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MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*: A SAGA OF PARTITIONED SELF

Dr. ARPITA GHOSH

Assistant Professor, School of English, REVA University, Bangalore.



ABSTRACT

This article explores the recent trend in the writings of the Indian women novelists who have made a huge leap from being local to global. The discourse not only includes the plight of Indian women and mirrors the prevailing social scenario, but also creates situations which broaden the spectrum of feminist perspective. Gone are the days when female protagonists were fitted into an all-domestic scene with muted voice. Today they are placed in an inter-lapping ambience where the backdrop of the narrative acts as a metaphor. In short, the plot and the story maintain a symbiotic relationship and help in the progress of the narrative sequence. I have taken up Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) to delineate how the saga of the partition of a nation becomes the metaphoric representation of an individual's disintegration and vice-versa.

Key Words: Indian writing in English, women writing, Indian feminism, self-disintegration, saga of partition, identity crisis.

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This article explores the recent trend in the writings of the Indian women novelists who have made a huge leap from being local to global. The discourse not only includes the plight of Indian women and mirrors the prevailing social scenario, but also creates situations which broaden the spectrum of feminist perspective. Gone are the days when female protagonists were fitted into an all-domestic scene with muted voice. Today they are placed in an inter-lapping ambience where the backdrop of the narrative acts as a metaphor. In short, the plot and the story maintain a symbiotic relationship and help in the progress of the narrative sequence. I have taken up Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) to delineate how the saga of the partition of a nation becomes the

metaphoric representation of an individual's disintegration and vice-versa.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is located primarily in the India of the 1940s. She speaks with great narrative eloquence of the idea of independence. The search for one's identity, to control one's destiny, is surely the key theme of *Difficult Daughters*. This search not only refers to the Independence aspired for and obtained by a nation, but also refers to the independence yearned for by a woman of that same nation. This independence is fraught with heavy price and fragmentation of the individual in the process. The fragmented and devastated soul is none other than Virmati's, elder daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash, belonging to the Lala Diwan Chand family.

Virmati is not alive to tell her tale. Her only child Ida, after the death of Virmati, takes a journey back into her mother's life – gathering bits and pieces from people and places who/which were once attached to Virmati. She seldom had a friendly relationship with Ida. In Ida's own words: "I could not remember a time it had been right between us..." (2). The only picture of her mother that is stuck in her mind is "silent, brisk and bad-tempered". Thus she takes a cruise to divulge into her mother's past which have always tantalized and allured her.

The image that Ida conjures up at the end of the novel is that of an individual engaged in a struggle to redefine herself against familial and social opposition. But her efforts end with her lack-luster marriage and her subsequent compromise with life's realities. In short, she lacks the courage to stand alone; she is always seen in need of some back support. The independence Virmati sought after only wrought out her doom.

Manju Kapur articulates the nature of female desire in *Difficult Daughters*. She subverts the rigid social gender norms and explores her protagonist's struggle for self-identity and self-determination. The novel is set mainly in pre-partition Punjab. It foregrounds the story of Virmati, a young woman who dares to resist patriarchy and suffers for her transgressions as a consequence. The national-political events of fighting colonialism are reflected in the enthusiastic young women who are seen defying the colonization of their own "self". Virmati is one of them. Thus the impact of the national struggle cannot be relegated. The young generation motivated by freedom struggle seeks out ways for individual freedom as well. Independence for a girl meant resistance to the powerful patriarchy. The pioneering mood of the nationalist movement and the ideas of women's education provided an impetus to independent thinking.

Virmati's insistence on education is her first step to resistance. Kasturi's rejection of such education only increases Virmati's stubbornness and she fights for it till the end. Her cousin Shakuntala's visit during their stay in Dalhousie inspires her and plants "the seeds of aspiration in Virmati" (17). The urge to taste "the wine of freedom" like Shakuntala lurked within her. Shakuntala's confidence and

sense of being took away Virmati's heart and soul. Thus Virmati too looked up to "education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges" (15). Virmati thought decisively that she too have to go to Lahore, even if she has to fight her mother who is so sure that her education is practically over. Thus Virmati's thrill of those approaching rites of marriage vanished in no time.

