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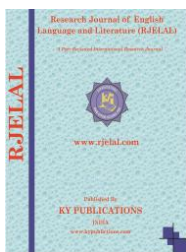
DELINEATING THE CHARACTER ARC OF DYNAMIC CHARACTER OF VIRMATI IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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ABSTRACT

Fiction is about the lives of characters. A writer creates different types of character according to the requirement of his story. The writer has one chief protagonist around whom other supporting characters develop. As the story moves forward, the characters also change either in a positive way or negative way. All these characters have their independent traits. There is a debate in literary criticism whether these characters can be analysed independent of their text or they can be analysed in consonance with the text only. Many critical theorists have given their different opinions about analysing the characters. In modern story telling, the writer does not intervene from time to time to delineate the characteristics of his protagonists but the reader has to grasp the character traits through action and dialogue. American Sea fiction writer David Poyer has also enlisted different facets for character study. This paper is an attempt to study the dynamic character of Virmati in Manju Kapur's debut work *Difficult Daughters* on the basis of the path laid down by David Poyer.

Key words-Dynamic character, flat character, characterisation, character arc.

Introduction

We can derive two opposing views about the study of characters that 'characters do not exist at all' only 'they are a part of the images and events which bear and move them' Murdik1961. He stated that these characters can only be studied in the context of the literary text. The realist have a contrary view 'that characters acquire, in the course of an action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context' Murdik1961

The argument goes further, Weinsheimer says – "As segments of closed text, characters at most are patterns of recurrence, motifs which are continually re-contextualised in other motifs. In

semiotic criticism, characters dissolve. Whereas, Shlomith points out "In mimetic theories i.e theories which consider literature as in some sense, an imitation of reality, characters are equated with people, in semiotic theories they dissolve into textuality. So where do we place characters. Are they so integrated in the text that we cannot analyse them by taking them outside the text. 'Is it possible to see characters at once as persons and as part of a design' Shlomith throws light that 'characters are nodes in the verbal design; in the story they are by definition-non (or pre-) verbal abstractions, constructs. These characters are not flesh and blood but wordy constructs but they are partly modelled on the reader's conception of people and in this they are person-like.

Again we are posed with a question whether we should analyse a character according to its mere existence or its actions. Prop has classified characters according to their 'spheres of action' while Griemas has subordinated the characters into actants and acteurs. Barthes clearly subordinates character to action. In 1970, he gave character a separate code (the semic code) and even ponders over the possibility that 'what is proper to narrative is not action but the character as a proper name. Ferera attempts to construct a model for a structural analysis of narrative fiction with character as the central notion. "In fiction, the character is used as the structuring element: the objects and the events of fiction exist-in one way or another-because of the character and in fact it is only in relation to it that they possess those qualities of coherence and plausibility which makes them meaningful and comprehensible.

Thus we see that the characters are the most important aspects of a fictional work. It is around them that the whole work revolves and it is due to their specific traits that the incidents take place. The great character suffered due to their specific traits: like King Lear was vainglorious so had to face calamities, Hamlet had to suffer due to his indecision. So we see that the qualities of the protagonists work as catalysts for the stories. Karen Bernardo, in his book *Characterization in Literature* makes following comments on characterisation. 'What does characterization do for a story? In a nutshell, it allows us to empathize with the protagonist and secondary characters, and thus feel that what is happening to these people in the story is vicariously happening to us; and it also gives us a sense of verisimilitude, or the semblance of living reality.'

