

Images of Women in Media and Literature: Journey from *Difficult Daughters* to *Desirable Daughters*

Dr (Ms) Manjeet Rathee

Associate Professor

Dept. of English and Foreign Languages

Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak-124001

The study of images of women in media and literature has been a significant area of concern for the last four decades because images as ‘the study of signification’ and ‘meaning production,’ play a vital role in shaping the perceptions and consciousness of various segments of society in relation to the lives, roles, problems and experiences of different categories of women as women and as autonomous citizens of society. Though it must be made clear that the significations and meanings do not reside as much in the images themselves as in the socio-economic and cultural contexts and framework within which these images are produced, distributed and consumed by the spectators. The inherent link of these images to the hierarchical structures of power and culturally dominant representations goes a long way in making them appear ‘natural’, homogenous and permanent but the reality is altogether different. As Roland Barthes points out that the meanings related to these images are ‘produced through the codes at work in representations, and that while meanings might appear to be natural, obvious, immanent, they are in fact produced: they are constructed through identifiable processes of signification at work in all representations.’ (Roland Barthes, 1977 : 65)

In the era of globalization and market economy, these representations and images in media are manufactured and constructed in sync with the market considerations of power and profit and can be equated with ‘commodities’ or ‘artifacts’ which in the words of John Berger are ‘brought and sold’ and which have ‘exchange value.’ This applies more to visual images where all that a woman is and all that she does is ultimately evaluated on the basis of her looks and appearances in the eyes of ‘others’ and more specifically in the eyes of men : ‘ how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (John Berger, 2003: 37)

These subordinated and dependent images of women in media as objects of pleasure and entertainment are constructed in specific ways through specific representations to suit the interests and power equations of dominant classes and they need to be analyzed and interpreted in a critical manner with reference to specific and changing contexts of economic and political framework. ‘The perpetuation of hegemonic worldview of male dominance’ is a regular feature and as Karen Ross asserts ‘the ways in which women are represented on and in broadcast media send important messages to the public about women’s place, women’s role and women’s lives.’ (Karen Ross, 2004: 62) Since these images are located in the particular time and place of their production and consumption and accordingly carry specific use and exchange value, the meanings and connotations that they seem to denote and perpetuate are always subject to scrutiny and resistance and

hence the question of creating alternatives to these dominant images and representations acquires central significance.

Compared to the images of women in media, contemporary Indian English writings by women attempt to engage and grapple with living realities of women of various strata of society and endeavour to project life in all its richness and complexities. The works of some of the recent well known Indian English women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sehgal, Geetha Hariharan, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapoor, Bharati Mukherji and others offer a full range of experience of the emerging Indian woman who though rooted in traditions, is firmly committed to re-defining her role and her relatedness to various institutions of the society in the light of modern thought and consciousness. One can find in these works a recognition and appreciation of the potential of 'independent selfhood of woman' with all its agonies, conflicts and contradictions. The new woman depicted in the literature of these women writers refuses to surrender before the conservative forces of fatalism and subjugation as well as to the market oriented glamour of body and looks and tries to charter her own independent path which could ultimately enable her to lead a self confident and self reliant life. It is essentially an image of modern woman who refuses to be a saleable commodity in the market and prefers instead to assert her individuality by challenging the defined social and family norms and structures, be it marriage, wifehood, motherhood or the larger questions related to her liberty, freedom and recognition of her social and intellectual pursuits. Whereas media abounds with images of women valued for their looks, in literature they are shown to be valued for their intellect, intelligence and socio-economic contributions and achievements. Modern woman depicted in the above writings seem to be a product of the rapid transformation and intense churning taking place in the society due to various struggles for women's autonomy and empowerment and new consciousness arising out of modern learning, knowledge and awareness.

