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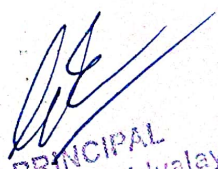
# MANJU KAPUR

*Critical Perspectives*



*Edited by*

NIZARA HAZARIKA  
K.M. JOHNSON

  
PRINCIPAL  
Nutan Mahavidyalaya  
SELU, Dist. Parbhani





*Manju Kapur: Critical Perspectives* explores the multiple dimensions of the fictional world of Manju Kapur. It examines how the female characters of Manju Kapur assert their identity and autonomy in a world shaped and conditioned by patriarchal normative structures. Her characters are individuals trapped between tradition and modernity; individuals whose predicament is determined by patriarchal hierarchical order. This book examines how the characters of Manju Kapur negotiate with issues such as gender, self, identity, subjectivity, body, representation, sexuality and desire, resistance and reaction, spatiality and materiality, and writing and language. It also searches how Manju Kapur's writings respond to the national and global theoretical perspectives and movements which attempt to address the epistemological and ontological questions of/about women. The essays in the book analyse all the major novels of Manju Kapur from different theoretical perspectives and argue that Manju Kapur is an advocate of the concept of a new woman, who can seek her ontological possibilities in the midst of the dominant and oppressive ideological structures of gender, sexuality, class, caste etc.

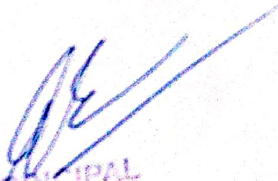
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Manju Kapur  
Critical Perspectives

  
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# Manju Kapur Critical Perspectives

*Edited by*  
Nizara Hazarika  
K M Johnson

PRINCIPAL  
Nutan Mahavidyalaya  
SELU, Dist. Sahibganj

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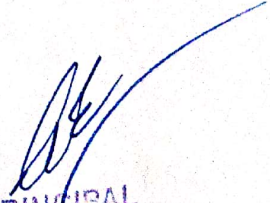
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To  
Professor Jasbir Jain

For being the inspiration  
to our academic endeavours

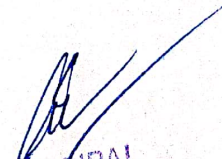
  
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Nizara Hazarika  
K. M. Johnson

  
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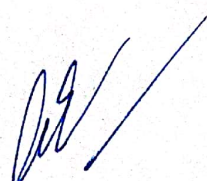
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## *Difficult Daughters: A Quest for Women's Identity*

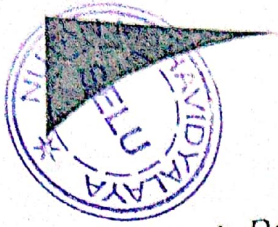
Nirmala S Padmavat

An author to win the Commonwealth Writers Award, Manju Kapur has gained a position for herself through her fictions. She received this award for her debut novel *Difficult Daughters*. The novel is about love, motherhood, tracing one's identity and education of women. The novel speaks about the implications of education when women learn to think for themselves and start to question the essential values of society. It's the theme of encountering between the stress of correctness and tradition. The novel presents the predicaments of three generation of women and the incidents in the principled, upper-middle-class Punjabi Lalaji family during the years of the Thirties and Forties.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* deals with the craving struggle of women to establish an identity. It's about three generations of women who are caught by the conflictual forces of the societal norms and torn apart by oppositional structures in life. The protagonist is caught between the perplexity of family duty and private needs. Nonetheless she provides preference to the latter and amidst intensive physical and emotional turmoil, exercises her selection that creates additional emotional rift between herself et al. The novel focuses on the struggle of an informed young lady of upper-middle-class against the norms of a family that cherishes previous values of organized wedding. It's so the search of the protagonist for autonomy.

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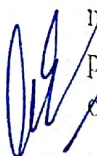


selfhood. India's history of freedom and therefore the protagonist's struggle for freedom and identity run parallel to every alternative.

In this novel Kapur deals with the lives of women, who attempt to create an identity for themselves during the period when India was politically unstable and undergoing a major historical catastrophe, the partition of 1947. The story is of three generations—Kasturi the mother of Virmati, Virmati who is the main protagonist, and Ida, the daughter of Virmati. In the words of Sharma: "The novel illustrates her (Virmati's) transition from the restrictions of family structure to a life of freedom and choice" (Sharma, 2012: 21). Virmati belongs to a conservative Punjabi family who lives in metropolis before Independence and settles in Amritsar after Independence. From the terribly starting she has been named during an ancient patricentric Indian society that confined girl to the four walls of the house. The head of the family, Virmati's grandfather, is progressive enough in his outlook to suppose that basic education is important for women.

