



Quest for self identity in Sula and Difficult Daughters by Manju Kapur and Tony Morison

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Abstract:

The concept of identity is associated with the psychoanalytical process. It no longer confines itself to the individual but it may characterize a group, a class or even a nation. As the twentieth century is rightly called the century of 'Alienation' man in this century is estranged not only from his fellowmen but also from his innermost nature. He is alone, in a crowded society. He refuses to be treated as an object and asset that he is a person. When one comes to think and speak of women novelists, one has to admit that they have a special way of looking at this concept. Manju Kapur, and Tony Morison women, are shaped by the same environment and are part of predominance of patriarchy. It is the confrontation of the female protagonist with the patriarchal oppressive environment, that adds more sharpness to their vision as novelists. Kapur describes how Virmati in Difficult Daughters with her dichotomies, marital tensions, domestic traumas undertake the quest for self identity. Manju Kapur has been a significantly sensitive woman artist who is gifted with keen observation. On the other hand Morison also focus on marital tension domestic trauma and quest for identity

As the period demands, both Indian and American society is patriarchal and Sula and Virmati, as women, have been subjugated to man-made injustice and identities. Virmati's is an affectionate upper middle class family where Virmati experiences all types of tortures and torments of life as her gender is inferior. and Sula belongs to middle class black family It may be the focus of the writer to recapitulate how a woman is denied all the opportunities of social freedom in the patriarchal family set up.

Freedom, in general, should be expressed as defiance of conventions and tolerance of justice in daily life. Virmati behaves like a typical Indian woman with reliance on tradition, consideration for the individual dependence and observance of moral values. Hers is not the voice to assert her rights. The novel is like a document revealing the pain and struggle of a beautiful woman trapped and subjugated under suffocating circumstances. "Her life is smeared under the pressure of family responsibilities", (p. 16). She registers her protest and rebellion against the prevalent male chauvinism.

As Virmati's character is a complex one, she is unable to make up her mind what to do

and what to achieve in her life. She has choices open for and her desires are multifarious. She has no idea about the priorities of her desires. Her inability to choose from these desires has created for her excruciating pain and suffering in her life.

Shakuntala's visit has planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. She rejects the marriage proposal of Indrajit. Thus, her life becomes a series of perpetual struggle against all odds as she happens to be a second wife of a Professor. Kasturi has the firm belief in the maxim, "A Woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings", (p. 111). Virmati has been emancipated from her traditional family in Amritsar. Shakuntala mesmerized Virmati with her life style in Lahore. Virmati wants to have uninhibited existence like her. For Virmati, Shakuntala "looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own", (p. 16). These seeds of aspiration have grown into a tree and Virmati tries to adopt unconventional ways. She crosses the patriarchal threshold. "She aspires a freer life than that offered by her parents. This aspiration is condemned to failure", (Ashok Kumar, p.2). Kapur does not predict anything

about the rightness of her path but her focus is to present the inner conflict engulfing Virmati's mind after she comes to live with Harish as his co-wife.

Both characters Virmati and Sula possess the desire to be someone and to have a place of one's own make their powerful character. Virmati in the initial stages of the novel, erupts like a surge now and then. She tries to escape from it and seeks refuge in the imaginative dream-world of evergreen pastures, after the better understanding of sordid reality around her. Her confusion has been endless. The early marriage or no education are the options for her. She has revolted against her marriage proposal and her sufferings increased. When she becomes aware of her attraction for the Professor, she gets the realization "to think of him was impossible, given the gulf between them until he bridged it by crying out his need", (Difficult Daughters, p. 54). Sula also has very close bond of friendship with Nel and in her company she accepts the challenges of male dominated society she denied the marriage proposal or the routine way of life imposed on women traditionally of getting married bearing and rearing children and serving the husband for entire life irrespective of her own dreams desires and aspiration as an individual entity on the earth.

Virmati's attraction for Harish, her awareness of her womanly duties and her desire to be free from patriarchal shackles of Indian family these three forces work simultaneously in her life. The situation is a trying one. Sula's rebel against male dominated society in attempt of becoming free from patriarchal shackles of Afro-American family and her awareness of being subjugated as woman. She crossed all limits those were considered to be essential for Afro American women in Bottom even having relations with white man was a taboo, but Sula did not care to establish sexual relations with white man by doing this she registered her protest to patriarchal system.

