



Transforming psychology of Indian womanhood from pre to post independence in concern of Manju Kapoor's 'Difficult Daughters'

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Abstract

A simple woman who is caught in the cunning tricks of hypocrite flatterers and cleverly seduced and betrayed by them resulting into the ruin of life or a traditional woman who has to face several barriers and restrictions of the social life, an uncrossed threshold which ever being crossed, brings defame and wicked name to woman or the ideological treatment of male dominated society to woman regarding them frail and inferior and a woman's struggle to come out of all these adverse situations of life with success or failure, though all these may be the prominent aspect of the novel, but have become now one of the most ordinary aspects of the research study. So this present paper aims to study the psychological change in the womanhood between pre and post independence, the transformation of traditional emotional psychology of pre-independence into progressive reasonable understanding of post independence in the womanhood, wherein the women have tried to get released from set up emotional psychology that makes them unable to do right judgements in life resulting into their endless sufferings and struggle and they are now developing the psychology of reasonable understanding that enables them to do right judgement for their life and thus tackle the problems successfully.

Keywords:- Feminism, patriarchal, traditional emotional psychological, reasonable understanding, feminist movement, tradition, relationship, self identity and independence.

The latter two decades of feminism in twentieth century notice the emergence of 'New Woman' or independent woman and the distinction becomes a complex manifestation producing a new level of tension in post independence woman writings. Several woman novelists depict the independent woman having no conflict with male but accepting responsibility for herself and enjoying the free spirit of self-identity, individuality, autonomy and equal rights with reasonable psychological understanding. Regarding the social and psychological point of view, Manju Kapur is acknowledged as the most celebrated post independence woman novelist dealing with the sociological and psychological sensitive issues of life.

“Women are one half of the sky” is an ideal attitude of feminist writers asserting the revolution to raise a new thinking on issues pertaining to the status and role of women. The feminism asserts on right, power and opportunity for women struggling since long back to achieve the racial, social and economic equality with man. Kapur’s female characters are of three kinds; the conventional orthodox woman, the emancipated woman and the category of woman belonging to her protagonist like Virmati. Her novel glorifies the woman of modern era, her problems and her wish for independence and her efforts to step out of the traditional rigid sex role and to reject the Victorian role of woman prescribed as –

“Man for the field and woman for the hearth,

Man for the sword and for the needle she,

Man with the head, and woman with the heart,

Man to command, and woman to obey”. {!}

A brief analysis of historicity of feminism is revealed here. Feminism is an intellectual and social movement advocating for women's rights uprooting the gender discrimination prevailing in the society, after focusing on their pains and sufferings all over the world, and their struggle for individuality. Feminism emerges as a literary form when educated women begin to question on the insufficient importance they have been given in literary texts, and struggle to study and deal with various issues from a feminist perspective. Feminist literary theory is the developed form of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. Though the feminists have a separate understanding of women's state in the society, yet they have the same focus on women and their struggle against gender bias. The main features of feminist theory are the rejection of patriarchal ideals in the family and home, to give up the patriarchal oppression in order to acquire personal identity and independence, and to put up the question whether men and women are essentially biologically different only or as a result of social construction.

The feminist movement is started from Britain by feminist writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, Barbara Bodichon and Lydia Becker who put question mark on the stereotype of the Victorian gentle lady and advocate for political, economic and social equality for women. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792 is an attack on the social, economic and education system that marks the beginning of feminism in English literature and the voice against the gender inequality is raised by other feminist writers by challenging the male domination in every sphere of life on global scale. In order to establish gender equality, feminism has passed through many stages for analysing women's role and position in society from a woman's perspective. Several types of feminism as liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, psychological and postmodern feminism exist with their own strategy to fight against gender discrimination. In spite of the fragmented contemporary feminism, the feminists focus on gender inequality and attempt to combat sexism in the society. The different strategies to eradicate gender biasness have the same motive to remove discrimination by establishing equal rights for women.