Contrary to the media images of Indian woman as silent victims dictated by patriarchal and global norms of oppression and suppression, images in the contemporary fiction have undergone a categorical transformation from portrayals of self sacrificing women towards self asserting and self defining women within the broader framework of social sphere and multiple identities. It is refreshing to see in these novels a realistic portrayal of issues central to woman's status and identity and a constant craving on the part of women protagonists for widening the horizons of their existence and action from domestic to societal terrain. Be it the journey for self discovery or challenging the traditional and stereotypical roles and disparities or the urge to transcend domestic boundaries, the women presented in the recent female writings seem to question everything that binds or confines their dreams, desires and aspirations, though their attempts do not always meet with success and sometimes even land them up in utter chaos and anarchy. It is the image of an emerging and struggling woman with no clearly defined path or destiny and hence the usual share of pain, anguish, sorrow, conflicts and the humility to accept failures. But over and above everything, the most significant aspect in these contemporary novels is that rather than depicting any homogenous, confining or essential image of a new woman, they try to project her myriad roles, aspirations and images, conscious of her rights and responsibilities, sometimes falling victim to the glitter of modern life, at other

times successfully breaking through the traditional barriers and yet other times marching ahead with all her limitations to an unknown and unfathomed path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being.

However, for purpose of convenience, the present paper would confine itself to the specific works of Manju Kapoor and Bharati Mukherjee where the '*Difficult Daughters*' and the '*Desirable Daughters*' struggle hard to break the barriers of conservative norms in an effort to eke out a dignified existence for themselves in a world which offers sharp resistance to such daring modernistic desires. In the midst of all kinds of domestic and social pressures, they are able to hold on firmly to their desire for higher education, individual growth and development and at the same time, look forward to being keenly engaged in the political and social movements of the day. The present paper is limited to exploring whether the images of woman protagonists, Virmati and Tara Lata, presented in the above two novels are successfully able to challenge the dominant patriarchal attitudes and practices and do these images liberate them of the 'dependence syndrome' so deeply entrenched in the inner and outer psyches of human minds and social structures in various forms of subordination. Further, given the pulls and pressures of conservative and market forces, how far the two woman protagonists are able to assert their individuality and freedom and in what way the images of their struggle and discovery of the self appeal to the readers. Do they appear real and natural and hence inspiring or merely superimposed upon each other so as to create a semblance of transformation and hence reveal a pseudo-modernistic desire for autonomy and freedom.

Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), is located around the years of country's freedom struggle from British rule so that Virmati's battle for individual freedom gets invariably linked up with the larger cause of India's battle against colonial oppression. Women at this critical juncture of intense political and social upheavals, were decisively 'moving out of the house' to take active part in the political battle for independence of the nation. They were going to jail with Gandhiji and were enthused and inspired to conduct political meetings and join in demonstrations and rallies. Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin, rightly points out at the beginning of the novel that at this point of time, when the whole nation was agitated and vibrant with the aim of getting 'Swaraj': 'it was useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges.' (*Difficult Daughters*, 1998:15) For women in particular, the fight for individual autonomy had to go hand in hand with fight against colonial subjugation on one hand and patriarchal subordination and orthodox mindset on the other. On one hand they could understand the significance of real struggle in 'doing something for the country' and simultaneously demanded 'larger spaces' at the individual level of leading a fuller life vibrant with 'autonomy and freedom.' The reader is amazed to see the large horizon of life and action these women wanted to 'appropriate' for themselves: 'Strikes, academic freedom, the war, peace, rural upliftment, mass consciousness, high prices due to the war, the medium of instruction, the Congress Committee, the Muslim League, anti-imperialism, Independence Day movement, rally, speeches.' (132)

It is against this vast canvas of individual, social and political battle for independence and autonomy that Virmati's life, her desires and aspirations as well as her failures and limitations finds its expression. The issues central to Virmati's heart are also central to the development of a citizen and a nation as a whole - be it the issue of caste and gender discrimination or religious fundamentalism, be it the question of individual consciousness or mass consciousness, be it the aspirations of the lowest of the low or that of the middle class or elite sections of society, nothing is left untouched in this all inclusive battle for a more meaningful and humane world – a world based on equal opportunities, peace and social justice. This larger spirit of compassion and generosity pervades Virmati's character as she matures from a naïve Panjabi girl to a mature woman in search for love, harmony, independence and above all a sense of purpose in life. Virmati, the eldest of the eleven children in her family of traders and jewelers business and always loaded with work of house keeping and taking care of younger siblings, longs for her mother's affection but there could never emerge a 'language of feeling' between the two. So a young girl full of life and energy gradually becomes 'silent, brisk and bad –tempered', bossing over the family, 'lashing out' at her sisters, yet very keen to study and march ahead in life. In spite of many difficulties and interruptions, she goes on to study more than any other girl in her family, eventually completing her M.A from one of the most reputed colleges of the day and acquiring good teaching jobs. But her unmarried state remains a continuous source of insult and humiliation for her mother and other family members. Whereas for Virmati, higher education involved being 'on one's own' but for her family, it was only a passport to leading a well settled 'homely' life. Her passion for higher studies is further ignited through her love affair with an Oxford returned Professor in English literature who makes her fully realize the values of education and higher things in life but is already married and this spells a doom for Virmati. Henceforth, she is constantly torn between the two worlds – one wanting to get married and settled and the other craving for an independent and socially responsible life. At the time of professor's arrival, Virmati was already engaged to a canal engineer but Professor's constant pleadings of intense love makes the matters so worse for her that she even decides to end her life by drowning herself in the canal but is fortunately rescued by the servants.

