



Patriarchal Domination and Dilemma of women in *Difficult Daughters*

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Abstract

Patriarchy does not simply refer to a person but an institution, a mind- set, a practice, domination. From patriarchal point of view, women are seen and construed in terms of male dominated society and its interests. Women's lives are governed by this concept of power that controls and subordinates them, their rights, behaviour pattern, physical movement, thinking process etc. the author being a woman herself, projects how women's lives and their thinking are governed by the values and traditions they imbibed in themselves from their birth itself. Independent minded and thinking women were not at all appreciated as they go against the patriarchal set-standards.

Key –words: gender, patriarchy, dilemma, tradition, domination, self-identity

Introduction

The concern and establishment of self-identity is the basis of feminist attitude which came into prominence with the understanding of the suppressed position of women in the society. Patriarchy is a system of subordination of women by men. It refers to power relations where men dominate women. It refers to power relations. The domination is not only physical, mental and also at the level of values. Confucius placed women at their 'natural place'- lower end of the patriarchal structure. Across all cultures voicing opinion is considered a male job. 'Families undoubtedly have a lot of influence in the creation and transmission of gender. Every family evolves a set of shared assumptions that serve to organize both their family – level discourse and their experience of the larger cultural discourse (Berger and Luckmann,

1966, Reiss, 1981). Parents generally ask their children to re-enact the dominant social discourse in contexts outside home.

Patriarchy's set standard is internalized by women. She was assigned roles determined by her gender. Thus womanhood is associated positively with the values of hard work, motherhood, chastity etc. all these values are related to the integrity of the household. Skilled and hardworking women are symbolically associated with making the reputation of the household. Chodorow attempts to show how gender differences are created within the psychodynamics of the family. "Women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which women have mothered them" (Chodorow,1978:49).

Objective

The paper attempts to understand how patriarchy regulates women's lives and how any opposition to it is looked at in the light of the novel *Difficult Daughters*

Projection of women

Difficult daughters By Mamta Kapur reflects on women's vulnerability, indecisiveness, insecurity and lack of space in an in-depth manner through her protagonist Virmati along with her mother Kasturi, aunt Lajwanti and other important characters like Ida, Ganga, Sakuntala, Swarna, Kishori Devi etc. Mamta Kapur has woven her novel around these female characters. They belong to different generations and have different mind sets too. We come across house-wife bearing children one after another, uneducated and jealous Lajwanti, to emancipate and thinking women Swarna and Sakuntala and also innocent and rustic Ganga to educated Virmati.

Kasturi, Virmati's mother belongs to that tradition of weeping woman who was made to understand that she has been but a guest in her parents' house and her real home is her husband's. Moreover she was also taught from childhood that her real success in life rests on giving birth to sons and making her husband and husband's family happy. Kasturi felt grateful to her mother for those long hours she had spent in the kitchen –cutting, chopping, slicing, pounding, wrapping, mixing, kneading, baking, roasting etc. in other words she was turned into a perfect wife material when she joined her husband's family. She was put under constant scrutiny regarding her looks, colour etc. Here we find Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement very relevant when she said, 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...'(Beauvoir, 1972). Kasturi's husband was brought into her life, marking the start of her long years of child bearing. While bearing

her eleventh child, Kasturi's life seemed such a burden, her body was not at all supporting her. Her sister in law Lajwanti taunted her saying 'breeding like cats and dogs'. But the patriarch of the family, her father in law was delighted – 'Raunaqin the house' which made Lajwanti bitter.

Kasturi was sent to hill station to regain her health. On her sojourn, watching Virmati growing restless trapped in a house she uttered, 'It's a shame that your hands are idle.' Kasturi was tense, 'Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster'. We see clash of thinking between Kasturi and Virmati. After meeting Shakuntala Virmati got inspired for a life outside. For Kasturi, for a woman, having a life of her own is unthinkable. 'Marriage is the only choice of life for Virmati's mother. Shakuntala's unmarried status was discussed in the family. She was a talented, highly educated teacher. 'Still it is duty of every girl to get married' - remarked Kasturi.