The strong organized movement of feminism impacts India in 1970s. The historical and social cultural differences of India from the western countries differentiate Indian feminism from that of the West. The particular historical and sociocultural system in India produces several bad practices like Sati, Purdah Pratha, child marriage, ban on remarriage etc, resulting into victimizing the women and also discouraging their education. So Indian feminists raise their voice eradicate these social evils from women's life. The history of

Indian feminism consists of three phases: the first phase from 1850s to 1915, second phase from 1915 to 1947, and the third post independence phase from 1947. The first phase of feminism is initiated by men who support and encourage women's equal rights and later joined by women, as the reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy raise their voice to uproot and demolish the social evils and to encourage women's education in India and are supported by women to reject the traditions of the patriarchal society.

The second phase of feminism moves round the nationalism, led by M.K. Gandhi, taking women out of passivity and domesticity and being involved in national struggle against foreign rule and making them aware of their rights. Developing a feminist vision, the women step out of home to participate in the political issues of the country that leads to the civic rights of women in the Indian Constitution. Thus though like western countries, the Indian women have not to struggle for basic rights, yet the orthodox socio-cultural patriarchal system, dominated by traditions and religious dogmas, has not let them enjoy the fundamental rights and democracy.

Post independence feminists realize the discrimination between men and women and oppose it. The woman is expected to bear silently all the injustice done against her, subsequently demolishing her individuality and identity. The Indian women novelists of the day artistically express the problems and predicament of Indian women. Manju Kapur contributes a lot to the Indian literature in English and emerges as a significant and eminent contemporary novelist with five critically acclaimed novels, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*. She is awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999 for her novel, *Difficult Daughters* and is acknowledged as a writer of international repute.

This research paper deals with the emerging new woman from the patriarchal upbringing and expectations. Kapur explores the discriminating state of upbringing of the girl child in her novel *Difficult Daughters*. During the process of the socialization, the female child is made aware of her role as a wife and mother in future family and making her realise her secondary position to male members. On the nature of mother-daughter relationship described by Kapur in her novel, the mother emerges as a strong figure of patriarchy, a suffocating and authoritarian figure. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Kapur presents the mother as the upholder of the patriarchal values and ideals who makes her best effort to establish them in her daughter in order to adapt herself in the existing set-up. To make the daughter able to fulfil the demands of the patriarchal society, the mother exploits her rights and gives her psychological tortures, ultimately making her a submissive and sacrificial being. As the woman in the patriarchal society is expected to be a perfect homemaker, living for others by suppressing her own emotions, so the housekeeping is preferred to education that breaks her aspirations for establishing self-identity, and autonomy. Dr. Ashok Kumar rightly says-

“In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus, it is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact” . {2}

Virmati's mother in the novel *Difficult Daughters* does not value her daughter's academic merits but tries to involve her in the household skills and making her realise of secondary position in the society. Like the psychoanalytic feminists, Kapur highlights how the value of connectedness is settled in the girl child having the burden of mothering the younger siblings and consequently seeing herself in relation with others that destroys her identity and individuality. The novelist criticizes the big family system as being a curse for the eldest daughter, having the burden of the household, depicted in the case of Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*. Besides

the destructive social aspects, the author also criticizes the religious dogmas settling the woman to the secondary position. Kapur's protagonist, Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* is victim of the patriarchal norms and religious dogmas prevailing in the society.

The novelist explores with keen perception the mother's desire to transmit the patriarchal ideals to the daughter, internalized in the process of her socialization and rigidly wants to keep away from her own independence and individuality, subsequently victimizing the daughter to psychological torture. A traditional woman regards marriage as the utmost destiny of women's life to reduce miseries and misfortunes, so Virmati is expected to get her married without thinking about her mental turmoil and like a repressive agent of patriarchy, preparing herself for the marriage right from the childhood. The novelist shows vividly that in a patriarchal family the woman has no claim even on her own body and no right to assert her sexuality. The novelist presents the reality of the traditional family having no concern about the fulfilment of the emotions of the daughter before the family honour but having control even on the girl's choice of her career and her life partner.

Kapur's protagonists are well educated, strong willed and action oriented women, they reject the patriarchal ideals boldly and effectively and make efforts to establish a separate identity for themselves, as Virmati revolts against her family's oppressive dictates and emerges as 'new women'. In *Difficult Daughters* Virmati goes against her conservative parents' will, leaves for Lahore for higher education and even gets married to a man of her own choice. She fulfils her aspirations of a freer life than that of offered by her family.