Virmati, having undergone the agony and humiliation of failed love with a married professor and an unsuccessful suicide attempt, now wanted a change for herself and hence convinces her parents to let her join in a Training College in Lahore for her B.Ed degree. But no sooner does she begin to see the futility of 'useless love and doubtful marriage' through her larger engagement and participation in the fight against British rule, the pleadings and pangs of illicit love from the Professor again prove too strong to resist and she begins to feel 'out of place' in rallies and conferences. Entwined in the trap of professor's love, the larger political and social spaces begin to lose their relevance. Her furtive meetings with the professor in the safe haven of one of his friend's residence inside the campus land her in yet another difficult situation of being pregnant with professor's child. The subsequent act of abortion with the help of a friend and the shame and humiliation of an illegitimate baby becomes too much for her to bear.

Her high qualifications and 'an impeccable background' provide her with yet another opportunity to begin life anew as a Principal of a majestic college in Sirmaur (Simla) run

by Queen Pratibha and hence implied a 'lot of status.' Virmati eagerly grabs the opportunity still not realizing that for her 'love and autonomy could never co-exist.' For perhaps the first time in her life, she is able to feel 'the satisfaction of achievement' as she happily managed her school and home with equal deftness and managerial skills. But yet once again 'the sharp pang of longing for the Professor' comes in between like a 'spectre' and disturbs her poise and equanimity. Professor's repeated visits and overnight stay was enough to send her packing once again from this beautiful place and she decides to go to Calcutta for further studies at Shantiniketan University.

After five years of long waiting, Virmati and the Professor finally get married in Delhi at a friend's house where she decides to stop awhile for a final word from the Professor on her way to Shantiniketan. However, it takes her only a few hours to realize that in marrying an already married Professor, she has committed a grave mistake. Both the worlds, her own parental home in Amritsar as well as members of Professor's family, have turned their back on her and her days pass as 'empty' as ever. In a desperate attempt to spend her time in some meaningful way, she finds a job in one of the primary schools and felt 'strong' while working there as it provided her with a chance to utilize her intellectual capabilities. However just when things were beginning to normalize a bit, a subsequent miscarriage at the completion of three months of pregnancy sends her in complete silence and isolation. The only thing that could help her survive this crisis was her ever burning passion for further studies. So Virmati goes off to Lahore once again to do M.A in Philosophy and meets her old friend Swarna there who, though married, is still very active in social and political affairs of the day. Conversations with Swarna again remind her about her old feeling of being a 'left out' and she prefers to 'drop out' of Swarna's life as well as out of the great political upheavals and social activities. But an act of brave defiance by Kiran, a young school going girl makes Virmati realize the futility of her 'petty domestic matters' at a time when the whole nation was on trial. She at last resolves to merge herself into the spirit of the nation. 'I have tried adjustment and compromise, now I will try non-cooperation.' (239) But the political unrest and uncertainties force her to go back to her home in Amritsar. Ironically, Virmati is able to get her personal space for which she had fought for all along by being confined to her house due to another pregnancy. The times of great communal frenzy and massacres cause large number of people to shift to the refugee camps and Virmati finds relief in donating all her belongings to the distressed people staying in camps. In the midst of political and social turmoil, she gives birth to a baby girl called 'Ida' – meaning 'a new slate, and a blank beginning,' who shared an uneasy bond with her mother and who neither displayed any signs of 'intellectual brightness', nor had any yearning for 'the higher things in life.'