However, he too agrees with the social norms that teaching ought to be illegal for women. Being the eldest kid of the ever pregnant Kasturi, Virmati should take care of ten younger siblings and her life is vexed due to the pressure of family responsibilities. She should play the role of a second mother for her brothers and sisters, do the foremost oppressive of the daily chores within the house and is commonly abused by her mother for no apparent reason. She never gets even the little love, care and some attention from her mother that she expects, naturally, as a child. All the time she is rebuked and admonished by her mother, who grumbles that, "I am tired of knitting and sewing ... What is all this nonsense? In Amritsar you were bad-tempered because you were busy and tired, here you are bad-tempered because you are idle" (Kapur, 10- 11). Virmati doesn't just like the plan of wedding and childbearing in real time once her highschool study is over. She doesn't hear her mother who persuades her to get married. Galvanized by her cousin, Shakuntala, she thinks that it's potential for a woman to be one thing apart from a wife. She longs to own her own house, identity and freedom.

However, at seventeen she is engaged to Inderjeet, an established irrigation engineer. Virmati falls in love with the romantic Harish Chaurani who came back from Oxford on a request of one of

  
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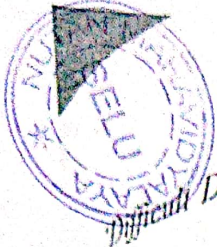
Nirmala S Padmavat

his friend's father who was on board of trustees of Arya Sabha College, Amritsar. He is enticed by a regular payment of two hundred and thirty rupees. Virmati and every one alternative feminine members of her family develop intimacy with the professor's family. It really starts with the exchange of food.

Gradually, Virmati gets herself tangled in the web of Harish's love. His constant pleading of intense love makes the matter so worse for her that she even decides to end her life by drowning herself in the canal but is fortunately rescued by the servants. When she attempts suicide and is rescued, the family members doubt, "Was this all her education had taught her? To put herself before others and damn the rest?" (79) They lock her within the warehouse throughout day time. Indumati, her younger sister, is married off to Inderjit once Virmati denied to get married to him. With the assistance of Paro, her sister, Virmati and the professor exchange love letters. She never addresses him directly, and closes her letter with the alphabet V. The professor uses the words "Precious love", "Virus", "love", "Virus sweet heart," "Vir darling", to address her and closes the letter with "H". Virmati undergoes the agony and humiliation of falling in love with a married person and once unsuccessful attempts in committing suicide she desires to be bold and follow her own pursuits. She convinces her folks to let her take part in a college in metropolis for her B.Ed. degree. She rebels and insists on her right to teaching. She doesn't yield to the age-old traditions of Arya-Samaj family. Once permission is granted by her father, Virmati decides to travel to Lahore to complete the B.T. course, despite robust protest by her mother, Kasturi, who is completely discontent with her daughter and says, "If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself. . . God has placed you on earth to punish me." (102) Kasturi accompanies Virmati to Lahore and puts her in a hostel. Virmati's denial to marry Inderjeet to whom she was engaged to, reveals her rebellious nature. Reena Kothari opines,

Her rebellion against her traditional Arya Samaj Family in postponing her marriage and then refusing to marry the person she was engaged to, suggests a radical rebellious act, and provokes the reader to assume that she will succeed in carving out a niche for herself. However, her involvement with the professor, an attempt to commit suicide and finally . . . further studies speak for her . . .

