

MODERNITY VS TRADITION: AN INSIGHT INTO MANJU KAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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The nature and form of Indian fiction in English underwent a drastic change with the advent of the new generation writers. Shaking off the conventionalities of traditional and idealistic Indian writing, writers like Manju Kapur, one of the prominent Indian women writers writing in English has published four novels till date – **Difficult Daughters**, **A Married Woman**, **Home** and the **Immigrant**. Kapur voices against the phallogocentric culture and strongly detects the marginalization of women. She does not believe in describing her women characters as love-slaves or mere helpmates at home. In her novels she presumably mirrors her own feminist and feminine mind set. All her novels bring to light the same kind of life and struggle of women wherever they are under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society. Kapur has portrayed in her novels middle class woman, their silent sufferings and their status in Indian society.

Manju Kapur's first novel **Difficult Daughters** is the result of five years of her research and writing. Her first novel has attained fame and name all over the literary circle of the world. It is only set at the background of India's Independence struggle but also partially based on the life of Kapur's own mother, Virmati. It is the story of a young woman who falls in love with a married man, a hitherto condemned passion in her narrow social circle. It is the story of Virmati, the trial and tribulations of that age, the bloody battle waged between her loyalties to her family and her love.

Indian novelists have enriched English literature by annexing to it new forms of expression, cross cultural views and multi-dimensional approach. Through **Difficult Daughters** Kapur not just tries to bring out the protagonist's quest of identity and independence, but tries to unleash before the readers the underlying conflict between tradition and modernity that every Indian woman undergoes. Kapur depicts the internal and external conflict between tradition and modernity through analyzing characters, situations and mindsets and places her protagonist in the forefront of all complex experiences.

Set around the time of partition **Difficult Daughters** is the story of Virmati seen through the eyes of her daughter Ida. The novel is set for most of the action in Amristar and Lahore around the turbulent years of Indian freedom movement and the partition of the country. The novel traces the parallel growth of Virmati through ups and downs, with her dreams desires, longings, and aspirations but ultimately ending with a lot of compromises and compliances retaining hardly any sense of individuality and freedom.

Virmati is the eldest daughter born to Kasturi in a respectable 'Arya Smaji' business family at Amristar. Most of the time as her mother was sick or pregnant; from her childhood Virmati's best energy is consumed in looking after the household and nurturing her mother's children. After her matriculation she is further trained into stitching, embroidery, and other domestic chores which are the essential pre-requisite of an Indian marriageable girl in a traditional family. According to her mother Virmati's education is practically over and now she should be married off.

Modernity is a consolidation of the rational and autonomous development in the field of politics, science and technology, literature, education, culture, industry etc, along with the advancement of human mind and thought process is the totalitarian aim of Modernity. It is a step towards respecting and valuing a human being as an individual and as an important part of society. It is advancement towards the general betterment of humanity. Modernity sets the stage for self development to take place.

The novel **Difficult Daughters** has a traditional note in the beginning wherein a typical joint family system is shown. All the collective interest of the family was given priority and personal issues were sacrificed for collective matters. Shakuntala and Virmati are the two female characters who strive to be modern and be themselves in the traditional joint family system of the novel.

Like many other Indian girls Virmati also wants to have a choice to study what and where. Though she has a tradition bound and conservative familial background, she marvels at her cousin Shakuntala's independent lifestyle and has an inner urge to be like her. She is an M.Sc in chemistry, working at Lahore. She is vibrant and intelligent and has a life of her own away from the family. She is an independent working woman who does not consider marriage an ultimate aim of her life. "She looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own. Her manner was expansive,

she didn't look shyly around for approval when she spoke or acted". (16) Kapur renders Shakuntala, modernity in totality. Her dress, activities, outlook and behavior reveal modernity. She talks of women's liberation at a time when the country was fighting for freedom. She asserts the importance of individualism and compels Virmati to think beyond marriage, husband and children.

Kapur here didn't depict the traditional suppression and oppression of Indian woman, but brought out the fighting spirit in them that refuses to bow down before the traditional patriarchal pressures. Virmati aspired to be like her cousin and there in the seeds of modernity were sown in her who gradually made her rebel against the basic norms of her family and society. When Virmati listens to Shakuntala, she is convinced of the other possibilities "something other than a wife".

Modernity values the human being primarily as an individual and secondarily as a member of the family, society and country at large. Optimism, innovation, rationality, exploration and experimentation are the various components of modernity. The modern society sets the individual to act freely according to his desires. So Virmati completes her F.A and with the support and encouragement of her father and grandfather succeeds in seeking admission to A.S.College. Though Virmati's father has modern views regarding woman's education he is very conservative in his attitude regarding child birth. Hence, in the same family, rather same person, both tradition and modernity coexist. Thus, by studying the diverse societal and familial issues, we can understand the journey of the Indian woman from tradition to modernity.

In most of the time modernity has the individual freedom, but keeps the ultimate machinery of control in its hands in the form of various social, religious, as well as legal institutions. Modernity in the case of Virmati is different. She does not do acceptable things, which would be regarded as 'controlled'. Virmati falls in love with a Professor who is already married, and is quite senior to her. This sort of relation is definitely not acceptable according to the prevailing customs and traditions. Here she becomes the target of the attraction of the Professor who taught her English Literature. Most of the time in the class his eyes remains fixed at Viru. He appreciates her intelligence and capacity to understand the things in their right and perspective. Their mutual attraction, reciprocate feelings develop into romantic love.

The Professor himself is a victim of child marriage. His wife Ganga, is very devoted to him and caters to all his needs except intellectual. She is illiterate and who is not prepared to learn anything, and cannot share his ideas or understand music. He feels a sort of vacuum in his mind and heart and creates a lot of space for another woman. As being a tenant of Virmati's uncle gives them ample chance to meet and appreciate each other.

A relation of this sort is definitely not acceptable according to the prevailing customs and traditions. But actually Virmati uses education as a tool to keep in touch with the Professor. Though she is aware of the oddity of the situation, she is irresistibly drawn forth towards the Professor, and experiences a constant turmoil within. This turbulence within her is outcome of the perpetual intrinsic conflict going on in Virmati's mind. The conflict between breaking the barriers of tradition and asserting modernity and Virmati's profound and ingrained traditional roots cause his tumult within her. We see Virmati drifting from the traditions and accepting modernity by taking up the bold and independent decision of living alone in a different city.

"Tradition" and "Modernity" are widely used as polar opposites in a linear theory of social change. The relations between the traditional and the modern do not necessarily involve displacement, conflict or exclusiveness. Modernity does not necessarily weaken tradition. Both tradition and modernity form the polar opposites are converted into aspirations, but traditional forms may supply support for, as well as against, change.

Thus, tradition and modernity continue influencing each other in the novel. The balance between the two is maintained by traditional characters like Kasturi and Lajwanti on one side and Virmati and Shakuntala on the other. So, whatever has been the age woman have been facing deprivation and discrimination throughout their entire journey from cradle to the grave. Through *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur shows a woman's journey from womb to tomb.

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