The defined norms for any daughter are – limited education to inculcate traditional values and an early marriage. The same destiny lies before Virmati. Her family has chosen a suitable groom for her and once her education is over, she is to marry Inderjit, a canal engineer. Eventually Virmati fails in her FA exams and her dreams are shattered. But destiny intercepts. In their new house in Lepel Griffin Road comes a tenant with his family and Virmati's life turns upside down. Probably Virmati would have married Inderjit, has she not met this new tenant, Professor Harish. The moment Harish fixes his eyes on Virmati, he becomes desirous. His amorous advances and romanticism tugs and trickles Virmati's juvenile sexuality. The moment he gazes at Virmati, he drinks in her symbolic stature – whether its her dreamy eyes on listening to Bach or her sitting on the floor during the class near the Professor's desk when she got late for the class. By that time "the Professor's desire to possess [Virmati] had extended to her heart and mind" (43).

"Eldest and a girl, she [Virmati] was finely tuned to the neediness, it called to her blood and bones" (50). The shrewd Professor realizes this weakness in Virmati and makes the most of it. He spreads his anguish at her feet and left it to her to decide. But then it was just another of his perfect performance. Slowly he creates enough pressure on Virmati to break her engagement with Inderjit. He always tugs at Virmati's emotional strings. He puts before Virmati his incomplete life. With an illiterate wife, betrothed when both were infants and it was none of their faults that they were bound by the wed-lock. Thus Harish draws sympathy from Virmati leaving her more confused than ever. Every time Virmati meets the Professor she feels tainted as usual. Harish even takes advantage of her relationship with her family. From a very tender age Virmati learns the ways of the family. She acts as a

second mother to her siblings. She knows that she is indispensable to her family. At times she too yearns for some attention and affection from her mother which she seldom receives; on the contrary she meets with her mother's stern tantrums. Inderjit's letters too fail to give her that sense of importance in his life. It is here where Harish plays his trump card. He imposes before Virmati that she is indispensable in his life and the thought of any other man in her life is like "poison" to him. Thus Inderjit's drab, dry and matter-of-fact letters loses in the love-war before Harish's poetic and romantic letters. The Professor succeeds by his demonstrative love. He even threatens Virmati to commit suicide were she to marry another man. His letters have the desired effect on Virmati who is tormented by psychological conflicts and confusions. She even tries to vindicate her feelings towards Harish through the age-old custom – "Wasn't her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body? Even though in this case it meant humiliating her grandfather, who was publicly associated with female education, betraying her father who had allowed her to study further, and spoiling the marriage chances of her siblings" (53). Harish's married state and her own pending wedding with her fiancé Inderjit splits her into "two socially unacceptable pieces" (51). When her family rejects her proposal of postponing the marriage, she attempts suicide, bringing disgrace to the family which in turn led them to keep her under strict vigilance. Her meek insistence on studying further and her refusal to marry led her to be locked up in the godown, and arranging Indumati to marry Inderjit.

In spite of resisting the patriarchs, Virmati had the feeling that whatever she did was not right; she had failed in her duty and that she would be punished for it someday. Her family's repeated trials to see sense failed. They told her that "men are not to be trusted" (81); that "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" (81). In the course of time their words turns out to be true and Virmati is shaken out of her lousy dreams. On one hand Harish displays his love to Virmati, on the other he reaffirms his physical bond with his wife

leading to her second pregnancy. This instance instills some sense in her and she packs up her bag and leaves for Lahore to enroll in BT.

Kasturi accompanies Virmati to Lahore to inspect the place her devastated daughter would spend the next few years of her life. Before leaving Kasturi makes one last attempt to make her daughter see reason before they depart – "A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings" (102). Virmati notices the tears in her mother's voice but she keeps her head turned away. "She had made a decision, and there are certain things she would not see" (102). In the station Shakuntala receives them and takes them to their destination. On reaching the institution Kasturi feels relieved. It seemed to be a no-nonsense place. But tightness grips her from within. Her heart flees to her daughter who would not marry just for the sake of living in a solitary, poky little room in a strange city; for eating hostel food and embracing loneliness of a single life. In stark contrast Virmati perceives things differently. She looks around and sees "autonomy and freedom" (105). But ironically this independence wrought her final doom.