Virmati got the shock of her life when she came to know that Professor Harish's wife Ganga got pregnant. 'How could it be true?' she considered it as a betrayal to her love. But the Professor dismissed it as insignificant, hardly worth talking about when compared with his feelings towards Virmati. What he did was to bring back domestic harmony, justifies Harish. Totally shattered and disillusioned Virmati wanted a new beginning. Studying is the next option left to her. After her relation with the Professor was exposed, her equation with her own family changed for the worst. Now she wanted to bring sense and purpose to her life. Shakuntala her cousin gave her strength. Her roommate Swarna too lifted her morale. Meanwhile she could not detach herself from Harish. Her rendezvous with the Professor secretly at his friend's place continued to disturb Virmati. Her sense of guilt, her terror of being exposed and her fear of her family was bothering her. Swarna said in despair, 'it is people like you who create trouble by letting others do your thinking'. Virmati was always awe-stuck by Swarna, 'what a girl...her opinion seemed to come from inside herself...committed, articulate'. Virmati replied to Swarna, 'not everyone is like you Swarna...I am not, though I wish I were. But when Harish is here, I stop thinking of other things. And when he is not here, all I do is wait for him to come'. Edward R. Lee observes in *Psyche as Hero* that patriarchy creates role model for people which are inhibiting and stereotypical but when a woman finds herself capable of breaking chains of patriarchal cultures around her and acts in this direction she becomes a woman hero. "The male picture of the ideal woman ...usually omits the role of revolutionary activist". (Jordan in Jordan and Kalcik, 1985: 42-43). After meeting liberated women like Swarna, Mohini Datta, Miss Noor

Ahmed etc. and listening to them speaking out their minds Virmati questioned herself “ Am I free?” she felt confused over the fact that while these women are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, she has been spending all her time being in love. She is in dilemma. She felt the larger spaces were not for her. Here we meet two different women- Swarna with all the brightness of a woman who has come from a productive rendezvous with the world and Virmati feels that she is not cut out for outer public domain. When the Professor was postponing marriage plan on one pretext or another, she declared, ‘if we don’t get married, it cannot go on. I have to consider’. But deep within her he knew that life without the Professor would mean that she would be alone. She wasn’t confident that she would be able to handle it. She was in two minds. Professor Harish was not at all happy over the fact that Virmati is meeting these women of substance and he tried to debar her from meeting them. He feared that their radical talks and opinions might catch on Virmati.

Finally after she became the second wife of Harish, she entered Harish’s home but nobody was happy at her arrival. In her normative role woman is expected to change and adjust. According to Huston and Alvarez (1990) families can contribute to an understanding of gender and at the same time, can encourage divergence from social stereotypes. Sociologists theorizing gender have suggested that culture and society are more powerful explanatory mechanism than nature and Biology. After her marriage with Harish, the Professor, Virmati was expected to change herself and her habits to adjust herself to Harish’s family. Bereft of any meaningful work in the house, she became restless. She was not allowed to do anything as sharing work would mean sharing space and accepting her into the household. She was treated as an outsider. Non-acceptance by the family made her stay uncomfortable. She even contemplated whether this segregation would continue till the end of her life. But for Ganga, the illiterate wife of Professor Harish, Kishori Devi had full support and sympathy. She refused to understand the incompatibility factor her foreign return son was facing with his illiterate wife. Harish reasoned that he can’t be happy with an illiterate wife. To which his mother retorted sharply, ‘she is a wife, not a show piece’. For her marriage with a married man, Virmati was criticized, abused and cursed whereas nobody questioned the Professor. His authority in the house meant that nobody openly questions him. By not questioning her son’s act, Kishori Devi, Harish’s mother behaved like a female patriarch who aligned with

the power centre to sustain and perpetuate patriarchal domination and to secure her position in the family.