While analyzing the prominent features related to the images of women in the above literary text, the one that appeals to the readers in a most striking manner is the life like portrayal of the character of Virmati in the backdrop of the vast canvas of country's freedom struggle, simultaneous social reform movements like Arya Samaj and above all the decisive engagement of various women characters in the social and political upheavals resisting and transcending all domestic terrains and pressures. The novel depicts a realistic human situation where 'difficult daughters' and 'difficult mothers' find

themselves engulfed in the sea of issues and experiences from which there is no 'escape route' possible. The issues that various women characters are shown to grapple with are the ones that lie at the core of challenging all kinds of hierarchies, subjugations and oppressions-patriarchal or colonial and which pave the way for establishing a noble, independent, dignified and meaningful relationship of women with their personal as well as a social lives- be it the desire for pursuit of higher education and employment opportunities, the right to choose one's own life partner, the issue of dowry and right to property, the fight for a life beyond kitchens, husbands and children or social and political participation of women. The depiction of pains, sufferings, frustrations and despairs of the women characters related to the pursuance of these issues along with their strengths, resistances, resolutions and accomplishments makes the images appear real and convincing rather than being manufactured for the sake of achieving a particular effect. The sense of being in the presence of actual individual things, events, people and places helps to make the readers a direct participant in the images that are being depicted. What is also significant is that the various women characters are not artificially empowered through market or outside agencies, nor do they display their strength and power in the way media would like them to be- by imitating the male centered norms and being individualistic and self-centered. The novel presents a very genuine and modest representation of the desires and aspirations of the various sections of women for gaining access to autonomy in the Indian context of women's emancipation and empowerment. At the same time, the novel also seems to be conveying that there is no easy or given path to leading a dignified and meaningful life for women and marginalized sections and that path to discovery and expression of their authentic self is necessarily fraught with numerous obstacles and challenges.

Virmati, a strong girl with firm convictions, a girl used to handle heavy responsibilities right from the beginning of her life, a girl who could challenge the strong patriarchal bastions and rebel to any length for her right to education, is unable to sustain her rebellion against the vacillations of her own heart and ends up being 'empty' and 'dispossessed' as a wife, as a woman and as a citizen. Manju Kapoor in one of her interviews claims that through the story and character of Virmati, she wanted to explore 'why it is with educated women that their emotional lives are so messed up.' (A Conversation with Manju Kapoor, 2010) This indeed is an extremely significant area of exploration especially with regards to women since she has long been deprived her of intellect due to historical factors known to us. Notwithstanding all limitations, her image of an ordinary woman with certain extra ordinary strengths and certain severe limitations does provide a beauty of its own and can not simply be dismissed as someone unsuccessful or unstable. Her quest is real, so are the outer and inner challenges, the traditional and modern forms of oppression and repression and her responses at various points of time. As Gur Pyari says: 'What is necessary is to break the patriarchal mould and for Virmati to have tried to do that in forties was a great achievement.' (Gur Pyari Jandial, 2003) That she did not accept stagnation till the end and that she continuously kept trying for better life and options resonates well with the actual life and situation of endless women in India in real life.

At the same time, Virmati's limitations gain meaning and significance in the light of other supporting female characters like Shakuntala, Swarna Lata, and Kiran who provide a fitting backdrop to Virmati's unresolved and unfulfilled desires by leading a life of well defined purpose - a life which transcends the domains of domesticity and over which they have their full control. Shakuntala successfully represents the image of an educated, independent, modern and empowered woman who 'never doubted herself in anything' (15) and whose area of work and action went far beyond 'husband and children.' She is the one who initiates Virmati into socially relevant activities outside the house. Virmati's close friend Swarna Lata also believes in leading a full life and handling her own affairs with firm determination. She is very clear from the start that she has to do something else other than getting married. Generous at heart and always eager to help others, Swarna is equally committed to political goals and tries very hard to orient Virmati too in this direction by inviting her to various political events and actions but Virmati's desire for independence and for unconditional love from the Professor husband can not go together. The constant clash of the two mirrored in the history of country's freedom movement shows that the path of attaining independence of heart, mind and action for a modern woman is not an easy one. However what is more significant is that this clash and dichotomy is so resolutely and clearly resolved in the struggle and images of the various other women, who irrespective of being single or married, are single mindedly able to tread upon a well defined and well thought of plan, purpose and action. The fact that some of the 'difficult daughters' are able to carve out an independent path on their way to attaining a dignified and meaningful existence makes the portrayal of these various shades of women extra ordinarily relevant. The overriding image and message that is so firmly embedded through out the novel that in the modern times the real answers to women's problems lay outside the home, that marriage is not the only choice in life for a woman today and that changing circumstances demanded something more than merely being a wife is crucial and would continue to remain so for many more years to come till the goal of an equal and equitable society is achieved. Dominant patriarchal mindset, attitudes and practices are continuously shown being challenged in one form or the other by the main protagonist Virmati and others, sometimes wholly, sometimes partially, along with all the resultant agonies and tensions. Manju Kapoor feels that any literature by women about families always has these 'larger considerations' related to power structures, power equations and control mechanisms. In her own words: 'One of the main preoccupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both the inner and outer spaces in their lives.' (Jabberwuck, Manju Kapoor's Home: 2006)