Once away from familial vigilance she is easily allured and distracted by the Professor, who has by that time found out means to meet Virmati; to drag her out of her hostel into his friend Syed's guest room in Lahore. Virmati has always been a weak player in terms of emotion and Harish very easily screws her up with emotional blackmails. Thus at every chance Harish implores Virmati's psychological as well as physical terrain very deftly. As for Virmati she has never been touched by any male outside her family and that too with such arduous and amorous urges. She gets trapped in her bodily desires and transgresses the laws of the threshold. She tramples over the "outmoded morality" (114) and enjoys her union with Harish. Nonetheless years of conditioning has left its benchmark on her psyche and she starts pestering Harish to marry her and make things clear to everybody. What Virmati never realizes is that both of them were coward to face the world. No matter how bravely Harish claims that co-wives are a part of the society, but inwardly he is afraid of his family. He is not sure whether his marriage with Virmati would

be acceptable to his family or not. He is coward and there is no doubt; but he is cunning because he is making the best use of both the worlds. He needs Ganga, his legal wife, to dish him his favourite eateries at home and maintain his "starved dhoti-kurta"¹ image; while he needs Virmati to give him sexual satisfaction. For Virmati, in spite of knowing the reality she lacks the courage to tear apart from the Professor's life. Every time her emotions betray her and she falls prey to the Professor's cunningness. The institution of marriage from which Virmati feels she is fleeing only catches her up in a round about way. Her hostel roommate Swarna Lata tries to shake her up from her "stale dream" (139) and proffers her that keeping the mind diverted in other valuable objectives in life could help her stay out of the Professor's way. "Swarna's words gave her some comfort. But that meant thinking of a life for herself without marriage, which was strange and not quite right. It meant she would be alone, and she wasn't sure she was capable of it" (140). This clears out how weak Virmati is in her decision.

Virmati goes on with her secret meetings and union with the Professor only to realize before BT exams that she is pregnant. She hates being the secret woman in Harish's life, hidden from the prying eyes of the world. Her Diwali celebration with Harish which she visualizes as "a step towards public statement, matrimony and the fruition of love" (115) gets blurred with her moist eyes. Many a time she has tried make Harish marry her, but at every occasion Harish has postponed her ideas. With her exams close at the corner she recalls her bitter row with the Professor in the past; she has read his eyes and the uncertainty in his voice.

'I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, . . . Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, . . . not being able to live in peace, . . . why? Because I am an idiot.'

It turns out to be futile. Virmati's tantrums only results into Professor's sulking. She feels trapped and fails to realize what is so unreasonable in her sayings. It is easy for Virmati to resist the patriarchs and deceive the matriarchs in her family; but with a foreign-returned patriarch like Harish she is left

defenseless. She doesn't know what to do and gives up to Harish's whimsicalities unquestioningly. After all she has to prove her trust to Harish and she succumbs to the demands without any after thought.

Months later each of Harish's words echoed in her mind with an ironical tinge. Her studies were her passport to independence, not just her passport to sleeping with the Professor. They were worthy of more respect, and Virmati vehemently failed to respect her studies. Virmati knew that what she had done would be seen as a social setback for women. This is the very thing the men were afraid of, even the mothers. Education led to independence and loose conduct. Virmati could not turn to her family because this act of hers made sure that she has smeared tar on her family's face. But she takes a chance of her ill-fate and tries to communicate the news of pregnancy to Harish. On her return to Amritsar during study leave she makes sure to meet Harish. But she fails to contact him and learns that Harish has gone to his village house with the entire family for his baby boy's "mundan"². Thus she is left with no other option but to turn to her eight-month old roommate Swarna Lata. At first Virmati's pride prevents her from asking Swarna for help. It is not as though Swarna is unaware of her relationship with Harish, but she feared Swarna's contempt to go into the myriad instances of where she feels she has been weak and wronged. But Virmati has to face the reality no matter how shameful it is and thus she finally confides on Swarna Lata to dissolve in the messes she has created.

Virmati could have presented Harish with the pregnancy news to resolve his doubts and vacillations about marrying her. But she scorned such tactics. Her self-respect was too highly esteemed so as to use such fallen cheap means to reach her destination. Whatever it was, she thought, she would be able to tackle her problems on her own. She had lived away from home for almost a year, she had seen women growing in power and strength, claiming responsibility for their lives, declaring that society would be better off if its females were effective and capable. She would solve

her problems on her own. She was worthy of independence.