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Suman Bala too opines that Virmati is a rebel and praises her for being assertive and daring as she remarks:

Virmati's rebellion . . . predicts an individual, who would go on to carve out a niche for herself, and make a personal exemplary feminist statement. Her stoic and heroic suffering for the sake of her love, and marriage to Professor Harish Chandra, who is already married to Ganga and has a child, point towards a self who is tenacious and assertive. (Bala, 152)

Virmati could be a young docile lady however Harish is matured, married and absolute to follow his whims as he's the lord within the patriarchal society. She falls dotty with him and to allow legitimacy to her love, she strives for wedding with him in spite of her family's opposition and, within the method, becomes "the black sheep of the family." (104). Love brings happiness for him but it robs Virmati of even the small peace of mind that she earlier has. Whereas the lady faces shame and life stigmatised, the man pretends as if nothing has happened. She looks up to him as her ideal, whereas Harish egotistically is concerned with his own desires and cravings. He keeps causing an inventory of all that she should do through letters however never bother to face Virmati's folks and propose wedding. On the one hand he leaves her alone to face humiliation and on the other, he keeps instigating her to revolt against her family. He writes to her:

Do you know how an earthworm lives? It inhabits an extremely limited space. . . . Uneducated people are like that. We are being murderers towards ourselves if we do not develop our intellect. Any part of us that is not used will atrophy and die . . . it was through your desire to learn that we were first drawn to each other. (94)

By introducing Virmati to the canons of English Literature, the nice western civilisations, and therefore the nuances of civilized living, Harish succeeds in providing her a false feeling of woman's liberation. Once meeting him and obtaining no suggestions from him it's clear to her that "she couldn't depend upon the professor to sort out any domestic situation. It was up to her" (63).

She doesn't retaliate, nor does she feel any rancour and follows his orders, very little realising his stinginess. It's not her education or her temperament that the person is inquisitive about, it's rather his liking for her and the actual fact that for as long as Virmati doesn't leave the protection of her home, he wouldn't be absolved to go after her. Lahore is to serve as their rendezvous rather than a seat of

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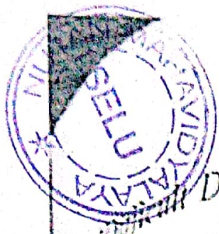
learning. He continued on the quiet relationships together with her, visiting Lahore fairly often. Virmati, who is first drawn to Harish, for his love of freedom and individuality, gradually loses her identity. To liberate herself from family pressures, she believes that education is the sole means, but later however falls prey to Harish's snare. She realises how vulnerable her position is and pressurises him to marry her in order that there will be some honour to their relationship. She holds him liable for all that went on to her – breaking of her engagement, change of her family's name, being fasten up in her house and sent later to Lahore etc. She accuses him thus:

Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace ... and why? Because I am an idiot ... Now you want to prolong the situation. Why don't we get married? You say your family makes no difference. But still you want to continue in this way. Be honest with me. I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right. Men do take advantage of women! (137-138)

Her furtive meetings with Harish within the refuge of one of his friend's residence put her in yet another difficult situation of being pregnant. On the pretext of her preparation for her B.T. Examination, she rushes to her place solely to speak to Harish. However by that time he has left Amritsar for his village for the Mundan ceremony of his son. Not knowing what to try to, Virmati returns to her hostel, confides to Swarnalatha, her friend, who involves in her rescue in getting her foetus terminated. Her family is aware of nothing regarding the goings-on. The news of Ganga's physiological condition makes Virmati think about beginning her studies once more. She doesn't wish "to be a rubber doll for others to manoeuvre as they will" (85). From here her journey to find her selfhood begins and she emerges as a strong individual.

The act of abortion with the assistance of an admirer and therefore the shame and humiliation of carrying an illegitimate baby becomes an excessive amount of stress for Virmati. She completes her B.A in Lahore. However, at every stage in her life, whenever she encounters freedom, Harish's presence in her life impedes her selections that she creates. Virmati, no doubt, is revolutionary in spirit and fights for her rights at each stage of her life. She is additionally capable of managing her things in moments of crisis. However, whenever she

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rebels and aspires to measure a freer life, she is condemned; thanks to Harish whom she loves.

Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, being politically active, while my time is spent being in love. (131)

She becomes important for herself and needs to curb her probing for increased intimacy with him. She needs to grasp her strength and regain her self-respect through education and profound ability. In spite of her frequent requests, Harish is reluctant to marry her. He is simply another chauvinist steeped in patriarchal traditions. He's a phoney who, at his own convenience, has moulded his opinions regarding social traditions and sexually exploits Virmati. Luckily for Virmati, she obtains a position in a girls' college, Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya, at Nahan where no one is aware of regarding her past. However, Harish follows her even to Nahan and far against her desires goes to bed with her and becomes liable for the termination of her services from the college. At Nahan, Virmati makes a wrong decision that's to come back to a relationship that brought her only suffering. Whenever Virmati speaks regarding their wedding, Harish has his own real reasons and excuses. In Delhi, on her way to Shantiniketan, she contacts the poet friend who is additionally an admirer of Harish. When his friend asks him to marry her, he expresses his reluctance:

What can I do? I am hemmed in and tortured on all sides. I know I have been unfair to her- I know. And yet what can I do?... Everybody will condemn me, her. My children will never accept it, nor my mother. You know the constraints. Surely, I need not explain myself to you! (185)

It's this friend who persuades him to marry Virmati. Ultimately their wedding takes place in the house of Harish's friend and Harish brings Virmati to his home.

Virmati is unwelcomed in his family obviously. On reaching home, by the remarks of the members of the family and generally introduced as gandy woman to the kids of Ganga, Virmati is forced to realise "I should never have married you ... and it's too late now. I've never seen it so clearly. It's not fair" (195). Virmati succeeds in marrying Harish, however she fails to secure any place for herself in his family.

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resented by the primary wife, Ganga, her circle of relatives.



Ganga, as the first wife exercises her full right over everything. Her every movement is restricted by Ganga and Kishori Devi, her mother-in-law. She finds herself as a stranger within the family and puzzled dismally "whether or not this isolation would continue until the end of her life" (199).

Ganga, the first wife of Harish, is married to him at a very tender age. Her mother never wanted to send her to high school and instead trained her in sensible work. Ganga enters her in-laws house at the age of twelve, and tries to prove herself as a decent woman of the house, however has never been able to be an intellectual companion to her husband. She is the mother of his youngsters, and is anxious to safeguard their gift and future. To her, wedding could be a non-secular and social establishment wherever love has no importance at the least. Once Harish's wedding with Virmati, Ganga protests initially, however her protest is weakened as days pass by.

Ganga, being illiterate and having been married in childhood, is devoted to her husband as a typical Hindu wife. She believes that Indian wives suffer and are ready to regulate themselves within the societal norms. She feels isolated with the entry of Virmati. She is aware of that she should fight her own struggle. She serves him as a personality, whereas Virmati, the second wife is a liege for his sexual gratification and intellectual stimulation.

Harish thinks that Ganga, his illiterate wife, might never prove to be a lover. He wails out the social inequality in thoughts, "They do not recognize that I need the companionship of an educated, thinking woman nor that I feel lonely and desolate among all these people who care for me" (86). Now Harish finds an educated and thinking wife in Virmati. However, like a traditional wife, Virmati wants to take care of all the chores and responsibilities of a wife. She doesn't feel complete without doing them. On the contrary, Harish treats his second wife a companion, a company for his thoughts and academics. He tells the same to Virmati, "You are my other self. Let her wash my clothes if she feels like it. It has nothing to do with me. I don't want a washerwoman. I want a companion." (201) Virmati becomes pregnant, and her in-law currently takes care of her and shows concern for her. But sadly, she suffers a miscarriage and Harish sends Virmati to metropolis to try her M.A which, he thinks, can bring her out of her depression. There she lives together with her husband, however later it becomes troublesome for him to return to

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metropolis often due to his promoted to the position of Principal of AS College. Virmati returns after her M.A. course and finds that her husband's family has been shifted to Kanpur due to communal tension. Ganga and the family head to their home city and Virmati gets united to Harish.

Legally she becomes the second wife of Harish and once they shift to city, she acquires the stature of wife and mother of a female offspring. Still she never feels the belongingness that a fresh marriage ought to do. She feels depressed and alienated. She tries to seek out her identity and her freedom: "I feel thus totally missed, thus totally cold. Can there be any amendment in my life, I wonder?" (235). Lack of affection and humiliation from the family makes Virmati steadfast to uphold her right to self-assertion through education at metropolis and though economic independence by turning into an educator in a college at Nahan. But in her pursuit of identity, she loses it at each stage and struggles to form house for herself on her own.