When we analyse a character in fiction, then we are looking at the qualities that are obvious in a character and qualities that are suggested through various things like dialogues, actions, reactions, expressions described. According to Chatman, who develops Barthe's views in his own way, what is named in the case of character are personality traits,' 'trait' being defined as a 'relatively stable or abiding personal quality 'and paradigm' suggesting that the set of traits can be seen metaphorically as a vertical

assemblage intersecting the syntagmatic chain of events that comprise the plot'

Characterization is any writing which tends to manifest a character in the mind of the reader. Good writers have always seemed to understand, that what people say and do reveals more about the characters than how they look. Although before the advent of modern psychology, writers in general tended to rely more on description of characters to establish who they were than they do now. But today it is uncommon for a writer to rely much on description, except to reveal characteristics like, race, gender, size, strength, or age--if these qualities are important. Action, what characters do, is generally the most powerful indicator of who and what a character is, followed by dialogue. But characters are revealed not just by what they say (or don't say), but by who they're saying it to and who they're saying it about. Even more revealing sometimes is what others say to them and about them. By the same token, a character's reaction both to environmental stimuli and to other characters is perhaps more revealing than deliberate actions that he takes. The writer converts his power of observation into wordy details to provide us a believable image of the different characters. Chatman clarifies ' Flat characters are typically developed in rough outline only, with such basic attributes as gender, age, and occupation or family role indicated but not much else. On the other hand, round characters are developed more fully.'Chatman adds that ' through narrative background, dialogue, transcriptions of character's thoughts, and characters' actions, the author hopes to convey, in a round character, a believable "living" person. This is direct characterisation . Indirect characterization uses speech and action to help audience members learn about a character. That is, one learns about characters based on what they do and what they say. David Poyer, the best known writer of American sea fiction has given the following paths to observe and analyse a character--

1. General - from environment and heredity
2. Physical -- what we refer to as "description"
3. Personal, Emotional -- mental or psychological features or qualities

Apart from that, we can perceive the character traits of the characters through the different point of view provided by the writer, the dialogues with other characters which reflect their line of thinking and their relations with other characters and the opinions of the other characters about them. In this chapter, we will attempt to analyse the character Virmati portrayed by Manju Kapur in great details on the above lines given by David Poyer and contour the character arc.

Dynamic Characters are characters that change (internally, not necessarily physically) in the course of the story, generally as a result of a lesson they've learned, some insight they've developed, or a truth they've discovered. This path of change is called a character arc. When we explore how and why a character changes during the course of a story and discovers the lesson that underlies the change, then typically we have discovered the theme, what the story is about. The main character in a story or novel is usually a protagonist that is someone who is trying to solve a problem or accomplish a goal. In some types, the character is synonymous with the story.

Delineation of Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*

Virmati is the chief character in the debut novel of Manju Kapur set against the background of India's freedom struggle. Her character traits can be analysed in the following way-

Setting – The novel is set mostly in Amritsar and Lahore. The typical Punjabi culture is depicted. Virmati's family belongs to Arya Samaj family. They had endeavoured to give education to women even though it might be limited to making them better wives. Virmati was born in a Puritan household where they lived a simple life. They were ritualistic and started their day with Havan. Thus we come to know that it's a conventional household.

Physical Description-Virmati was fair, round faced, having myopic eyes with medium height. All the girls in those days kept long hair and so she had also long hair which she either braided or tied in a knot. "Virmati sat nervously on the edge of an armchair. Her sari palla slipped off her head and revealed the thick glossy knot of hair at the nape of her neck." (Kapur 209)

Emotional void - Virmati had experienced an emotional void due to her mother's indifference to her needs which had made her short-tempered. Virmati was the eldest and she had to be responsible all the time. She never experienced the feeling of being pampered. So she yearned for that sort of affection. The mother and daughter relationship in the terms of gentle love had never existed between them; Kasturi forever had looked at Virmati, her eldest daughter as the caretaker of her children and she had forgotten all about her emotional needs. This apathy led to many points of friction where the short-tempered nature of Virmati becomes evident. Later we see that even her daughter Ida talks about Virmati's impatience. While Kasturi was at Dalhousie she found time to observe her eldest daughter closely. One day she observed, "What's 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-12). On this, Virmati who was in anguish due the lack of feelings between her mother and herself replied curtly "Maybe I should go back to Amritsar., Pitaji can take me the next time he comes." (DD-12)

