



Quest for Identity

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ABSTRACT

The Present Paper entitled “Quest for Identity” focuses on the attitude of New Women. It also brings out how Manju Kapur portrays Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* trying to establish her identity through her rebellious attitudes.

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Introduction

Modern women are highly educated and professionally well placed. They make use of their status in society to their advantage and free themselves in all possible ways from the clutches of patriarchal home. They establish their independence, equality and individuality on par with men, and thus they liberate themselves from the domination of men. If anything untoward happens to them at home or in the society, they do not remain silent. Without any fear of consequences, they “voice against any kind of atrocity and injustice and show an indomitable spirit to pronounce their volitions and convictions” (Singh 12). Unlike traditional women, they begin to live for themselves without minding the society soon after the attainment of the maturity of mind.

The educated modern Indian women who have professionally well placed have come out of their familial restrictions, forget their traditional households, marry the men of their choice and move towards seemingly attractive life outside home and native country for their future prospects. In the process, they get deceived and experience untold hardships. Thinking that they have established their individual identity freely fails to make them realize the situations in which are placed in an alien environment. Their educational status sometimes does not help them escape from the clutches of male dominance, and social conventions and narrow-mindedness. Virginia Woolf in her essay titled *In a Room of One's Own* has given expression to such a plight of women:

It is not education alone that women are in need to establish their independence and identity. Liberty of experience is equally important to them as their education is. If they have both education and experience, they can brave any situation in life without any fear like their men. They can be inspired to think, imagine and create anything freely as men do. (52)

The attitudes of modern women first as children and then as grown up can be seen reflected in the poem of Dorothy Parker:

In youth, it was a way I had,
To do my best to please
And change, with every passing lad
To suit his theories
But now I know things I know
And do the things I do,
And if you do not like me so,
To hell, my love, with you (1-8)

This is the “come what may” attitude of New Women in their various earthly avatars. Manju Kapur has portrayed Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* as one such new women who seek for identity.

Virmati was the first and the eldest daughter among the eleven children born to her mother Kasturi. She was born and brought up according to the convention of Punjabi patriarchal society by which Kasturi also had grown up. She was unfortunate to be born as the first female child. She was more ill-fated for being the eldest among eleven daughters and sons of her mother:

She was the most often the one who had to do the most oppressive of the daily chores. Besides, she was often abused without any apparent reason. Her position had thus become a substitute and not a ‘double’ that every woman mother wants her to be. As a consequence, the relationship assumed hostile dimensions” (Rishi 91)

Even in the midst of her heavy domestic schedule, she had not given up her strong thirst for academic pursuit and personal advancement. She was keen to study degree in fine arts and after that, a teachers’ training degree. As she had failed in the formal schooling prior to her degree course, she could not carry out the purpose of her life. She had to confine herself within the four walls of her house till her marriage.

As per the tradition, it was the custom of Punjabi Middle class family that she should enter into marital life soon after her formal education. There was no more further educational advancement for her. Her mother talked of her marriage and even started taking steps for the arrangement of her marriage. Being all the time at home, Virmati could not but remain a silent spectator to her marriage arrangements. Never did she have any guts either to voice her concern for further education or against her early marriage. She had to forgo all her personal needs silently. She was like a drop in the ocean without any individuality of her own except the identity as the eldest one and as the second mother.

Virmati did not know whether she had to choose family responsibility or give concrete shape to her passion for education. She knew well that she would lose her identity, freedom and happiness once she got married. Indira Bhatt also gives her voice of concern to the voiceless mind of Virmati when she says about her future status as a wife after the marriage:

A woman, once married, will lose her individuality and as a result of which she will dissolve like a salt doll [in the midst of her in-laws]. Whatever she has as her identity or individuality in her parental home, she will lose everything and remain in the house of her husband as a marginalized being. (130)

Virmati did not want to remain a voiceless being accepting her fate. She first voiced her refusal to her early marriage and it was the first indication of the voice of her individuality but it was not at all heard and addressed to. Yet, Virmati reluctantly had to cope with her precarious situation arising out of the marriage arrangements.

Virmati's heart was full of great expectations of her future and but she had kept all her personal ambitions hidden in her heart itself. All other members in the house failed to understand her inner self. Her mother, though a woman, did not think of the feelings of another woman in her daughter because she was every inch a conventional mother in her way of living. She was also quite aware of her reconciliation to her status as a daughter. She expected the same thing from her daughter. Virmati knew that she could not escape from her mother and early marriage however hard she tried. She also felt that the time was the greatest healer and so she had to remain waiting for the opportune time to come patiently with smiles in grief.

However, Shakuntala, her cousin, was the direct inspiration to her. She became an encouraging voice to Virmati by narrating her individual pursuits. She wanted Virmati to follow her example to establish her individuality. She also urged Virmati to pursue education further and enjoy its multiple benefits for her independence. At once, Virmati realized that "education was something significant, beyond marriage, husband and children" (DD 17). She decided that it was not the marriage as the first choice as her mother thought but only the education should be her first choice. If educated, she could use her educational advancement as a tool to achieve her individual identity. She also looked "almost breathless with admiration and love" (DD 18) for her cousin because of her timely guidance. She considered the pursuit of education further as a great relief from the patriarchal attitudes of her mother and her early marriage. Even if there was any opposition, she was determined to rebel. What she expected did not happen but what she did not expect happened unexpectedly in her favour.

As expected, her marriage with Inderjit was fixed and she had to accept him as her life partner without raising her voice of refusal. Fortunately, her marriage was postponed due to the unexpected death of the father of Inderjit.

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