



SOCIAL MILIEU IN MANJU KAPUR'S 'DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS' AND BHARATHI MUKHARJEE'S 'DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS' - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Literature is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language. Art and literature do not rise full – blown like Venus from the sea. Their creation is slow and cumulative process. It is the criticism of life. It reflects the social surroundings of the writer's time. Indian women novelists have been portraying women in various manifestations. But recently, the remarkable range of India's most accomplished women writers of post colonial strand has brought a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters. Manju Kapur has intuitively perceived the gender issues perturbing women and presented women as an individual who fights against suppression and oppression of the patriarchy. Manju Kapur is one among the group of Indian writers in English who live and write in India itself concerning the problems of the indigenous people here. She gives importance to familial characters especially women.

Bharati Mukherjee has dealt with the major and complex issue of the searching root in the post-colonial era. The discussion of the original home, imagined home, belongingness, identity crisis predominates the writings of all these writers. Her novels, honestly, depict the issues of her own cultural location in West Bengal in India, her displacement (alienation) from her land of origin to Canada where she was simultaneously invisible as a writer and overexposed as a racial minority and her final re-location (assimilation) to USA as a naturalized citizen. She endeavors to dive deep into the distorted psyche of those immigrant women who have been surviving in the conflict of traditional Indian values; inherent in their personality and their fascination for western mode of living.

Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women but because she has understood a woman both as a woman and a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts. This novel is a story of a woman



torn between different forces that affect her life. Her duty towards her family, her desire to be academically well equipped, her illicit love affair with a married man and her attempts to shape her own destiny stands as the core of the novel. This is rather a story of sorrow, love and compromise. Virmati, the central character is in quest for true love.

Bharathi Mukharjee's 'Desirable Daughters' is a brilliantly woven thoughtful novel about three India born upper class sisters-Padma, Parvati and Tara- who live as Indian immigrants in USA. The novel basically explores the experiences of Tara, the protagonist, who is more removed from her native Indian culture than her two sisters. It registers her sense of alienation, lack of belongingness, memory and fragmented identity; nevertheless it does not describe her nostalgia, urge to return to her homeland. Tara is a modern educated lady. When she migrates to San Francisco, she accepts the challenges of host country; she does not look backward. Instead of being afflicted with nostalgia she looks ahead for adjustment and survival. This novel celebrates immigration as the process of gain rather than a case of loss and dissolution of native culture. The protagonist undertakes the journey from expatriation to immigration; from strangeness to familiarity and from alienation to adoption and assimilation. It is a wonderful synthesis of feminist. Bharati Mukherjee's heroines break the myth of single identity and try to balance the 'world of origin' and the 'world of adoption' through the process of assimilation. This paper analyses Social Milieu in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters and Bharathi Mukharjee's 'Desirable Daughters'.

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Feminists' writers also often discuss the idea of female bonding and show how daughters can achieve much by following the tradition of their mothers. However, the mother-daughter relationship varies in different cultural backgrounds and most of the time the younger generation looks upon the older as being antagonistic to its interest and therefore refuses to conform.

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Bharati Mukherjee has dealt with the major and complex issue of the searching identity in the post-colonial era. The discussion of the original home, imagined home, belongingness, identity crisis predominates the writings of all these writers. Her novels, honestly, depict the issues of her own cultural location in West Bengal in India, her alienation from her land of origin to Canada where she was simultaneously invisible as a writer and overexposed as a racial minority and her final re-location to USA as a naturalized citizen. She endeavors to dive deep into the distorted psyche of those immigrant women who have been surviving in the conflict of traditional Indian values; inherent in their personality and their fascination for western mode of living. This paper is a comparative study of Social Milieu in Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters' and Bharati Mukherjee's 'Desirable Daughters'.

Virmati, the eldest in a family, is the protagonist of the novel. She is the second mother of her ten other siblings who look up to her for every little thing. Looking back she has no fond of memories of her past. Virmati was taught that there are many other things in life than mere education. Marriage, setting up a new home, bearing and rearing children, striving for domestic bliss and marital contentment are the many things that a woman should strive for. Very often Virmati felt like revolting and breaking the age old traditional barriers and doing something different. Virmati's marriage was arranged with an Engineer Inderjeet. Virmati thought of going for higher education. But she was denied of getting it as her parents had arranged her marriage. Finding no means of escape and all attempts at persuasion lost, she began to secretly weave a dream house filled with marital bliss. But due to the death in the family of Inderjeet the marriage was postponed for two years.

Virmati got a chance to continue with her education. Man is helpless in the face of destiny. So also the arrival of Prof. Harish Chandra in Virmati's life which brought many changes in her life. Virmati was deeply enlightened by the Professor and considered him noble for his concern towards women's education. These informal meets increased.

This continued for some time and the Professor's desire to possess had extended to the heart and mind. They both were in love with each other. Virmati thought that she would be getting true love from the Professor, who is already married and also she thought that this love would be long lasting. But the path to love never ran smooth. The social barricades and moral hurdles label their relationships as 'illicit'.

Virmati as the name suggests was not only brave, but also stubborn. Although she tried to live within a moral code, fate decided otherwise. Despite her resolution and pain, she was still considered to be the black sheep of the family. Meanwhile Harish was getting restless without Virmati. All his letters went unrepplied. Harish tried to meet her thrice but was rewarded only the fourth time. Virmati spent the time arguing with him and blaming him for his indecisiveness. But true to his style, the Professor tried to calm her by saying,



“There is a void in my heart and in my home that you alone can fill”. (112)

Later Virmati's meeting with the Professor became rare. Whenever she came up with the topic of marriage, he had his own genuine reasons and excuses. She holds him responsible for all that she go through in life, right from a broken engagement to being titled as the black sheep of the family. Even in Lahore, she lives a shameful life with the tag of a ‘secret wife’. At this stage Virmati thought that it is highly impossible for her to get the true love which she thought of getting from the Professor in the beginning.