Gullible – Virmati was easily attracted to the life described by Shakuntala and declared that she wanted to be like her. Virmati was caught in the whirlwind of responsibilities and at this point of time the free life of Shakuntala without marital responsibilities attracted her. Virmati declared to Shakuntala "I want to be like you, Pehnji" (Kapur 17) Unaware of her true leanings, attracted by Shakuntala's lifestyle, Virmati visualised a future which was not permissible to her family and even to herself. She could never be like Shakuntala as she was basically a homebound girl as she was equally interested in her matrimonial future as well. So when her marriage was decided she easily acquiesced. At this point, she did not advocate education over marriage. It is only after the entry of the sophisticated Professor in her life with his alluring ideas of companionship in marriage which had so far been an anathema in her culture that she decides to use her love for education as an excuse to postpone her arranged marriage to buy time to make the Professor declare their love to the society by marrying her. The Professor had also been able to easily attract Virmati

through his glib talk on equality for woman and companionship. She was so impressed that she gathered courage to fight the fortress of patriarchy led by her mother.

Reckless attitude - Morally, Virmati may be right in feeling that once she has considered the Professor as her husband, she should not enter into marriage with anyone else but the solution she found for her problem is cowardly. When the Professor does not show courage to proclaim his love publicly; and the family builds up the pressure to marry Inderjit, she takes the cowardly decision to end her life. Here we feel that Virmati is being selfish and is only thinking about herself and does not think or does not have the maturity or foresight to visualise the impact of her decision 'to end her life' on others. With sheer luck on her side, she is retrieved from the waters to start a new life albeit with fresh challenges.

Difficult daughter - After Virmati is forced to declare her love for the Professor, Virmati remains adamant in her decision, and does not give in to pressure for arranged marriage. The pressure tactics used by her dominating mother also remain ineffective on her obduracy. The family tries to convince Virmati but finally decide to marry Indumati with Inderjit and keep Virmati under house arrest. To keep her bad influence away from her siblings she is allowed to go to Lahore to do her BT. Here, in the beginning she resists the attempts made by the Professor to see her especially when she learns that the Professor's wife has delivered a baby boy. She feels 'used' by the Professor, who she realises is enjoying the best of both the worlds. But this wall of resistance is not strong enough and as she is basically a very gullible person who relies on some support in her life, she again gives in easily to the pleas of love made by the Professor and this time she even maintains physical relationship with him. She readily believes the Professor when he promises her that he is taking every precaution to not make her pregnant.

Escapism - When the Professor sabotages her job of a school principal at a prestigious school at Nihan because of an uninvited overnight stay at her house; she is faced with an existential crisis. She cannot go home after this shameful exit from Nihan and she knows that the Professor does not have the courage

to marry her. She decides to go to Shantiniketan. But the Professor's friend intervenes and the Professor is forced to take up the responsibility by marrying her.

Essentially traditional – Virmati grows from an obedient daughter to a difficult daughter and then to a rebellious daughter who revolts against the patriarchal system and chooses her own partner who has promised her an idealistic existence in contrast with the life she had seen women live in her social milieu. But after marriage she is relegated to a corner in the house where her existence is only recognised by her husband. She sees her dream of equal existence crumble before her eyes when she realises that the Professor had wanted companionship in marriage only from his point of view. Her emotional needs continue to be neglected. Here as we see Virmati enter into a competition with Ganga, the first wife of the Professor we feel that Virmati is essentially a traditional who has been thoroughly conditioned by the discourse of patriarchal marriage and she cannot think beyond that. Once married her interest in studies also diminishes and she wants to take up the role of a traditional wife with full enthusiasm.