Even as a toddler, Virmati never likes to be like Kasturi, her mother, who is merely a home maker. Kasturi, on the other hand, desires to groom Virmati to be one like her. In a patricentric family, it becomes painful for an elder female offspring like Virmati to fancy her childhood underneath the pressure of responsibilities: "The learning begins reception and girls are imagined to walk from mother's uterus into mother's shoes" (Choubey, 387). Virmati is consistently torn between the two worlds- one desperate to unify the established and settled and the other the alternative probing for a freelance and socially accountable life. Also, she doesn't believe organized wedding, "Early marriage, and no education? No Professor, and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased" (50). Kasturi isn't given an opportunity by her mother and maybe, that's why, she isn't able to permit any option to her daughter, Virmati. She is least involved regarding educating her daughter. Jaideep Rishi points come in his essay:

Kasturi unknowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds those values as ideal which patriarchy has taught her to be so. And when her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self. (Rishi, 92)

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Kasturi believes in the patriarchal assumptions regarding the societal values of male superiority. During Kasturi's formal schooling days, it

absolutely was never forgotten that wedding was her death, "Her mother tried to confirm. ... She was aiming to please her in-laws" (57); Virmati is cognizant that Kasturi sees to it, "She was to be supervised like a jailbird on parole. Wedding was acceptable to her family, but not independence" (106). Kasturi is thus traditional minded and conservative in her outlook that she doesn't approve the dress of Shakuntala, the daughter of Lajwanti and cousin of Virmati. According to Kasturi, "Study means that developing the mind for the benefit of the family" (14). For Virmati's family, wedding is for the parental pleasure and family prestige: Kasturi argues,

Shakuntala Pehnji did not have five sisters waiting to get married either. And do you think it makes her mother happy to have her daughter unmarried? She may say what she likes about jobs and modern women, but I know how hard she still tries to find a husband for Shaku, and how bad she feels. You want to do the same to me? To your father and grandfather? (54)

Shakuntala's behaviour is viewed with contempt and disclaim by her circle of relatives due to her habit she smoking, disobeying her mother, and acting as she pleases. Her behaviour is taken into account as manly. She additionally doesn't fit in the standards of her society. She neither depends on her father nor is married. She is self-sustaining and shows no interest in wedding. She becomes a role model for Virmati and step by step Virmati tends to think about a life without wedding, husband and kids.

Virmati's fertility is metaphorically connected with the on-going political events and, once she has an abortion and a miscarriage, she is finally ready to give birth to her daughter amidst the turmoils. She and Harish argue over her suggestion that their female offspring be known as Bharati, however finally Harish comes up with the name 'Ida', that is neither Hindu nor Muslim and that means 'a new slate or a blank beginning', because he doesn't like their daughter to be tainted with the partition of their country.

At times Virmati tries to claim her autonomy and identity however she is censured and ordered by her husband to be a part of the modern society, its culture and rituals. Virmati looks to own a gnawing feeling that she isn't given the importance she deserves. She tells Ida that she isn't to be mourned in any means once she dies. She tells: "When I die ... I want my body donated. My eyes, my heart, my kidneys, any organ that can be of use. That way someone will value me after I have gone" (1).

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*Difficult Daughters: A Quest for Women's Identity*

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Virmati has always defied the family traditions; however paradoxically, she forces Ida to be contained by them. She tries to keep Ida under her restrictions. Ida questions why Virmati, who herself has flouted the societal norms all her life, seems to be a stern and strict mother. This novel captures the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters over a period of three generations. Initially, Ida, happens to belong to similar sex, identifies herself with Virmati. Then a stage comes when to assert her identity, she breaks far from Virmati and feels alienated. However, once she attains her individual self, Ida delves into the past life of her mother and realizes what it's to be a mother within a patriarchal society. Thus, an identification and fellow feeling takes place between the daughter and the mother. A more robust realization of her relationship with her mother descends when Ida starts realising her mother's position. Initially Ida hates her mother and doesn't wish to be like her, but when she puts her feet into her mother's shoes, then she realizes what it's to be a mother within the patriarchal society.

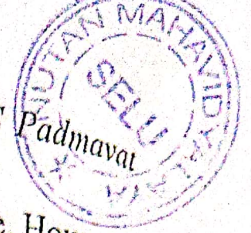
Virmati is jaded with the traditions and norms of the society. She decides to interrupt the shackles of the society. She displays courageousness to fight for her right to education, for her right to decide on her man in life and economic independence. She makes many tries to assert her individuality. Whenever she rebels to liberate herself and aspires for a freer life, she fails to form an area for herself and proves to be a loser. The male dominated society, the incredulousness of her family and eventually her husband himself can be liable for her failure. It's a matter of concern that her wedding with Harish seems to be black.