The second literary text *Desirable Daughters* (2002) by Bharati Mukherjee is equally gripping and absorbing as far as engagement with various images of women is concerned. The novel, set equally in India and America, is a story of three sisters of an orthodox, Brahmin Indian family who in their own specific ways try to break with the confinements of the tradition in an attempt to lead a full fledged life which could assimilate the goodness and modernity of Indian and American soil. So the canvas of action and images extends from national to the global as the Calcutta born three privileged sisters, renowned for their 'brains and beauty' and high class status, struggle to reconcile their conservative, convent educated and sheltered early life and values in India with the opportunities for

independent life and cultural assimilation provided through their emigration to America. The glitter and temptations of market ethos and global world, along with its conflicts and contradictions add to the range and vivacity of experience of the different images. The overt and covert defiance of central woman protagonist and other female characters against traditional conservative practices and lifestyles and the search for freedom in various ways of their thinking and living is a dominant imagery that runs all through the novel in a non-judgmental and non-moralizing way.

Three sisters- Padma, Parvati and Tara, born exactly on the same dates with a gap of three years each, and all three named after Indian goddesses, appear to be 'as like as blossoms on a tree' but as Tara clarifies right at the beginning, that they are not. Padma, the eldest, married to a non- Bengali businessman previously married and settled in New Jersey, was earlier forced by their father 'to turn down movie offers.' (*Desirable Daughters*, 2002: 22). But moving on a similar path, she is now a 'multicultural performance artist for local schools and community centers, staging Indian mythological evenings, with readings, slide shows, recitations, and musical accompaniment. (94) The second one, Parvati, settled in Bombay after marriage, with husband waiting for a green card, apparently lives a more luxurious life than any of her sisters. Tara, the youngest of them- a 'thirty six year old divorced kindergarten teacher, is the central protagonist around whom all the other images are interwoven. She lives in a most un-Indian like manner in a part of San Francisco called Cole Valley with her teenage son Rabindranath Chatterji called Rabi and a live-in lover Andy, a Hungarian Buddhist contractor, a yoga instructor, and a Zen master adept in the art of retrofitting. Her modern American friends find it hard to believe that she had agreed to tie the knot with a person of her parent's choice and it is obviously an 'enigma' and 'a recipe for disaster' for them. Yet it is now 'amusing and appalling' for Tara - a modern, educated girl 'with a certain amount of confidence and a sense of style- that she could so easily approve of and marry a man she had never met merely because her father had told her that 'it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market.' (26)

This tame surrender to the 'manipulations of the marital marketplace' is not difficult to understand in the context of the Indian orthodox families. Yet Tara could see through the limitation of her confined psyche as she realizes that 'I wasn't, perhaps I'll never be, a modern woman.' (27) Her decision to get separated from her husband, a wealthy, intriguing, charming and a very popular man clearly shows that like the earlier analyzed Indian 'difficult daughters', the emigrated American 'desirable daughters' too wanted something else from marriage rather than being limited to the role of a wife 'endlessly on display at dinners and openings.' (27) Tara unhesitatingly reveals that if she had wanted only to be provided for, she would have stayed along with her husband in Atherton but this kind of dependence and display was clearly unacceptable to her and she takes her own decision to gently part ways with her husband.