Independence and autonomy was at last Virmati's. With Swarna Lata's help she underwent abortion in the hands of a proper doctor at Mohini Dutta's guest room. Though it was illegal, yet Virmati's situation gained sympathy and it was done under sterilized medical supervision. She even slipped on the gold bangles into Swarna's wrist before going for abortion as a fee to the doctor and the expenses for abortion and tonga fare to reach the destined place. At home she gave the excuse of the ensuing war as her reason behind such generous disposal of her gold bangles. Everybody in the family disapproved of her act without question. Her independence of doing things were taunted and pinched at. Virmati refused to acknowledge the truth. She only thought – 'Yes, she was independent. Her body had gone through knives and abortion, what could happen to her now that she could not bear?' (161)

Unfortunately Virmati was not independent of the Professor. On the contrary, she was blindly dependent on him. She depended on him so as to make sure that she does not conceive during their illegitimate union. But as before Harish did not care enough to protect Virmati. He was in the words of his own daughter – a great "performer" who could demonstrate his love but never his responsibility towards Virmati. In fact, she was not independent enough to look beyond marriage and monogamy. "She was his for life, whether he ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice" (163). But better options knocked at her door so as to make her independent of the Professor. On successfully completing her BT, a job offer came to her all the way from the hill state of Sirmaur.

The prime minister of Sirmaur State being obliging to the Maharani went to Lala Diwan Chand's home to ask if Virmati could take up the job of a principal in a girls' school in Nahan. With her BA and BT degree, Virmati was held as a suitable candidate to fill the vacant post. But the family protested reasoning – "We did not educate her to send her away to work. She is still so simple and inexperienced" (165). But the Diwan did not give up.

He persuaded in as many ways as possible to make Virmati's family agree to his proposal and left. Though Kasturi resented the idea, Suraj Prakash cajoled that if Virmati was not going to marry, she might as well do something instead of sitting idle at home. The topic of marriage had come up again, only to be met with violent hysteria on Virmati's part. After the Tarsikka episode, the family was too wary to force anything against her will. Thus after discussing with all the elders of the family, Virmati's opinion was sought which she weighed dispassionately and decided to accept the job.

Invitation from Nahan came to Virmati as a fresh start. She was dying to taste the wine of freedom as she did in Lahore. The situation inside and outside the home agonized her. She sought ways to keep distance from her family and the prying eyes of the strangers by the road. She sought a fresh start not for herself but also for her relationship with the Professor. The moment she left home, she started communicating with the Professor. Her letters to the Professor describing Nahan fired his romantic imaginations and he wanted to be there with Virmati. But she was not ready to give in so easily.

Virmati concentrated on her career. She ran her school, ran her home and passed the days busy and happy. Virmati found the school surprisingly easy to administer. There were about two hundred and fifty girls in the Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. They came from the homes of traders, shop-keepers, bankers, teachers, and the state employees of Sirmaur. Virmati had grown up shouldering responsibility and she discovered that those talents did equally well for larger things. She supervised the accounts, gave appointment to parents, held weekly meetings with the teachers, monthly meetings with the prime minister, and very occasional meetings with the Maharani Pratibha. In the evenings, when she was briskly sauntering around the hillside, she would think of what she had done in the day and feel the satisfaction of achievement. However, from time to time she felt a sharp pang of longing for the Professor. But Virmati was yet to realize that for her "love and autonomy could never co-exist" (169).

The moment Virmati was finding a strong foot on the ground, the Professor intervened. She was tired of waiting for the Professor to marry her. Her focus was not stable. It was hovering between her career and her marriage to Harish. That she perceived her stay at Nahan as a period of waiting rather than the beginning of a career became prominent in her later letters to the Professor. In a way she threatened Harish that if he couldn't make up his mind to marry her, then she might as well devote herself seriously to her career. And Nahan was not the place to do it. On the Professor's arrival, she screwed him up by letting the devils, raging inside her, out in the open.

For the first time Virmati let her seething anger vent through. But her internalized value system did not slacken its grip on her psyche. Hence she looked for more material to their togetherness. She hankered for conventional marriage. But the Professor is the representative of the patriarchal authority which has always relegated woman's needs to obscurity. Moreover, his authority in the house or in his relationship with Virmati meant that nobody openly questioned him or threw tantrums and insults. Virmati does both and he feels humiliated beyond imagination and her attitude appalled him. It was too much for him to bear such "insensitivity" on Virmati's part and he left the place then and there. Although he left, his stay invited certain consequences in Virmati's life, leading her to be sacked from job and asked to leave the place as soon as the year comes to an end. With her education and independence she has once again brought disgrace to her family. This time she didn't have the courage to face her family and she starts her journey eastwards to Shantiniketan.

