

Portrayal of Female Transformation in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* and *Home*

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Abstract

Manju Kapoor's novels focus the life of Indian middle class women who struggle for their fundamental rights, quest for identity, right for education, and self-existence. Her novels deal with the lives of women, who seek enlightenment and empowerment. Her female characters are the illustrations of transforming women, who have been frequently attempting to get rid of the burden of embarrassment which they have conceded for ages. They differ from traditional women and break all social taboos and conventions and appear as new women who are conscious of their self identity. This research paper is an effort to study how Manju Kapoor depicts the female transformation in her novels *Difficult Daughters* and *Home*. Manju Kapoor's protagonists viz. Virmati in *Difficult daughters* and Nisha in *Home* are well qualified, genius, talented and above all, career oriented women who struggle to be free from the clutches of brutal traditional values and strive to carry out their yearning of independence following modernity.

Key Words: Transformation, tradition, modernity, self-existence, struggle and education

The transformation of Indian fiction from tradition to modernity is portrayed by various Indian woman writers. The big alteration in the women's writing came with the 1970s when women novelists broke the past literary tradition and started to transmute their own experiences as women as well as their femininity into literary expression. The suffering and dutiful model of women was replaced by the modern woman. The altered female is in reality an urban middle class female who still suffers, but not in stillness as she used to be in the times of yore. Now she can boldly face any challenge that will hinder in her progress and development. Education plays a pivotal role in developing the protagonists of the novels of Manju Kapoor. They do not want to be like puppets in the hands of those who treat them second class. They confront all the patricentric designs that impose on women towards domesticity, and struggle

for their self identity and self independence through education. They want to bear the errands that will lead them beyond from a family, children and husband. Kapoor's protagonists are not silent sufferers but they are brave, honest, and resolute and action oriented. All the protagonists concede that they no longer want to depend on others and to seek justice; they want to fight without any male intervention. No doubt they have to face hindrances in every step to flourish into new women. Though they dare to pass through the rigid patriarchal threshold, where their freedom is cramped and their self identity is snatched. It is their constant struggle which runs through the uncertainties finally bear the fruits of success.

Manju Kapoor while advocating the cause of women, projects her women protagonists as being modern in their attitude of life, dispelling orthodox

traditions, breaking the old conventions and deviating from customs; and in this process they encounter many hurdles. Being well equipped to face the tempests of life, emerge as perfect modern women. Manju Kapoor imbibes the will of the swift changing times, renders her protagonists competent of adapting themselves to situations that challenge them at every stage in their lives. The present paper deals with Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* and *Home* gives an idea about how the portrayal of women transformation has undergone in the conflict between tradition and modernity. The protagonists of these novels are seen as women struggling against all atrocities. Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* and *Home* presents the new images of women who raising their voices against the injustice meted out to them in the past. Virmati and Neha are the models to be followed for those women who yearn to be free from the clutches of barbaric and brutish social customs and traditions. They are generally educated and their education leads them to achieve independence and self identity.

Virmati and Niha try to set up their individual identity. The dislocation they suffer and the suffocation they bear in the traditional railings of marriage and family is evidently brought out by the novelist. With respect to this Manju Kapoor declares:

“I am interested in...women whether in the political arena or in the domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both the inner and the outer spaces in their lives. What sacrifices do ... to keep the home fires burning and at

what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home”.

Difficult Daughters is a chronicle of women characters like Virmati, her mother Kasturi, her aunt Lajwanti and her daughter Ida. All of them except Kasturi break their long unheard silence and opens mouth against the orthodox society that has snatched their freedom of expression and freedom of independence. The main protagonist of the novel Virmati's role has been woven in many intricate tasks. The most difficult one is to look after her eleven siblings. Due to her mother's constant pregnancies puts a heavy burden on tender heart of Virmati who has to perform all the household duties besides her studies. When her patience exhausts she revolts against her mother and against the system that has blocked her existence. She tells:

“Let Indu Mati marry. Give her this khes you are making. I don't want any bedding, pots and pans... nothing!.. Mati, Please, I want to study... In Lahore... I want to go to Lahore”.