Space creation - After the initial years of her marriage, after she has gone through a lot of emotional crisis, we see Virmati finally make small attempts to create space for herself. While doing her MA in Lahore, she does not visit Amritsar as and when ordered by her patriarchal husband. This is her way to assert herself and at least in some way to retrieve her sense of self-respect. Gur Pyari Jandial comments-'As Virmati moves towards achieving a sense of identity, the call for 'Lal quila tor do' and Azad fauz chor do' becomes louder. The atmosphere of revolt, courage and resistance around her infuses Virmati with confidence and determination'¹⁰

THROUGH THE EYES OF IDA –

Enigmatic figure - Ida is the writer who is doing a biography on the life of her mother. Her mother had always been an enigmatic, distant creature for her who when probed about her past life became even more distant. The novel begins with Ida's statement 'The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother' (Kapur1) This shows that before she had explored the life of her mother, she had not

considered her as a role model to live her life .On the contrary she had negated her role –model status and desired the opposite of whatever her mother symbolised.

Emotional apathy – When Ida looks at the photograph of her mother at the age of sixteen she is amazed. It is not just because of age only that she finds the difference. It is also the expression on the face in the photograph of ‘Beauty and wistful melancholy’ (Kapur2) which she had never seen on the face of her mother which is different. Ida writes ‘I stare at this early photograph of an unknown woman and let despair and sorrow run their course---Should my memory persist in touching her ,the bloom will vanish into the mother I knew, silent, brisk, and bad tempered.’(Kapur2)

Strict mother - Ida records ‘My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she said it was for my own good.’(Kapur279). Thus, we see that even though, Virmati had revolted against the patriarchal pressure of her mother she herself could not become a friend and emotional confidante of her daughter. Her mother, Virmati was also saddled with a difficult daughter and when this daughter took divorce which was a social taboo ,Virmati had worried how her daughter would live without the support of a man. ‘What will happen to you after I am gone’ was her favourite lament.’(Kapur279).

Conventional attitude – Ida recalls that even though, her mother was living alone, she did not like to stay with her married daughter. “You believed too strongly in the convention that a mother has no place in a daughter’s home to stay with me, so you never really got to see the dynamics of our relationship close at hand”. (Kapur157) Virmati had always wanted that her daughter should also follow her example and marry an academic. Ida recalls that she was at least able to satisfy her mother on one account.” How many times have you declared that I would be lucky if I found a husband like my father? I had agreed with you.My father was on a pedestal so high that to breathe that rarefied atmosphere was an honour.” (Kapur157) So when Ida had chosen the academic Prabhakar she had satisfied Virmati “He was what you respected, a successful academic, a

disseminator of knowledge. Like my father.” (Kapur157)

Un-Communicative - Ida found that Swarnalata was effusive on Lahore; her home city which she had been unable to forget even though it was now in Pakistan. Her mother had never talked about it. Ida had met Swarnalata to get to know about her mother’s life in Lahore. As Swarnalata talked “I lean towards her soft, quavering memories and the difference between her and my mother becomes increasingly marked. ‘No use thinking about the past “had been my mother’s axiom ‘blanketing everything in oblivion. So far as Lahore was concerned, the subject of other people’s eloquence, there was nothing but a void, though it had been a place she had studied much in.” (Kapur137)

Ida had never been able to become close to her mother to share her thoughts because of her dominating presence. Ida talks with her dead mother as she learns of the harrowing experience of abortion that Virmati has to go through from the aged Swarnalata. “Mother I never told you this, because you thought Prabhakar was so wonderful, and I was glad that in the choice of my husband I had pleased you.” (Kapur 156)

As Ida had never communicated her strained marital relations to her mother firstly because she was not communicative and secondly she did not want to add to her mother’s woes, “though it meant that you were the most upset when the marriage terminated. (Kapur157) So her divorce had come as a shock for Virmati.