Another read is that the maternal indifference destroys Virmati. If she had an understanding mother, she wouldn't be involved in a relationship with a married person like Harish. Asha Chaubey remarks that Virmati, "... jumps into a blind, bleak future with Harish as a result of her mother might never perceive her dreams" (Chaubey, 104). Ida is shown as a radical fashionable girl of up-to-date India. She does things to please herself, thereby questioning the patriarchal structure. Ida, an informed girl, unmarried, apparently leads a freer life than her mother. she is, however, not free from the pain and anxiety that infested her mother: "No matter how I might rationalize otherwise, I feel my existence as a single woman reverberate resolutely on that platform" (3). The disobedient Ida marries Prabhakar,

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a fellow of educational pursuit to settle in her personal life. However, she hardly was pleased with him. It leads to divorce terribly shortly. She confesses:

Of course, I made a disastrous marriage ... I was nothing, husbandless, childless. I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society. (258)

Ida refuses to submit to the dictates of the male dominant society and believes in the personal freedom. She is not willing to follow the traditions and customs of the society. She hates her voice to be suppressed and believes in the personal freedom. She always tries to reach that goal which her mother aimed in her life.

Virmati, being educated, makes a departure from the established path of Indian social custom and tradition. Yet, paradoxically she follows similar established norms of the Indian tradition and finds fulfilment and happiness in her own means. It seems that she is neither emancipated nor confined really to the normal role expected of her. So it will be futile to say that she fails to carve a powerful identity for herself. There are other women, like Shakuntala, Swarnalata and her own daughter, Ida, who demand equal opportunities and transcend convention and that they succeed higher than she did in their parallel struggles for independence in their lives. As Rollason opines:

At the centre of the narrative, we are confronted with a woman who fights but falls by the wayside; but at its edges, as no doubt less representative but still symbolic figures, we encounter . . . other women, whose relative success points the way to the future. (Rollason, 3)

Shakuntala, Virmati's first cousin and Swarnalata, her friend in Lahore fight for her independence and rights within the patriarchal hierarchy have a voice of their own. They attain fulfilment in being free and leading their own lives. "Both are representatives of a certain female type that recurs in Indian literature: the emancipated woman militant." (Srivastava, 179) The most necessary question that must be answered is whether or not Virmati blossoms herself into a "New Woman in the real sense of the term. In spite of her initial revolt against the family and firm stand against Harish, she succumbs to his implorations and keenness in Lahore. She feels guilty at her loss of status however resorts to self-deception by crafting it as outmoded morality. She plunges herself in a useless love, uncertain wedding and physical relation outside the wedlock. Disregarding decency or honour

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awaits furtive meetings with Harish with her eyes wide open as she is aware absolutely well that there are "... myriad instances where she felt she had been weak or wronged" (129).

Though she dares to cross one patriarchal threshold, she is fast into newer ones wherever her person is restrained and everywhere she has to "adjust, compromise and adapt" (236). She might have put her foot down to voice her angst she was going to be her own mistress and relate to him with dignity, however she doesn't. The time Virmati spends as a head of a girls' college in Nahal is the most satisfying time in her life. She could be a competent teacher and her performance gets her a merited respect. There she has no family to satisfy and no responsibilities to fulfil. She lives in a house of her own with great contentment. Thus in Virmati, one can see a new woman who is aware, introspective, and educated. To some extent she becomes self-made in defying the social conventions. Nonetheless she lacks confidence, self-control and long-sightedness that stop her in reaching her goal. But she is very emotional and obsessed with Harish. This results in her inability to go against Harish. Nahal justly says: "... she fails to interrupt the dependence syndrome" (Nahal, 17).