The life of Virmati is full of conflicts, agony, love and compromise. The major segment of the novel portrays Virmati's love affair with the professor and pursuance of education. From the very beginning Virmati yearns for transformation of her character beyond the four walls of home and emerge as modern woman. Free from all shackles and social bondages, “It was useless looking for answers inside the home...had to look outside. To education freedom...lights of Lahore College”.

Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarnlata are the impeccable characters in the novel who opposes the idea of traditional womanhood. Virmati unlike traditional girls declined to accept the proposal of arranged marriage. According To Chakravorty Joya, “The gloomy state of Virmati’s mind can’t be fathomed by her people. Virmati refuses to marry Inderjeet. The bold step by her upsets everybody...ruined her sister’s chance of marriage...The novelist profoundly delivers the issue of women inadequacy. She defines that the position of degraded due to dependability. She has no right to take her own decision. The male... hurdle in their lives.”

Difficult Daughters depicts a continuous rift between traditional loom of Kasturi and modern beliefs of Virmati. Shakuntala and her friend Swarna Lata portray the woman’s aspiration for identity. Both of them struggle for achieving respect and freedom for themselves. Though it seems very uphill task, but they choose for a modern life by redefining the conventional standards. Leading an autonomous life in Lahore, Shakuntala encourages Virmati for splitting the traditional bindings which marginalizes her position. She focuses on education and freedom at Lahore College as her goal. Shakuntala always engage in discussion on the subject of education and freedom. Shakuntala’s visit has sown seeds of hope in Virmati. Images of Shakuntala kept hovering through her head, Shakuntala who having completed her M.Sc. in Chemistry, had gone about tasting the wine of freedom.

Virmati had to brawl against the authority of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy. Kasturi scolds

Virmati, ‘you are getting very modern in your thinking. We hardly getting to see you as it is’. The trouble torn odyssey of Virmati from dependence to independence costs her a lot. Virmati learns that life was really not worth but the entire struggle. Things are not always as they appear or look. But at the end she became successful, free from the unfair love of her husband. Instead of yearning for true and sincere love, Virmati takes the legal responsibility of leading her own life and become economically self-sufficient. She lives life on her own dictations and terms; but in the course of action she loses a significant part of herself and realizes the pettiness of things.

Manju Kapoor’s *Home* explores her protagonist Nisha, who passes through many stages of traditional restraints and finally emerges as a New Woman, deposes the inherent definitions of gender, religion, tradition and culture. she discovers women’s inherent capabilities to rise up to the circumstance at the right time and also to exercise a fundamental mission with spirit to proclaim their freedom and self-identity. In this sense, Nisha is, introspective, conscious, educated, needs to shape a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating existing social conducts. It is a perpetual struggle between two forces: rigid traditional mother and a formidable modern daughter. Anupama comments;

‘Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress’

Nisha dwells the life in the web of

responsibilities. Manju Kapoor describes not only the trouble torn women in the joint family but also their sacrifices for the family. Home is the novel about the quest for identity and selfhood of three women, especially Nisha who struggles against the age old customs and conventional traditions of the family. Nisha like Virmati struggles against the constrained norms of the family and society; she wants to live her life on her own dictations. She discards to marry anyone against her choice.

In the novels, there is a continuous disagreement between traditional approach of Kasturi and Sona against modern views of Virmati and Nisha. Banwari Lal's family is greatly traditional and their primary goal is the wedding of Nisha and they believe in destiny, predestination and God's firm hand over everything. As a mother, Sona was very conscious about Nisha's future life. Always wants to see her as wedded woman. For her mother, marriage is the only choice for girl. She should have been familiar with household things. Nisha is a mangli and to find a match for her will take much longer time; after much discussion her family has decided to allow her to pursue education as a stop-gap arrangement. Nisha's higher education becomes the issue of their discussion, it is Rupa who advocates in favour and she earnestly feels that higher education is essential for a girl. In this regard she says, "If anything happens in the girl's later life, she is not completely dependent, ... It would be a shame to not educate her further, ... Let her do her English Honors, not too much work, reading story books". Thus college is the turning point in the life of Nisha where she got exposed to the outside world. It is at