Virmati felt too tangled to focus on any one particular thing. Her relationship with the Professor had led her to so many new beginnings. That sense of hope was beginning to feel stale. Still with every mile she travelled she felt stronger. There was a life of dedication and service ahead of her, and in that she would forge her identity. But in all her new ventures she planted the seeds of disaster with her own hands. Her last attempt to meet the Professor's poet friend hammered the final nail on her coffin and she was dumped back to the place from where

she was fleeing for so long. This poet friend turned out to be a fiend to Virmati. He pestered Virmati to stay at his place and in the meantime he sent a telegram to Harish to reach Calcutta as soon as possible. Harish did rush to Calcutta but he evaded the question of marriage as usual. He was more concerned with his wife and children. His acceptance to them was more important to him than his marriage to Virmati. That much was crystal clear. But his poet friend made a sharp, neat dissection of his priorities by offering – either accept Virmati as a wife or "be prepared to let her go" (185).

The burden of the past five years which lay heavy on Virmati's heart seemed to have lifted when she married the Professor following the conventions and the rituals in the poet's house. What Virmati failed to perceive was that, this marriage was "imposed" on the Professor. In a way, the poet screwed up the procrastinating Professor with only two options – accept or leave. That the entire thing was forced upon Harish becomes clear with his "uncomfortable" feelings while his way back home. "He dreaded facing his family" (190) but he was "soothed with the achievement of his desires" (190).

An "intensive education" fails to teach Virmati that resistance to patriarchy to forge an identity and ensure independence is not equivalent to trespassing into another woman's domain. Marrying a man of her choice was not an issue for her family but marrying a family-man who was already married with children was objectionable. She failed to realize the gravity of the situation. Virmati was sure that her entire family would never forgive her. This process of rejection that had started with Tarsikka was completed with her marriage in Calcutta sans family members and blessings. But these thoughts did not bother her any more. She was optimistic about her new life and new status of being a married woman. She promised to herself a blissful marriage and her husband would be everything to her. Virmati was pleased to finally detect a recognizable pattern in her life. But the moment the tonga turned towards her new home, to be presented as the Professor's second wife,

“panic set in and her palms began to sweat”. The inevitable did happen.

“All this was her [Virmati’s] fault. If she had not gone after him, he would not have strayed, the family would not be torn apart now” (192). Everyone stood at the door, looking accusingly to Virmati with “the sindhur in the parting of her hair that the Professor had himself put, her tikka, the sari palla over her head, the red ivory bangles from her wedding ceremony” (191). It didn’t take much time for Virmati to realize the family dynamics and the role she has to play in this family politics. The whispering of the child, Giridhar, that she is a “gandi [bad] lady” (192) was enough to bring wrinkles in her brows with unhappiness. Her first encounter with her new family left her “tired and depressed” (195). For the umpteenth time she uttered the same old words to the Professor:

‘I should never have married you’, she said slowly, ‘and it’s too late now. I’ve never seen it so clearly. It’s not fair.’ She faltered and stopped. How many times in their past relationship has she said those very same words. I should not, cannot, will not marry you. It will not be fair. And now she had married him, but the old words were still springing to her lips, so many futile noises in the air. (195)

As the days passed, her “pariah status” was confirmed with every averted look. Virmati was soon able to form a more accurate picture of her self. She was allowed to do nothing for Harish, except to share his bed at night. Even Harish at times became irritated with Virmati for making life difficult by trying to share her rights in the kitchen and everywhere else with Ganga that included him. He only consoled her saying – “You are my other self. Let her [Ganga] 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). Thus Virmati’s days passed empty-handed. She had nothing to do but try hard to concentrate on her reading in order not to feel stifled in the hostile household, and wait for the Professor’s return. She tried to be friends with Guddiya, her sister-in-law, who was not overtly hostile to her, but she failed. She even tried to win over Giridhar, Harish’s son.

But it was then when hell was let loose. Ganga snatched him away followed by a tight slap on his face and started screaming – “You want her to take him away too. One is not enough for that...that...” (203).

