

## **LONGING FOR LOVE IN MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS**

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### **Abstract**

*The last decade of the twentieth century is marked by the huge success of a great number of novelists both at home and abroad. While some Indian expatriate and immigrant novelists have won worldwide popularity for their best literary works, at home, the first timer Manju Kapur has achieved her success for her debut novel, "Difficult Daughters". The novel is quite different in theme and tone from those of her Indian predecessors. "Difficult Daughters" seems to be the historical record of the events of the 1940s which are used in the imaginative reconstruction. The novelist has chosen the aspects and prospects of life in a joint family, the problem of women in a male-dominated society, their love and longing, the conflict between duty and responsibility and between ideals and ethics. The novel is the narration of a young girl Ida, daughter of Virmati a woman who represents her won type. She appears modern and belongs to the generation of Midnight's children. The aim of the paper is to focus on issues such as victimization of women in the social matrix of the colonial middle class.*

**Keywords:** Indian expatriate, imaginative reconstruction, victimization of women, social matrix, colonial middle-class.

Manju Kapur has recorded the experience and memories of Virmati, an educated daughter in a joint-family in the prime of her youth, and has chosen her position in the world of love, duty, and responsibility. Though the political situation in the country and the communal disharmony during partition dominate the theme, the love and longing of a mother for her daughters and especially of Virmati puts her in a difficult situation. The mother-daughter relationship in the novel is a realistic presentation by the novelist. The life and career of Virmati start from Amritsar but her love becomes sentimental, and her longings become more sensible only after she shifts to Lahore and Delhi.

Love and Longing are the "inverted dichotomy" in the novel based on the moral responsibility of an unmarried woman and a married man. The real problem in the man-woman relationship is interpreted in different situations when they are in love. A woman's position as a daughter, a wife, and a mother is Kapur's main concern. Virmati is born and brought up in an austere and high-minded household in Amritsar falls in love with a neighbor, an educated professor who is already married and also a father of two children. Eventually, she marries this professor who takes her to his home to live along with his family. Virmati has accepted this fate without any question or introspection. She loves the members of the family as well as the Professor, but she loses both as she fails to compromise with the two worlds. Virmati is Kapur's difficult daughter for her mother, Kasturi but when she becomes a mother, her daughter Ida says "My mother tightened her veins on me as I grew older, she said it was for my good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes"(258)

Virmati had a disastrous marriage marked with sadness, disapproval, depression, and despair. She has become a subdued and miserable woman for her love. Her family is a joint complex one where Lala Diwan Chand advises his two sons Suraj Prakash and Chander Prakash and their wives Kasturi and Lajwanti to live together in spite of the small and petty problems. But Virmati knows how her aunt was jealous of her mother's status when she hears her aunt's comment "breeding like cats and dogs"(7) at

her mother. Kapur presents how the two mothers are worried about their children. While Kasturi becomes sick for her repeated childbirths, Lajwanti becomes jealous and selfish about her own. The two women live in their world of love and longing for their family and children their daughters Shakuntala and Virmati think of something beyond this. They know that "women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else." (15) still, they believe "a girl lives for other, not herself" (13) and their "study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family."

While describing a mother's love for her children, Manju Kapur brings out what makes the mother selfish, and how she longs for their well being even though they have grown-up. Virmati is a grown up guides and nurtures her siblings, takes care of her ailing mother at Dalhousie and is guided by her aspiration for higher studies. Her education corrupted her though it was a necessary for her to win the love of the Professor. Her mother's suspicions on her activities are justified, and for this, she guides her all the way to Lahore as a cautious mother.