this juncture, Nisha has her hair cut with a view to appear different from a traditional appearance. This is her first step towards modernity and opposing orthodox belief of her family. Knowing well, that her family will certainly be upset at her present hair style, she takes this daring step. In the college she equates herself with other classmates. She tries to portray herself as a modern or changed one. Nisha falls in love with an engineering student, Suresh in the college. He tells Nisha that her parents would not agree to their marriage since he is not rich. As their relationship grows, Nisha bunks her classes and visits coffee houses, theatres. She grows more confident and more daring and all this is clearly evident in her modern dress, changing her salwar kameez with jeans and shirt. Her salwar kameez with jeans and T-Shirts. In the love making Nisha successfully resists any sexual act and comes out a virgin. This incident proves that Nisha is a woman with will-power and a modern girl with traditional thinking. She maintains her modesty and never lets Suresh violate her.

Nisha begins her business with the support of her father and proves herself to be a victorious business woman. Her journey as a business person is a journey of self-realization. She has left no stone unturned to meet the expectations of her father. Her success in her business proves that she is indeed a talented woman who needs only free environment to prove her mettle. Gradually Nisha learnt the value of life. She stands on her own feet she has returned half of the twenty thousand loan.

"With your blessings, papaji you will get the other half by next year, she laughed, almost recapturing the

liveliness that had been hers in college”. (Home, 295)

Her business becomes her medium to move from silence to voice. This gives her self-confidence which makes her realize her freedom and self-identity.

Nisha is nourished and grown up in an Indian middle-class family. She could have lived a happy life by following the conventions of the family but she focuses to construct her way of living. She was meant to reveal her skill and talent to work equally. Her intention behind establishing her Nisha's Creation is not purely to pass time. She doesn't want only physical independence but also economic independence. This is how Manju Kapoor defines the direction of complete equality, struggle for economic existence, and her equality with men, shows her heading towards modernity.

The protagonists of both the novels, Neha and Virmati portrays the struggle between the girls wishes for individuality and their community that puts thorns in their way and tries to crush their freedom. Eagerly waiting to begin a new phase of their life, Neha in *Home* and Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* are prepared to face the wrath of the traditional patriarchal system. Both of them questions the destiny offered to a woman by their own relations. R.R. Prasad well-known feminist critic points:

“The female protagonists of her novels protest against male dominated and the marginalization of women”.

The commonality between the two main characters is their mothers. Virmati's mother Kasturi is an archetypal representative of the patriarchy as she

believes in a woman's humility and obedience. For her, marriage is the all and ends all of a woman's life. On the other hand, education does not have any importance in her life because she has to spend her whole in the four walls of her home where her husband is her god and to obey him at any cost is her foremost duty. Neha's mother Sona's role was somewhat similar but she helped Neha in her business.

Nisha is the victim of domesticity and pseudo values of family under patriarchal designs. She is trapped in dichotomy between her inner desires and institutional liabilities. However; she fights against the system of narrow minded society and asserts her individuality. In order to lead her own life without any restrictions, she nurtures her desires and does not remain silent bearer but voices her internal urges loudly against the male ideology of having power over woman's body. Kasturi, Virmati, Shakuntala, Ida Swarna Latha, and Ganga are the difficult daughter in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters*. Virmati has been portrayed as a difficult daughter, a scapegoat under the callous patriarchal dominance, who is trapped up and sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Nisha has to resist at every step in her life but it is her unshakable spirit which gives her immense valor and energy. Kapoor is well aware about the present events around the society and in her novels she expresses it emphatically. Nisha who is highly educated and self confident represents the varying image of women in the society. Both Nisha and Virmati hail from the middle class but confront the existing socio-cultural patriarchal system. In the social setting

they are modern, educated, intelligent, self-confident and courageous. Sona and her sister Rupa are the real sufferers of thwarted maternal instincts, but they take it absolutely in opposite attitude. Though Sona and Rupa have same background but the difference is only in their attitude.

CONCLUSION

Through the above mentioned discussion regarding the female characters of Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* and *Home*

concludes with a theme that victimization of woman is a common happening. It is an irrefutable fact that her own family is the root cause of her depressed plight. Being conscious of her repression at the hands of her own loved ones, she struggles overtly or covertly and denies to bear the pangs of suppressing desires. Whether the issue is her academic pursuit or her marriage she never hesitates in raising the voice against the injustice.

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