The paper also reveals the disharmonious marital relations and the defiance of patriarchy as described in the novel *Difficult Daughters*. A deep analysis of the novel reveals the psychological, financial and other existential problems, faced by a woman in wedlock. The institution of traditional marriage imposes on a woman the rigid customs making her subordinate, constraining her to be a homemaker and a procreative device, and thus offering woman a life of domestic violence, and a life without choice and rights. The novelist obviously describes the fact that because of his patriarchal attitude developed during his socialization, man becomes a controller of woman's social, economic and sexual power and definitely creates in her a dependence syndrome and the inferior status. The novel explores the rigid social structure with man's insensitive and cold attention to his wife's distress, having no place for equality, sharing and understanding in marriage. The society expects woman to be a sacrificial being demolishing her identity and individual self. Shakuntala expresses views to Virmati in this way-

“These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else”. {3}

Virmati and Ganga do not possess completeness in the marital relations and are accepted only in the traditional feminine role as a procreative device, sacrificial wife and ideal mother. The novelist clearly reveals the reality of woman in the patriarchal society, getting love and respect only because of her body and marriage gets damaged on the body's failure in performing the traditionally expected role. Such marriage proves the subjugation of the woman in the interest of the continuation of her husband's blood relation who is presented as a reproductive machine having no individuality. As Ishita in *Custody*, gets rejection on being failed to perform the established gender role and Virmati and Ganga in *Difficult Daughters* are marginalized due to their husbands' selfishness. The author successfully reveals the hierarchical system also where woman proves

to be the main cause to help man in the victimization and subjugation of the member of her own sex. The novel also depicts the evil tradition of marriage in society that allows the man to live a married life with more than one wife at the same time that forms a traditional psychology in the social life. Because of which Virmati fails to prevent herself from getting married with already married man living with his wife and does not care even of her precious career in teaching, individual identity and her decision proves to be a doom in her life throwing her in endless miseries.

As a feminist writer, Kapur envisions a society based on equality, sharing and understanding. She presents the characters of her protagonists in such a manner as they demolish the age old tradition and establish their identity and autonomy by self reliance, participating in political and social activities and by asserting the claims of body. The novel 'Difficult Daughters' consists of the conflict between tradition and modernity in its characters and the female protagonists are involved in this conflict against the male dominated traditional society. The novel explores the struggle of a woman (Virmati) for higher education, facing several twists and turns to fulfil her desire of education.

“She had to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over.” {4}

The novel reveals an endless argument between education and marriage and marriage or man – woman relationship is brought out as the central theme of the novel. There exists a premarital or extra marital relationship between Virmati and Professor Harish in the novel through which they get their love fulfilled in sudden meetings and after a huge upheaval; she succeeds to marry the man she wishes to. Though it proves to be painful to Virmati but it shows a change in the social attitude. The novel reveals the emergence of a new woman, no longer being the **“chaste wife whose suffering can only make her more virtuous, the nurturing mother who denies her own self, the avenging Kali or a titillating strumpet”**. {5} Virmati's desire for self expression and self realization is condemned and doomed to failure by her family and by professor. The novel explores Virmati's character dealing with the theme of travails in self identity versus socio-cultural identity. Toni Morison remarks in this concern-

“Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin? What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company”. {6}

It is a well known fact that Virmati struggles a lot against the patriarchal ideals of the society, makes efforts to fulfil her aspirations of education, freedom, independence, self identity, individuality and autonomy to satisfy her emotions of love. But in the process of her life of a new woman, she makes some faulty judgements which prove to be painful to her life, throws her into a doomed gloomy life where all her aspirations are broken and left unfulfilled. But she cannot be claimed completely guilty for the judgements she makes in her life as the mental setup of the traditional emotional psychology indirectly has a dominant role being responsible for her life destroying mistakes. She takes the crucial decisions of her life under the influence of tradition based emotional psychology of the contemporary society and she fails to decide any affair of her life with progressive reasonable understanding that is a strong tool of the post independence well educated society. Dr. S Prasanna Sree comments –

“Virmati struggles between the physical and the moral, the head and heart. Finally she gives way to her heart and body”. {7}