Virmati realized she had not only transgressed but also usurped whatever was rightfully Ganga’s. Amendment in the new family was not in the cards; Virmati tried her hands with her own family. With this intention she paid a single visit to her home. On her arrival to Amritsar she had written and told them she was married, but nobody had cared enough to come to see her; not one brother or sister, not any of the young ones to whom she had practically been a mother. They were justifiably angry with her, and she was ready to make amends, full of desperate hope. However, Virmati was unable to gauge the gulf her actions had created between her and her family. The moment she entered the house, Kasturi’s harsh words hit Virmati. When Virmati did not budge an inch from where she was standing, Kasturi grew red with rage. She took off her chappal³ and hit on Virmati’s back, holding her arm with brutal grip.

‘You’ve destroyed our family, you badmash⁴, you randi⁵! You’ve blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on our family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji⁶! But what do you care, brazen that you are!’ (204)

Whatever ties Virmati had between herself and her family was severely broken. Virmati started searching for fulfillment and happiness with the Professor because long ago she had learnt that – “A woman’s happiness lies in giving her husband happiness” (210). But Virmati’s domain of her kingdom was not enough and she was forced to be content. To relieve her from her messy life Harish sent her to join the post of a teacher in a primary school opposite his college. At home she tried to be friendly with the children because “she didn’t want to think she was indifferent to his children” (214). Whatever she did or thought was one way or the other have something to do with Harish. She dissolved her self to be in resonance with “his rhythms” (209). Her resistance to patriarchy was

weakening and with each passing day she was turning herself to slave Harish – to be a “rubber doll” in his hands. With no change in the family dynamics, she started behaving cheap and mean to avenge Ganga. Ideas of revenge came into her mind which she put slowly into practice. Virmati’s only weapon was her husband and she started to use that. She displayed her power over Harish, needling him about Ganga so that he would lose his temper with his mother over her. She asked him to get sweets for her and then magnanimously made him share them with the others. She would make a show of dressing up to go out with him, and since he loved flowers in her hair, asked him to tuck a sprig of jasmine or a rosebud into her bun, just as they were leaving. She even took care to dress even better than she usually did and smiled seductively at Harish at least once a day in full view of the others. But her tricks did not run smooth or bring about any favour on her side. In days to come she realized that she was pregnant. However, it too did not last long and on the third month of pregnancy she had a miscarriage. The death of her father followed by the death of her grandfather, without forgiving her, lay heavy on her heart. She was a pariah to her own family while Harish’s condolences were properly taken in as befitting the eldest son-in-law. All these things registered in her psyche and gave her a mental setback. Even Harish’s ardent caress failed to arouse her. She turned into a cold, strange person unaware of who she was, who she was married to and what her familial obligations were. Once again Harish interfered and decided her steps to future. In a year all that had made Virmati dear to him seemed to have vanished completely. Thus the idea of sending Virmati off to Lahore for an MA came to his mind. Harish chose Philosophy as her subject. He made arrangement for Virmati’s stay in Lahore as a paying guest in one of his friends’ sister’s house. Virmati felt relieved in Lahore – away from averted, accusing looks, nightly sobbing rituals to make her feel like a murderess; away from her rival Ganga and the family politics. She led a quiet life, studying and at times amusing herself going around Lahore with Kaka and Kiran, Leela’s offspring. However, away from Amritsar she was never free of Harish’s surveillance.

Virmati as a teenager tried to revolt against the patriarchal notions, she fled from marriage, brought much disgrace to her family and thought her higher studies as an achievement. Fool that she was never realized that all these days she fought against family patriarchs just to run under the stricter rein of another patriarch whom she misconceived as her passport to freedom, identity, and independence. Once married, she came to see reality without the blinds in her eyes. Her freedom has been snatched; her independence depended on what Harish felt was fit to her and her so-called identity got overshadowed by Harish’s own image. She literally lived under his shadow. Even her likes and dislikes were controlled by Harish. She hated Philosophy, but she had to study it because Harish felt it to be a noble subject and suitable for her. When Harish talked of the war and the ensuing political upheavals in the country, she felt utterly left out. Her once rightful place beside her husband in the true sense of the word was slipping past and she also “wished it was not such an uphill task, being worthy of him” (237). Thus the realization had dawned on her that all these days she had been chasing a mirage. If the Professor had not intercepted her life she would have been living a happier, peaceful life with no heartache and no burden hanging heavily around her neck. She became more withdrawn inwardly, leading to Harish’s annoyance. Virmati’s row with Harish only led her to brood and decide that “men were [are] liars” (242). Even Harish’s tantrums left her speechless when he pointed out that it was Virmati who was creating problems.