Virmati confesses her mental state to Swarnalata, her room-mate in the hostel in a vivid manner, "When Harish is here, I stop thinking of other things when he is not here, all I do is wait for him to come", (p. 140). She hates this secret relationship. There is always the sense of uncertainty, the fear to be seen by somebody. Still, the attraction for the professor and her falling a

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prey to his physical desires remain there. Her life continues in the same formless, endless, limitless tragic manner. She is surrounded by hollow hopelessness. Harish is not in a position to help her. Her own conflicting identities have given her trouble and grief. Her own physical lust has been responsible for her to sweep into the slippery ground of illicit love for Harish. In the same manner Sula also continued her affairs with many people her life went on in the formless endless, limitless tragic manner with uncertainty of future and hopelessness.

Kapur strongly emphasizes the plea that the worldly forces are not responsible for the protagonist to fall deep into melancholic void, but her own inner desires. The Indian woman is represented as spineless, wooden creature, traditionally. Sula as

subjected to male-domination. This is hostile to woman's endeavours in such a set-up. Virmati tries to establish her identity. She is like a rebel who learns in the course of her encounter with the stark realities of life that her power is to be used cope with the male orientation. Her perplexed psyche and her traumatic experiences have tormented her. "She constantly faces emotional and physical turmoil", (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 258). As a consequence, she is unable to live in harmony with the environment around.

The novel is like a critical analysis of the patriarchal modes of thinking. It aims at the domination of male and the subordination of the female. The pattern of the society teaches woman to internalize the concept of subordination. But what about her self-realisation? Tradition presents the systematic attempts to silent the female and culture demands her to be feminine. Kapur, presents this struggle against victimization in her novel. "Kapur also reveals her female protagonists' deep study of Indian culture and tradition in which they are rooted", (p. 226). Virmati fights this battle knowing it very well that it is futile.

Virmati tries to clutch life in the palms of her hands but fails to hold it. She has no power over past and present has nothing to offer her. She thinks, "How many new beginnings had her relationship with the Professor led her to?" (p. 197). The irony in the novel is all pervasive. Virmati tries to assert herself but the search remains elusive for her. She prepares herself for the task of emancipation

but she knows it at the back of the mind that it is meaningless. It makes her struggle inconsequential to prove her to redefine her reality.

It contributes in creating a void which is nothing but a chaotic feeling of loss in life. This awareness of identity crisis and consequential anxiety have been important for the existential vision of the plight of the modern woman. Virmati discovers the meaning and value of life probing through the dark mossy pathways of the soul. It is "A value charged, almost a charismatic term with its secured achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation", (H. Dennis, *Wrong Identity: Problem and Catchword, Voices of Revelation*, p. 77). This search for identity is motif of Manju Kapur's novel. Her protagonist is confused, she always runs for what she does not know.

Virmati participates in a wild race-in her educational search or in her marital adjustments. She has no clear aim in her mind. Unfortunately, she meets with disharmony and failure. The disappointments, delusions, social pressures, uncertain future make her life crump and it hurts her psyche. It justifies her cynical attitude towards established social norms and even towards life. It gives her chance to rebel against social, familial pressures. "She breaks the patriarchal norms to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self-fulfillment," (Ashok Kumar, p. 20). She peruses the quest for self identity. She loses her interest in everything, after she becomes the co- wife of Harish in the first year of their marriage.

Life for Virmati has become burden. She keeps the days passing. The new day is exactly the same as the old one-empty, hollow. Really, Virmati is not wanted in the family. She has paid a visit to her parents' house, after her marriage with Harish. She meets with rage and hostility there as if she belongs to the opposition party. Her mother says, "You have destroyed our family, you badmash,! you have blackened our face everywhere! (p. 221). Her new home is labelled as "Cheap dishonoured home," (p. 221).

Virmati feels that she has no blood relations after this incident. No one comes to visit her, not even her younger sisters. She feels barren and desperate. Her ties with the family with all these care, concern, sacrifice

and responsibility are all broken. When her father dies in communal riot, Virmati comes to see him but not accepted by them. "She remained on a periphery leaning sideways against the wall avoiding everybody's eyes", (p. 237). She is not able to meet her mother. According to the people, her marriage has killed her father. Katuri speaks of it, "Would your pitaji have gone if he didn't have to live with the disgrace his daughter caused him?" (p. 240). Sula also is also having distant relations with family her ties are broken she witness death of her own mother but did nothing to save her however people doubt Sula of killing her mother in ambulance and sending her granny to orphanage .

Virmati has understood it properly that it is her own mind with multiple desires to satisfy that cannot present her any solution. Virmati's self remains neglected. The marriage and the bed for which she seems to have thought and craved all her life has been a thing of renunciation for her. She feels that "She is losing all sense of identity," (Ashok Kumar, p.5) .On the other hand Sula doesn't feel guilty for whatever she did but when she felt to marry and have peaceful life she got frustrated and there she felt failure for a moment in life .