Moments of Posthumous Empathy - When Swarnalata informed Ida about Virmati’s pregnancy in Lahore, Ida could not help but sympathise with Virmati’s vulnerable position. “Poor Virmati, I thought, how she must have suffered, whatever did they do when these accidents occurred? How was it kept a secret, when woman could smell a pregnancy a mile off?” (Kapur156) Similarity in suffering a trauma softened Ida’s heart towards her mother as she realised that her mother also had to go through abortion like her.

Her thoughts ran thus “I know, Mother what it was like to have an abortion” (Kapur156). She had

also been forced by her husband to go through abortion even though she was married. Her mother had to abort her child as she was not married and she had to abort her child because her scholar husband did not want to invest his precious time in child-rearing. She realises that there were many facets in a woman's life whose patterns are repeated in the same way in the life of her daughter. They had both carried the guilt of the aborted child throughout their life.

Eternal fascination - Even though Virmati was distant and enigmatic she fascinated and made Ida curious. When Virmati was alive, she did not allow Ida to peep into her past but after her death the barrier was lifted and Ida made it the main motive of her existence and conversed with the relatives and friends to know as much as possible about her mother until she had unearthed the total story of her mother. Ida felt that the enigmatic past of her mother had always haunted her. As Ida explores and retrieves the past of her mother she is surprised and marvelled at the same time. She was surprised that her mother who had posed to be a traditional woman with rigid patriarchal values was a rebel who had revolted against the authority of her own mother. Ida also understood the sacrifices her mother had to make as she travelled on her rebellious path. Now she was able to realise why the irritation her mother showed when she had tried to delve into her past. In the end, she talks with the memory of her mother whose enigma had always haunted her "All through, I felt the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance. This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore" (Kapur280). Ida feels satisfied after she has explored the past of her mother. The hidden past of her mother had always haunted and troubled her but the writing of a book on her life had revealed her life. She also feels satisfied that she has done her duty to her mother as she has brought before the world the life of a woman caught between the web of tradition and modernity.

Swarnalata's perspective

When once Swarnalata was discussing with Virmati about her involvement in Swadeshi movement, she asked Virmati to join her in her work but Virmati responded that she belonged to a simple family, Swarnalata was irritated by this attitude and scowled at her "It is people like you who create trouble by letting others do your thinking," (Kapur133) Swarnalata acknowledged many a times to herself that "Virmati was simple. She made no demands beyond the ones of basic amicability" (Kapur133)

From Swarnalata, Ida could gather accounts of Virmati's life in Lahore. She came to know that Virmati had become pregnant and the Professor was tragically away in his own village for the 'mundan' ceremony of his son. So with no Professor to help, Virmati was forced to seek the help of Swarnalata. Ida is curious that why her mother did not ask for Swarnalata's help in the beginning when they were good friends. Swarnalata throws light that maybe Virmati felt that she would not have approved of her behaviour. Swarnalata explains that she had often aired her views before Virmati that such careless behaviour from girls will lead the parents to believe that educating girls is creating problems. Swarnalata told Ida "Yes we were good friends. But Viru knew, yes, she knew that what she had done would be seen by me as a social setback for woman, Good God! This was the very thing the men were afraid of, even the mothers. Education led to independence and loose conduct" (Kapur155) Swarnalata also informed that it was Virmati's pride which "prevented her from asking me first. Though if she had stopped to reflect, it would have been obvious that Lahore was a better place than Amritsar for these things and I a better....."(DD-156). Thus we see that Virmati could not be free with Swarnalata as she felt that Swarnalata would see her in poor light.