It is a matter of real fact that to play with reason provides victory and to play with emotion makes a loser. It does not matter to affect the feminist movement whether a woman gets married or not married, whether she has any relationship or no relationship to satisfy her emotions of love, as she possess the equality of right in the concern. But the freedom only to satisfy the emotions of love, to enjoy the relationship with anyone of her choice and to marry any man without caring her own dignity, self identity, independence, freedom, equal rights, and future situations of life cannot be acknowledged as the perfect aim of the feminist movement, instead it may add a vulgar notion to it. The most prominent aim of the feminist movement is to establish for a woman, self identity, dignity, individuality, freedom, independence, autonomy and equal rights in life along with choice even of love and marriage, providing strength and welfare to her life. This aim can be attained with the help of the progressive reasonable understanding used by the post independence well educated woman and not with help of tradition based mental psychology used by the pre independence ordinary woman folk.

Traditional emotion and reasonable understanding, both are the psychological states of mind, it depends on the person what he uses in taking the decisions of life, as mind acts differently to every aspect and state. Pre independence Indian social life is so strongly gripped in the tradition based emotional psychology that all the works and decisions are under its influence, while post independence Indian social life has created awareness to life that develop the reasonable understanding with progressive attitude to life in human beings and the works and decisions are influenced by it. This is a change that can be noticed in between two decades of the feminist movement and this change can be acknowledged as the transformation of pre independence traditional emotional psychology into the post independence progressive reasonable understanding in Indian female life

In the novel, Virmati has the aspirations of a new woman and she wishes and makes efforts to fulfil them but she rejects her engagement with Indrajeet not for her aspirations but for her love to professor. She goes to hostel for higher education but there she continues her relationship with professor and cannot understand the cunning tricks of love of professor who wants only to satisfy his desire of lust and has no intension to marry her. While she thinks that they are bound strongly together in love which a woman traditionally deserves for in her life. After her pregnancy, abortion and being betrayed by the professor, she decides to live a free and separate life to establish her dignity, self identity, freedom, independence, autonomy and a splendid career as a teacher, as she has seen women growing in power and claiming the responsibility for their life.

But her past love for professor haunts her again and again and she fails to resist herself there alone and wishes to have a married life, as she traditionally believes that a woman's life is incomplete without getting married to a man - **“As the traditional woman considers marriage as the ultimate destiny that may lessen women's miseries and misfortunes”**. {8} It is also her traditional psychological belief that she wants to marry professor on this base that her future partner for married life has been decided by her former relationship with the professor and she cannot marry anyone else.

“Was not her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body”.

“She was his for life, whether he married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice”. {9}

Her family has not much problem with her love marriage to everyone but the family has rightly big problem with her decision that she is going to get married to an already married man living with his wife. Her family members try to convince her that a man who is not faithful to his wife, how he can be faithful to her and how he can give happiness to her. As –

“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. Nothing solid”. {10}

But being caught in the tradition based emotional psychological, she finally gets married with professor and enters in the life of eternal clash. After marriage she tries her best to settle in the domestic life and to make her husband happy traditionally thinking that the happiness of a wife lies in the happiness of her husband, but she proves imperfect as a wife as Harish becomes indifferent to her love. Instead she snatches the rights of another woman and gives a setback to the notion of sisterhood woman - woman camaraderie mostly talked about by the feminists. As a mother she behaves Ida in the way as she was behaved by her mother and fails to take care about the needs of her daughter Ida who does not assigns the ways of her mother's life. When her father and grandfather are dead and all her aspirations of being a new woman are ruined, she becomes ill tempered, almost mad and her behaviour becomes harsh to everyone. If she had not taken the decisions of her life being caught in the influence tradition based mental setup of emotional psychology, but instead if she had taken proper care of her aspirations of being a new woman with the help of progressive reasonable understanding, she would not have been declined to such painful life

To conclude, though it cannot be definitely justified that today the whole human society has completely come out of the tradition based emotional psychology or now any woman has not to face sufferings in her social life yet a big change has emerged in the post independence social life. Today the educated woman has changed her attitude to life and takes the decisions to tackle the problems of her life by using their progressive reasonable understanding. The educated society has changed the attitude towards the woman's life and accepts the equal rights for her in every affair of life and the woman enjoys the freedom, self identity, independence and autonomy in life. In the educated society, the woman is not in conflict with man but she takes the responsibility of her life on herself and she decides her future life's betterment with reasonable understanding.

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