Virmati's desire for education and her longing to be like her "Shaku Pehanji" makes her close with prof. Harish. The love, at first sight, develops into a mutual attraction and gathers reciprocative feelings she was deliberately defending her marriage with Inderjit a construction engineer and her family was suspecting her nature she did not bother about anything and was moving in her world of love and romance. The love letters of the professor were at least consoling her with the lines, "there is a god who looks after lovers" (88) and "my love and devotion has remained ever yours, it is that which gives my life its meaning" (98)

Virmati was aware of the Professor's love for her and at the same time conscious of the impossibilities in the two families to accept their desires. She knew that her affair would damage the reputation of her family and the prospects of her sisters. An Indian daughter thinks for her parents and longs for her lover like Virmati. Education helped both Virmati and professor think intelligently about themselves. The Professor thinks that the society is responsible for his marriage in childhood and he was sure that he was not in peace with his first wife Ganga. In his view, marriage without love and happiness is futile. That is why he is in love again with Virmati. But Virmati's love for the professor makes her ambitious of higher education and daring to disobey her tradition. She finds herself in a dilemma whether to stay with her family or to marry the professor. She says in helplessness, "as for me, I know, I have failed in my duty and I will be punished one day. Nobody can escape from their karma. Maybe what is happening to me is part of it and there is no use protesting" (84-85).

Education provides preference, choice, understanding, and judgment and this was the "Arya Samaj effort to educate girls" (85). But Virmati's activities are not a set back to it. She has only thought of choosing a right man of her choice to be her best companion. She knows that her marriage with the professor may affect Ganga's happy life and the prospect of her children, but she finds it impossible to refuse the professor's gifts of south Indian silk which, as a lover, he presents to Virmati on the eve of Diwali. Sometimes Virmati thinks about him that "a man who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never give happiness to any woman. He is a worldly person caught in his own desires" (85) Coming in contact with her room-mate Sorna during her Lahore days she came to know how she led a narrow life and there was a much beyond this. There was a love for independence in which the woman of Lahore was initiated

Virmati's longing for higher education is for winning the heart of Professor Harish and also for her satisfaction. It also helps her to be intelligent enough to provide emotional satisfaction to Harish. She also gets economic independence when she joins Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya as a teacher. Virmati's marriage with the professor and her coming to his house is an uneasy home-coming for both. Virmati knows that she will live in the new house in the status of her husband's second wife. But Virmati "knew

herself to be a crawling worm dependant on other people's good wishes for survival" (157-158). She also finds that soon after marriage everybody becomes hostile to her in the new environment. But she has accepted everything and completely surrenders to it. Because " a woman's happiness lies in giving her Husband happiness"(110). The professor is sure of the status of both of his wives.

Virmati's love for the Professor is pure but unethical. But the Professor's love for Virmati can be understood realistically. He is enjoying the best of both the worlds of his wives. In Ganga he has a servant who keeps his house clean, and his clothes washed takes care of his children and also caters to his mundane needs. He has Virmati who fulfills his needs of intellectual companionship which a homely wife cannot give. Kapur has brought out how "male ego- centricism blinds men to the situation of women, who may be placed in agonising circumstances in account of their relationship with men" (Bala and Subash Chandra 1999:108)

The novel also exposes the daughter-father relationship between Virmati and her father and between Ida and the professor. It becomes clear when Ida says:

I grew up struggling to be the model daughter.....My father liked me looking pretty, neat and well dressed..... I had to do well in school, learn classical music, take dance lessons..... read all the classics of literature, discuss them intelligently with and then exhibit my accomplishments, graciously before his assembled guests at parties"(258)

The novel appears to be an absorbing tale of love and longing in which women have been counterparts by asserting her rights as a daughter, a wife, and a mother she struggles physically, emotionally and intellectually. In her love for Professor Harish, she has a constant longing for self-autonomy but her search for freedom is proved to be self- deceptive and meaningless.

Manju kapur's Virmati is caught between tradition and modernity in her middle-class status. She has presented Virmati in Indian milieu in which she appears bold, assertive, modern, independent and familiar with the problems of the changing world order. Virmati appears to be a "creation of an Indian consciousness" (Spencer 1960:18-19). In describing the love between Virmati and the professor the writer has made a feminist approach reflecting women's gender roles sexuality and self-discovery

In summing up, it can be said that Manju Kapur's treatement of love is like 'human bondage' extending it to the lyrical expression in the subjective and sensitive forms. Like the great philosophers of love, she had expressed the various moods of love she has worshipped love in her fascinating pursuits after the affairs of the Professor and Virmati. She has presented love as a passion. In Virmati and Ganga, she has exposed how woman's love is not necessarily less pure than man's. As a realist Kapur has presented the condition of woman in a complex family structure in which her characters are prone to loving and longing.

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