Seema Malik argues that Virmati's defiance and rebellion leads to alienation. She calls her a loser:

Trampling patriarchal norms, Virmati defies societal expectation to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self-fulfilment. But what does she really get? She is a loser whose acts totally alienate her from her own family and she fails to create a space for herself for which she had been striving all along. (Malik, 175)

In her quest of Identity, she loses it at each stage and struggles to form a space for herself on her own. Her rebellious angle takes back stages when it should be strong to refute Harish's sexual oppression. Sadly she becomes submissive and succumbs to the whims and fancies of Harish. Love, in Virmati's case, performs that, which even the robust patricentric traditions couldn't do. The lady who has refused to be afraid in the name of family honour, to marry a person of their selection, currently doesn't move her fingers without the permission of Harish. At one stage she finds herself willing to hitch Swarnalata within the independence struggle however checks herself. She is not sure, "Would Harish like it?" (233). Throughout their appeal and after the wedding, it's continuously Harish who didn't wish her

  
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to try this or that. That Virmati might additionally wish to try to do certain things and abstain from doing something becomes a matter of no importance to her. All that she cares for the world is to be "worthy of him." (237) Step by step unwillingly though Virmati loses her individuality. Harish is aware of a way to bring her spheres to his views. He's terribly confident "She might protest, but ultimately she had to do as he said" (244).

Virmati differs from the women of older generations by declaring her right as a daughter, a wife and a mother. In her love for Harish she contains a constant probing for self-autonomy however her hunt for freedom is otherwise proved to be self-deceptive, fearful and empty (Nayak, 163). The dreams of liberation that Virmati has dreamt and fought for still elude her. At the top of her journey, she finds that she continues to be dumb and mute and she continues to be expected to follow and never to guide. All her efforts in this direction become awry, merely an exercise in uselessness. On the terribly first day of her wedding she realises, "She would walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had carved out for her" (196). Even her education becomes a matter of Harish's convenience. Once he desires her by his facet, she doesn't think about education but when Harish thinks that she should pursue studies she accepts it without raising her voice. Unwittingly she has become a puppet in his hands. Vandita Mishra justly argues:

Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power or freedom. Because even as she breaks free from old prisons, she is locked into newer ones. Her relationship with the professor, for instance, while it does provide an escape from a loveless arranged marriage; it is itself furtive and claustrophobic, offering only a stolen togetherness behind curtained windows. Even years of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to strike independent roots and grow. She hovers uncertainly at the edge of each new world, never entering, lest the professor should call and not find her near. Eventually, marriage to the man of her choice is no triumph either. As second wife, she must fight social ostracism outside the house, and compete for the kitchen and conjugal bed with Ganga, the first wife, inside it. (Mishra 227)

On the contrary, Charumati reveals her admiration and respect for Virmati. Virmati's commitment to fight her battle to claim herself her selfhood is to be honoured even though she does not succeed as she desired. She tramples and...

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expectations to claim her identity and achieves self satisfaction and self-fulfilment in her life. Fully considering Charumati's remarks, Jaydeep Rishi adds:

That Virmati did not live her life without making compromises does not mean that she achieved little. It hardly matters that she could not voice her own words. What matters is that she at least tried to voice her own words. (Rishi, 93)

Virmati's fight against her mother symbolises the oppressive forces of patriarchal structure. Defying patricentric norms that force a woman towards domesticity, Virmati asserts her individuality and needs to attain self-sufficiency through education. So she is known as a rebel who is bold, determined and acts accordingly. However, once she falls in love with Harish, she changes her character and at times exhibits some kind of slavery. However towards the end she becomes free, free even from the oppressive love of her husband. Virmati, finally, realises that a lady ought to be self-controlled, self-willed, autonomous and rational. She ought to have her innate strength. And once she succeeds in doing that, she gets her husband all by herself, her kid and therefore the reconciliation together with her family. Though providence plays a crucial part, symbolically it makes her true liberation. Indian women have attained their potential and achieved a great deal of individuality within half a century of independence. However, if there's to be a real feminine independence to be attained, a great deal remains to be done.

Thus, Manju Kapur portrays Virmati as a progressive woman who wouldn't leave her desire to achieve the much-needed individuality in life. To continue her studies, she is ready to sacrifice her family and every norm of male dominated society. Not only that, her call to marry a person with a wife and kids is obvious defiance of the conventions of the society to which she belongs. A woman's right to like and select her spouse cannot be questioned. That's the message Manju Kapur looks to convey through the character of Virmati (Das, 141). Gur Pyari Jandial is full of appreciation for Virmatias she says,

It would be a mistake to devalue Virmati's struggle because she failed, for what mattered was to have made the attempt. What is necessary is to break the patriarchal mould, and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement. (Jandial, 116)

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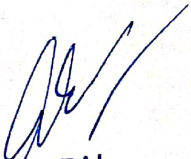


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