The novel *Difficult Daughters* is set in the patriarchal pattern of society. In India this social system is a decisive factor in man-woman relationship. Virmati is not allowed in this social set up to be open and frank about her love with Harish. Communication ends with the intercourse in their relationship. Virmati turns desparate about what should she do afterwards? What should be the end of all these illicit meetings before marriage and even after it, what is her position in the new house? The questions remain unanswered. "The consequences for Virmati are harsh indeed," (Ashok Kumar, p. 2).

The sex life of both Virmati and Sula creates monotony, fear, frustration. They become forceful elements from outside in the world of sex. They affect the sexual behaviour of them. The woodenness and neutrality are the best representations of this sexual politics . It may appear biological, the sexual act on the surface, but it is not so. It is deeply set in larger context of human affairs in reality. Virmati may try to forget her difficulties while enjoying the sexual act by shuttering her eyes. It is symbolic as she wants to remain aloof from the harsh realities of the

harsh world. But these realities cannot leave her free. They always haunt her and “she leads a suffocating life in the tight walls of the house”, (p. 19). At the same time the sexual behaviour of Sula seems to be also escape from harsh realities of the external world. It is a symbolic act of rebel for her she doesn't feel guilty for dealing in sex with Nel's husband or white man .

The argument put forth by Greer is that natural differences between men and women that are exaggerated due to social factors. ‘Woman is a social construct but devised by man’, as per the thesis of Simon de Beauvoir. As woman designed by society she tries hard to fit herself in the social model. She slowly loses her natural human qualities in this process .Women are more forgiving, more kind and more holy in “Difficult Daughters”. They are not much interested in material and physical pleasures. Though Virmati involves herself in illicit relationship, she is forgiving in the heart of her heart. Virmati's illicit love attraction can be thought as the new desire of a new woman discussed in the book of Betty Friedman. It may be the part of corruption of modern life. Men are self-centred in the novel. There is no transformation to be brought in their nature.

The married life of women is exhausting and difficult but they are not courageous enough to admit this. They do not achieve self-fulfillment. They are mature enough like Kasturi Nel Eva peace Hannah and Kishori Devi but not having self-satisfaction. The women are shown as traditional picture in the novel “but Virmati and Sula are epitome of modernity, trying to break the trammels of traditions”, They are all the part of a wheel of life run not by them but by the heads of the families, their patriarchal societies. If women are given chance for self fulfillment, they can become stronger and are ready to fight all obstacles.

As an example, Virmati goes against the system and decides to fight in order to realize her suppressed potential. “Education gives her strength in achieving some level of freedom from the shackles of patriarchy”, (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 256). But she admits that she is responsible for the perpetual of patriarchy. She emerges not as a hapless, helpless weak figure looking for sympathy and support but as a capable, intelligent and self respecting young woman. She realizes the patterns of society and threads of

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patriarchy. She makes constant efforts to be aware of her dormant capacities. It is like an awakening in herself.

Embodying freedom, adventure, curiosity, unpredictability, passion, and danger, Sula takes little from others and gives even less. She is not ruthless; rather, she is spontaneous and unable to moderate or temper the sudden impact her actions might have on her community. Morrison tells us that Sula "had no center, no speck around which to grow"; her life is like an open rainbow for experimental freedom that often touches the edges of danger. she never surrenders to falseness or falls into the trap of conventionality in order to keep up appearances or to be accepted by the community. As Morrison notes of her, "She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments — no ego." Faced with a racist world and a sexist community, Sula defends herself by creating a life, however bizarre, that is rich and experimental. She refuses to settle for a woman's traditional lot of marriage, child raising, labor, and pain. The women of the Bottom hate Sula because she is living criticism of their own dreadful lives of resignation. Bottom's black community despises Sula because she has an independence that contrasts to the community's own small-mindedness. She remains true to herself, Sula suffers no limitations; she never betrayed who she is. African women are oppressed, and to escape their oppression, they must become self-propagators. Accordingly, Sula rejects the traditional role ascribed to women. However, since her oppression as a woman is the result of an oppressive economic system, not men, Sula finds it impossible to escape all the traditionalisms associated with women

Sula rejects the advice of settling down and having babies replying I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself. But because Sula's struggle to enjoy her fullest potential as a human being is a struggle waged against the Bottom community instead of capitalism she struggles alone and unsuccessfully. Unfortunately she does not succeed .because By the time Sula dies, she is completely isolated from the community. She is visited by no one except Nel, on one occasion, and after death, she is prepared for burial by white folks, since no one in the community would 'do' for her. Virmati also

has the same desire to live and enjoy the life at fullest on her own with a married man and for that she goes against the family and society but she faces a lot of protest from both family and society and lastly she is alienated and fails to win the consent of her family and society.