Society accepts Polygamy from men but women were refused a choice. Harish wanted the best of the two worlds- the caring Ganga, one who looks after his home and family and Virmati, a companion, educated, beautiful with whom he can engage in intellectual pursuits. Kasturi was at her worst abusive self when Virmati went to meet her after her marriage with Harish,. ‘You have destroyed our family, you *badmash*, you *Randi!*’ When her father died she was not allowed to visit, she remained in the side-line. Harish’s condolences were accepted gracefully whereas she was treated as an outsider. She did not get the forgiveness of her family but Harish’s involvement and role in the same issue was ignored. This shows how patriarchy works against women and favours men. Virmati was considered a transgressor, while her counterpart Harish was beyond criticism.

Acceptance came her way only with the news of her pregnancy. Expectation of a male born made her mother-in-law concerned about her. She was disgusted to find that her mother-in-law who had hardly spoken to her in all these months, now wanted to sleep with her. ‘ was she such a personless carrier of her husband’s seeds?’. Kishori Devi was expecting a male child. Thus she started taking extra care of Virmati because she believed ‘ sons cannot be born just like that’. Ganga, Professor’s first wife, was hoping for a girl because a male born to her rival in the family means more space, more importance and a heir to the family. But In spite of all the care and concern of the mother-in-law Virmati had a miscarriage. Ganga considered it justified. She saw it as God’s way of punishing her. On his part Harish was only concerned about his own sexual gratification. Karen E. Rowe maintained that to sustain a schema for femininity based on passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice suggests, ‘ that culture’s very survival depends upon a woman’s acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity’ (Rowe 1991, 348)

Later on Ida was born to Virmati. Ida wanted to live for herself much against her father’s wishes. ‘ Why it is so so important to please him?’ Ida objected. In spite of being unhappy with her parents, she tried to make them happy by marrying a person of their choice, but unfortunately it ended in disaster. She was expected to be the model daughter as the fortunate child of highly educated parents. But this unceasing pressure to live up to expectation put her down. She was constantly looking for an escape route. Finally she ended up being nothing, husbandless, childless, a status not welcome in our society. ‘I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society’. Ida represents those marginalized

women of the society who loses hope and will to fight against the formidable patriarchal order. As a result, like Ida, these marginalized women of the society were engulfed by melancholy, depression and despair. Bell Hooks in Centre/Margin theory maintained that for any defined group, especially one with any power, influence or control, there is a centre and a margin where the centre has more power, influence or control than the margin. The way to move towards the centre is to use those with influence in the community. Ida refused to do so. In search of her identity, trying to come out from the shadows of her parents, she faltered miserably. Her struggle was against the power centre. Simone de Beauvoir's comment is relevant here. She commented, 'to be feminine is to appear weak, futile and docile. The young girl is supposed not only to deck herself out, to make herself ready and to repress her spontaneity and replace it with the studied grace and charm taught to her by her elders. Any assertion will diminish her femininity and attractiveness'(Beauvoir 1972).

Conclusion

Within Patriarchy there is no halfway or retreat or refuge for women. A woman can be either good or bad, either angel or monster as Gilbert and Gubar mentioned in their book *The Madwomen in the Attic*. The angel they noted is an ideal representation of the feminine-with associated attributes like purity, submissiveness and self-denial. The monster conversely has traits typically associated with masculine behaviour like aggressiveness, assertiveness, independence and the lust for fame and fortune. Thus Gilbert and Gubar rightly stressed on the importance of killing off both the 'angel' and 'monster' figures because neither are accurate representation of women and women writers. Mamta Kapur, no doubt created passive, obedient, all obliging character Ganga, much to the liking of her dominating mother-in-law, she tried to portray Virmati as a human with both virtue and the vices. She was vulnerable, but readers did not hate her. She gets readers sympathy at the end. Mamta Kapur did not make her or any other women look a monster. With all their limitations and values imbibed from their birth on the patriarchal line, they are very much human with their jealousy, insecurity, hopes and fears, love and longings etc. women like Ida, Swarna, Sakuntala were not seen as good. Even highly educated Professor Harish did not encourage Virmati's meeting with Swarna and others. He was apprehensive that after mixing with bold and independent women like Mohini Datta, Swarna and others she might pose uncomfortable questions to him, which actually had happened. He wanted Virmati to be the same submissive, much-in-love woman whom he can exploit by his sweet talk.

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