Through her relatives as recalled to Ida on constant persuasion

- Ida could slowly eek out some real information about her mother through her uncles and aunties even though they were taught to be only reverent towards the dead. Ida was able to coax them to give her some titbits as for her it was her mother's death which had given her space to delve into the

past of her mother. The author has given a direct record about Virmati's character through the eyes of her siblings. One of the sibling recalled, "You know, our mother was always sick, and Virmati, as eldest, had to run the house and look after us." (Kapur5) Another sibling elaborated on their vulnerability. "We depended on her, but she was free with her tongue and her hands, one tight slap she would give for nothing." (Kapur5) One of the brothers told Ida how her mother would try to discipline her "She would lash out if we didn't listen. We used to run from her when she came. She was only our sister, but she acted very bossy. We were scared of her. (Kapur5) Another sister recalled how her eldest sister was constantly burdened by household responsibilities." She never rested, played with us, she always had some work. Another sister revealed her awe at Virmati's expertise at studying. She counted Virmati's degrees with fascination "First FA, Then BA, and then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage he went for an MA to Government College, Lahore". (Kapur5) Another brother appreciated "She studied more than any other girl in the family. Bhai-Sahib-your father –was very particular about education" (DD-5)

Discussion

Virmati was born in a basically conservative family who were however pioneers in educating their daughters. Virmati learnt to assert herself after she secured the love of the Professor who sowed the ideas of emancipation in her. But after her marriage she realised that she had only exchanged one crude authority of her mother to the subtle domination of her sophisticated husband. She had also learnt that it was the woman who had to keep the marriage intact and therefore she accepted her role as a second fiddle in her marriage without any complaints. But the frustration had shown on her relationship with her daughter. Virmati had suffered as she had pioneered to choose her marriage partner and her reality of physical space reflected on the dynamics of psychological space again and again in her maiden status and her married status. Her house was big and therefore she was never cramped, the first time when she felt cramped when she was jailed by her mother in the storeroom. Virmati was treated as a pariah in her own house and she was not allowed to

participate in sister's wedding. This alienation from family hardened her stance of rebellion and her resolve to marry the professor. After her marriage with the Professor she was relegated to one corner of the house. Her existence was in the small, dressing room and only limited to eating, drinking, reading books ordered by the Professor and quick sex. So when the Professor wanted to call his poet friend she could not perceive how they were going to make space for him. The effect of her cramped existence also altered the generosity of her adjustment for friends. Again in the wake of communal tension when Ganga was forced to leave her coveted position and go to their hometown along with Maji, Virmati experienced an enlargement of space. "When Virmati came home to Moti Cottage, the first thing she did was shift everything belonging to Ganga to the dressing room. Doing this, she felt light headed, as though she had conquered and won." (Kapur273) "Virmati had never had so much space around her, Maybe this was really what she had fought for all along, space to be." (Kapur274)

The cold war described between Virmati and Ganga explains a lot about their characters. During the communal riots, Amritsar became a place of action where crime was heartlessly perpetrated and people were rendered homeless. All the people in Amritsar were giving aids in the form of money, clothes, food etc. Virmati gave away all the old clothes Ganga had kept. There was a steel almirah which Ganga had locked to "assert her claims" (Kapur276). But now Virmati was not to be bogged down by even the symbolic authority put by Ganga. "She got the lock broken by a locksmith." (Kapur276) Virmati stood before Ganga's open cupboard, Just seeing those sarees made her sick. Each one of them reminded her of the woman with her round face, round bindi and black kajal-lined eyes staring fixedly at her with loathing... She stretched out her hand to pluck the first saree from the pile, a red thing, Ganga liked wearing red. It was hard for her to touch it, it was like touching Ganga's skin." (Kapur276) This psychological warfare elaborated on by Manju Kapur has made the character of Virmati more realist.

Character arc - Virmati shows courage to fight the fortress of patriarchy by demonstrating her right to choose her husband and learns to assert her rights by

entering into a psychological warfare with Ganga and in the following years of her marriage she devises certain strategies to resist the domination of her husband. Given the times when Virmati puts up her resistance and endured for her bold decisions, she has shown a considerable growth from a shy girl to a thinking woman. Her character arc is long and she can be called a dynamic character who records a considerable growth through her actions.

Conclusion

Virmati is a dynamic character who shows glimpses of modernity in the role of a daughter and reverts back to tradition in the role of a mother.

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