not a real woman if she is not married, Virmati gets an education, true to modern day drama falls in love with a suave but married man and have an illicit relationship with him and at the same time gets an education and work as a headmistress in a girls school in Nahan, the capital of Sirmaur. Life and her career could not be more modern than that but she realizes that she is a kept woman, still entwined with a man's thread which is too strong for her to wield according to her will and even after she succeed in marriage with the professor she becomes " the other woman", like a bat, neither accepted by birds nor by animals and her husband gains more autonomy over her as he does not like her mingling with others except him, thus she was shackled to that life from which she did not want to fall into. Swarnalatha, her friend, tells her that times were changing and they were the ones who were the lucky ones to see to the changes but the ones to bear the brunt of the changes as nothing new comes into place without the harsh scrutiny of the society and criticism and women coming out was a revolution in itself, or as Swarnalatha says " Satyagraha" which means "holding onto truth" the truth being that all are born equal, to be equal representatives of the world, not to stay behind but to help one another.

Virmati speaks in the first person," I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conference, politically active, while my time is being spent in love. Wasting it". (Kapur 142). Yet, her helplessness and fretfulness speaks volumes for she talks of her peers who are shaping India as she was speaking and it was the active participation of women, educated and emancipated from the superstitions of the ghost in the banyan trees that the new era dawned, slowly not fast paced but surely without stopping.

4. CONCLUSION:

Virmati is the daughter of the soil and as India comes out from the dark period of the colonial rule, women are coming out from the veil to see the world. Indirectly, it was the British that sets the ball rolling for the Indian woman to come out from the middle ages as education was handed out to them and they saw the white woman discussing and making decisions with her counterpart, smoking, drinking, partying and having fun and they were intrigued with it and the young daughters of India wanted to emulate them. The pioneers stumbled, struggled and were ostracized to a point but were appreciated not in their time but long after they were gone and one cannot but wonder the giant strides that

they have taken to take forward women's wellbeing, a catch-word for it is not the lot of women to litter the soil with children and make the kitchen her world but as the same blood courses through her veins like a man, so too she has equal rights to claim on earth. "Virmati represents the Indian woman's psyche, which depends on social approval of the family and man" (Sudha Sree. 168) but the "psyche' changed with education and the rebel came out of the sari. Virmati is the prototypical woman being embraced by a new India, an intellectual, courageous, bold but as all prototype still crude and not refined but looked in awe and a model for better things to come later on. A new India was born.

REFERENCES :

1. Agrawal, B.R. Indian English literature and Crisis in Value System: A Study of *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur. *Indian fiction in English: Roots and Blossoms*. Ed. Amar Nath Prasad and Nagendra Kumar Singh. Vol.I. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2007. Print.
2. Balakrishnan, Anita. Marriage, Tradition, and Autonomy: The Quest for Self-discovery in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*. *South Asian Review* 25.2 (2004): 104-112. Print.
3. Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. Great Britain: Vintage, 1997. Print.
4. Bhatnagar, Mamta. "Tradition, Transition, and Modernity; The Changing Image of Woman in Manju Kapur's Novels." *Creative Writing and Criticism (An International Biannual Journal of English Studies)*, Vol.5, No.1, October 2007.
5. Chakravarty, Joya. 'A Study of *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*'—*Indian Women Novelists in English*. Ed: Jaydeepsinha Dodiya: New Delhi: Swarup and Sons. 2006.
6. Desai, Anita, Introduction, *Sunlight on Broken Column*, Attia Hussain, New Delhi: Penguin, 1992. Vol. XV
7. Kapur, Manju, *Difficult Daughters*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.
8. Parraga, Javier Martin. Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Narrative: The Case of Difficult Daughter'. Paper given at Conferences: India in the World, Permanent Seminar on India Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, University of Cordoba, Spain, 7- 9 Mar. 2007
9. Sudha Shree, P. "Difficult Daughters : Travails in Self Identity". *Indian Women Writing in English : New Perspectives*. Ed. Sathupat, Prasanna Sree. New Delhi : Sarup & Sons, 2005. Print.