Virmati's decisions are bold. Betty Fried man presents the problem of stunting of growth of a woman in the patriarchal framework of society and it is at the pivotal position in the novel. It has been really a Herculean task going against the social conventions. Against all odds Virmati becomes the co-wife of Harish. Her condition is really pathetic in facing all her humiliations and sufferings to be a wife of Harish. The doors of happiness are closed for her. It seems she, herself has closed them. To be a second wife her humiliation is yet to be neutralized and her identity is yet to be crushed. Sula is considered as an evil woman in black community she is excommunicated and various rumours are spread against her to tarnish her image she is humiliated for being not married and breaking the norms of black community by developing relations with white man and constant attempts are made by society to present her as disaster or bad omen and she is held responsible for all bad happenings in Bottom .

Virmati has made many new beginnings and has visited many new places. Now the time has come in her life when the ray of hope is lost. She wants to be stronger, she wants to assert and to "forge her identity," (Difficult Daughters, p. 198). But it is not possible for her. In the same way when Sula comes back after ten years to Bottom she is held responsible for spread of epidemic disease in Bottom.

Virmati is fully aware of the fact that life in the patriarchal set up is really difficult. Here in every decision the last word comes from the male partner. It is a tragic vision of Virmati's married life. "Though she succeeds in marrying the Professor, she does not secure any space for herself in the family", (Ashok Kumar, pp. 18-19). Though Sula succeeds to set herself free from the shackles of patriarchal society and live life on her own terms and conditions ,she during this endeavour of creating her own identity in male dominated society she lost her place in family and eventually in society .

Both are clear about their identity in the initial stages of their life. they become

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confused as time passes. their desire to achieve equality in the patriarchal society proves to be a delusion for them. they meet their desires fully shattered. their life become more dark and clouded for them. their quest for self identity has been a dominant preoccupation in their mind and they try to articulate their cry for their existential equality.

Roop Rekha Verma outlines the symbolism and iconography relating to the theme of feminity in Hindu mythology which ranges from Sita, the epitome of unquestioning self-sacrifice, to Kali, the goddess of power. Yet this variety seen in mythological imagery is missing from the actual theories of feminity which display the stereotypical view of woman as weak and vulnerable. Though this narrow conception of feminity is prevalent throughout the world, its stereotype has cuts across cultural difference.

Over time this positioning of women is the result of cultural conditioning and can be contrasted with an entirely different form, which is more capable of social participation and responsibility, this claim for equality has its own drawbacks. A hitherto unrecognized aspect of the role assigned to women is that such claims to equality often deprive her of qualities that distinctively belong to womanhood, and further more deny her full personhood as well.

The alienation of the female protagonist leads to death or defeat but provides an impetus for a sustained reputation of patriarchal values. These plots focus on a form of opposition through the resistance and survival of the heroine. The unequal structures of power governing relationships between men and women leads to the female protagonists search for an alternative psycho-social space; the protagonist leaves the husband or lover and chooses to live alone or with other women, some form of separation from traditional heterosexual relationship deeply implicated within patterns of domination and subordination.

Conclusion:

At last we can say that the novels evoke some concern over the problems of women in a male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix and male stands as a 'sheltering tree' under which a woman proves her strength through her suffering. At last we can say that both novels are a saga of women protagonist's struggling life. Throughout the novel they

crave for self identity. In their novels Manju Kapur and Tony Morison created such memorable female characters such as Virmati, and Sula. These women characters overturn the notions of the male dominated society so that the idea of suppressing women had to be given up by them. These female protagonists are the personification of new woman who have been carrying the burden of inhibition since ages and want to break that tradition of silence now. Their new thinking and attitude gives them new recognition and social worth as an individual in the male dominated society. Their new ideology makes them feel free to do whatever they wish to do. The female protagonist Sula and Virmati are embodiments of this kind of rebellious women. They are representation of an advanced and free woman of 1940s. Throughout the novel they crave for their existence, and identity. The question of self identity is closely connected to the problem of

survival. Existentialism is a modern philosophical idea which directly deals with man's disillusionment and despair. It also implies human assertion to life. "Existentialism is the philosophy which declares as its principle that existence is prior to essence.

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