After returning to Amristar, Virmati was offered the principal ship of a college, where Harish came often to meet her. So, she was dismissed and she decided to go to her native, but on the way she met Harish's close friend who was already aware of their intimate relationship. So he did not let her go and called Harish. He performed all the rituals of marriage. Professor with Virmati returned home.

During her life Virmati felt that it would have been better if she would not have married Harish. This thought itself shows that Virmati failed to get the love from the Professor. After sometimes she gave birth to a daughter Ida and at the beginning of the novel this girl Ida pondered over her mother's life. However the path of true love never did smoothly run. She is haunted by a deep sense of guilt.

Kasturi, Virmati's mother is an example for typical feminine attitude. To run her home, first as a joint family and later as her own, is happiness for her. Like Kasturi, Ganga the Professor's wife, marriage is a religious and social institution, where love is not the basis of marriage. But in Virmati, there is a struggle between the head and the heart, the physical and moral.

Virmati had to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. The rebel in Virmati might have actually exchanged one kind of slavery for the other. But towards the end she became free, free even from the oppressive love of her husband. Instead of waiting for true love, Virmati took the responsibility of leading her own life and became economically independent. Virmati realizes that life was really not worth all the struggle. Things are not always as they appear or seem. Throughout Virmati fights to get what she wants. She lives life on her own terms and conditions; but in the process she loses a significant part of herself and realizes the insignificance of things.

Bharati Mukherjee's ‘Desirable Daughters’ is a brilliantly woven thoughtful novel about three India born upper class sisters-Padma, Parvati and Tara- who live as Indian immigrants in USA. The novel basically explores the experiences of Tara, the protagonist, who is more removed from her native Indian culture than her two sisters. It registers her sense of alienation, lack of belongingness, memory and fragmented identity; nevertheless it does not



describe her nostalgia, urge to return to her homeland. Tara is a modern educated lady. When she migrates to San Francisco, she accepts the challenges of host country; she does not look backward. Instead of being afflicted with nostalgia she looks ahead for adjustment and survival. This novel celebrates immigration as the process of gain rather than a case of loss and dissolution of native culture. The protagonist undertakes the journey from expatriation to immigration; from strangeness to familiarity and from alienation to adoption and assimilation. It is a wonderful synthesis of feminist. Bharati Mukherjee's heroines break the myth of single identity and try to balance the 'world of origin' and the 'world of adoption' through the process of assimilation.

In Desirable Daughters, the immigrant experiences of the female protagonist Taralata and her elder sister Padma, Taralata's dwelling within dual identities and her search for identity are located in the transmigration phenomenon in the twenty first century. The popular hearsay 'home is where the heart lies' brings the appropriate relevance to Taralata's desire for an eventual return to the native land. Taralata belongs to traditional Bengali Brahmin family where the women like Taralata and her elder sisters have no scope to establish their own individual identities.

Taralata's transplanting from Ballygunge with her husband and re-creating new home in the USA never make her feel at home. Despite being a wife of affluent Bishwapriya Chatterjee, Taralata spends her life as if she belongs to an outsider community. Bish's excessive business in the cyber world and Tara's position to her husband like 'a princess' and 'queen' make Tara fail to reconstruct the home of intimacy, familiarity and emotional hearth in this alien environment. Taralata's longing to get rid of the constriction of the Bengali orthodox family in the USA and to lead an independent life get shattered for Bish's traditional approach. Taralata intends to lead her life as an American wife enjoying full freedom. In this unknown city she is free to make a mess of her own life. The re-creation of new home seems rather a vain attempt in the alien environment. The journey of her inner self is unveiled in the foreign country. Her outer self aspires only for the liberal life that is contrasted with inner self which cannot keep aside the bygone days in Calcutta. Unlike the sweet old home in Calcutta, the city of San Francisco emerges as the place of residence without any emotional attachment. Taralata's physical living in the foreign country with a very little network with her elder sisters, presents before her past days of family relationship in Calcutta.

The women in the novels of Manju Kapur seem to be the personification of new women who have been carrying the burden of inhibition since ages and want to be free now. The writer clearly shows the dilemma of women who carry the burden of being female as well as the added responsibility of being mothers to members of their own sex. In the traditional social milieu of the novel where mothers and daughters exist, marriage is regarded as the ultimate goal and destiny from which these women cannot escape.



Manju Kapur and Bharati Mukherjee succeed in presenting the real picture of women in a male-dominated society. Their female protagonists are mostly educated aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking, for which their family and society become intolerant towards them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds. The novelists have portrayed their protagonists as women caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and the yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. Manju Kapur says that writing in India tends to involve the family and community to a far greater extent than in the West. Here, women are often defined in terms of their roles. The tension between these notions of identity and the desire for personal fulfillment forms much of sub continental literature.

Woman is inferior position in society is not a biological fact but a created one. Civilization defines what is feminine, determines how women should behave, and perpetuates the oppression of women. The social position and roles that civilizations have assigned to women have kept them in an inferior position to that of men. It is the patriarchal civilization that relegates women to the margins. All feminist writings concern themselves with women's inferior position in society and with the discrimination encountered by women because of their sex.

Manju Kapur and Bharati Mukherjee have tried to portray their own emerging new women grounded in reality. They have their own concerns and priorities, as well as their own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists.

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