‘You make it so difficult for yourself there. I think by now you have had enough time to adjust.’

...

‘My wives know what to expect from each other,’ continued Harish. Virmati looked at him. Normally he never referred to his ‘wives’. She was the wife, Ganga was the pronoun. Was Harish actually equating them? What had happened at home while she was away? Did she have to crawl back to that dressing-room to protect her conjugal rights?

Once all love in her eyes for Harish has turned into "hatred". Virmati decided that its time that she take a stand for herself. She has tried adjustment and compromise; now its time for her to try non-cooperation. Distress enveloped her heart and she decided she would not return to Amritsar during the holidays. If Harish's love for her wasn't strong enough to survive an MA, it certainly wasn't going to survive a lifetime. On the other hand the egoistic patriarch was determined to teach his wife a lesson.

In the meantime the upcoming wars and its aftermath was racking havoc in the lives of the people. The partition issue turmoil the entire country leading to death, massacre and bloodshed. Kishori Devi insisted that Virmati be brought back and all of them return to their native place. But the idea of travelling with two wives to his home town sent shivers down Harish's spine. The coward that he was, his masculinity was only visible on the power he exercised in controlling the lives of the female members of his family. He knew Virmati would not be willing to go, she might protest but at the end she has to do as he said. It is at this juncture he brooded on Ganga. He liked the way Ganga was always engaged in housework. She was so convenient to handle, and he wished Ganga attracted him more. Finally the truth was out before the readers. Ganga as a wife was "perfect", she only failed to appeal her husband. Harish was attracted to Virmati only physically, and thus their relationship got strained with time. The political reason did cause a final partition between Harish and Ganga, letting Virmati conquer and win Harish for once and all. But that victory was not enough to lead her back to her own self. Hence Ida found her mother irritating, withdrawn and bad-tempered.

In spite of many trials, Virmati's life became an utter failure, except the educational degrees she had bagged. She was chased back to the role of a housewife which she was destined to be. As a mother, she has internalized all the qualities from Kasturi, and started applying them on Ida. Virmati tried to inculcate in Ida – respect for her father and always be ready to please him. But the rebel she was, inherited from her mother, Ida sought ways to escape. In every role Virmati failed. As a daughter

she disgraced her family; as a wife she was not perfect, on the contrary she usurped the rights of another woman by giving a setback to the notion of sisterhood and woman-woman camaraderie so much talked about by feminists; as a mother she was not particular or careful about the needs of her daughter just as her mother; she, like her mother, tightened her rein on Ida and tried to curb her freedom which only shows that she has not learnt anything from the experiences of her own life. Her sole aim in life was to "please" Harish in every way. As an individual, her defeat was the worst of all. She simply misused her freedom to education and independence; and after her death, she was disowned by her daughter as a "woman" if not as a mother. This vindicates Ida's resentment towards the word "simple" which may people used to describe Virmati. After all nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways and that too with so much of higher studies. Her partitioned self aptly reflects and merges with the ensuing partition of India; both looking forward for independence and happiness and better future but are bound to be content and mute witness of massacre, bloodshed, broken heart and death.

The novel aptly captures the essence of Rosemary Tong's observation that – "When our lives get too difficult to handle, we consciously work ourselves into a rage or go down into depression" (194). Virmati's self-realization of her "splitting into two socially unacceptable pieces" (51) is in par with the novel's backdrop of the Partition saga that fragmented India into two. In this struggle for freedom and autonomy India loses thousands of innocent lives in the rage of communal riot and hatred, while Virmati loses a part of her self and retreats into depression and bitter temperament which is why Ida perceives her mother only as a bad-tempered person throwing tantrums at the slightest occasion. Thus the vision of independence instead of signifying the dawn of a new era ironically turns out to be a sad and sordid tale of misery. Virmati perceives and identifies her plight, her dislocated partitioned self not only through her life's experiences but also through her fragmented nation. Manju Kapur subtly and seamlessly weaves the saga of Virmati's desolate life with that of the

partitioned nation, each mirroring the image of the other.

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