Tara's already unsettled life gets a further jolt with the sudden appearance in her house of a stranger, who claims himself to be the illegitimate son, born out of a secret pre marital alliance between her eldest sister Padma and her former lover Ronald Dey- a Bengali Christian. Tara's frantic attempts to discover his real identity and his actual connection to

her family leads to a chain of events that ultimately prove to be Tara's 'catharsis and nemesis'. In the process of 'defending the Bhattacharjee family's innocence', she is not only able to discover the true nature and identity of her relationship with her family members especially her two sisters but invites the wrath of her so called nephew, Chris Dey, who retaliates his non acceptance by her by attacking her house (and her peace of mind) by certain very powerful explosives. Though Tara is miraculously able to escape the attack due to Bishwapriya- her husband's bravery and presence of mind yet the sudden terrible jolt changed their lives 'forever.' Tara felt as if in that sudden decisive 'timeless void', her life had transcended the human plane and had begun to acquire extra-territorial dimensions. This close confrontation with death and a miraculous escape exhorts Tara to come back to India to understand and establish her connections with the 'Tree-Bride' and with her roots in the light of her newly gained insights.

As with the earlier protagonist Virmati, Tara too is not able to fully realize her dream of being the master of her own life and attaining her own independent identity yet her constant efforts in this direction and her capacity to learn and survive from various jolts and agonies makes her stand apart from her other sisters who, leading a more stable and more complacent life, do not feel the need to widen their horizons and redefine their identities. Tara, born in a family suffering from 'chronic depression', brought up in a highly traditional and superficially Westernized manner, and having waited eagerly for 'the liberating promise of marriage and travel and the wider world', shows the courage to divorce her husband, after a decade of marriage, because somewhere in her heart, she felt that 'the promise of life as an American wife (read a modern, independent wife) was not being fulfilled'. (82). Her husband's status, affluence and popularity restricted her to managing her home and a child, whereas he was in demand 'as a speaker' and as a 'model software millionaire' throughout the world, with the result that she gradually began to lose confidence in handling her daily affairs according to her own priorities. She was not ready to believe that she knew 'so little' and was 'so unprepared' to handle the larger and finer things of social and intellectual life and worldly affairs. Her sisters Padma and parvati, devoid of any inner urge for inner growth and expansion, did not mind leading a life of domestic delusions and worldly superficialities but Tara was arguably different.

The three sisters do not share personal defeats and personal sorrows with each. Under such circumstances, left all alone to herself with no one inside or outside the family to fall back upon in times of need, Tara's loneliness is further compounded by another shock in the form of his only son having been discovered to be belonging to a different 'sexual orientation', in other words he was a gay though he had never looked like one to her. The revelation leaves Tara shell shocked for a moment but the maturity and readiness with which she accepts the above revelation speaks highly of her modern consciousness and perceptions. 'One door had closed, another opened...And this is how it will be from now on.' (167) Her liberal attitude and deep understanding of various shades of human relationships is reflected in the act of accepting the 'slightly altered world' of his gay son with great equanimity and dignity.

Like Virmati, Tara too, in spite of her best endeavors, is not completely able to liberate herself from her 'dependence' on her former husband and her live-in lover and it is Bishwapriya's presence in her flat and quick thinking and immediate response that ultimately saves her life, yet the very fact that Tara could take her independent decision to live separately from him, and that too without the support of none of her sisters, at a time when such a step was unheard of in her family, reflects her indomitable courage. Tara was not a woman to be satisfied with traditional notions of a husband being merely a provider and a protector; she wanted something more in the form of a true companion, more sharing, more opportunities, more freedom and more understanding of the matters of the heart. And that did not seem her possible with a husband who spent more than fifteen hours away from home in his office and she alone having to take care of their only infant. The images of family, marriage, love, tradition and human relationships that are presented in this novel seem to resemble and resound any Indian upper caste and upper class family. That marriage is a 'deal' in the marital marketplace where women are 'thrown' so unprepared by their families is so authentically built up not only through Tara's marriage but through Padma and Parvati as well. Padma's husband Harish did not merely tie a marital knot to a star wife but more significantly, tied his future to a star 'who was growing brighter' day by day. Parvati, after completing her education in the US, is proud to spend rest of her life in the shadow of a successful corporate husband and uncomplainingly attends to a continuous stream of guests and her husband's family members, with the sole purpose of pleasing her husband and in-laws. Amidst the 'joys' and 'luxuries' of global world, 'love' has become a slippery ground for women especially 'when both partners bring their own definition.' (27). For many people caught in the illusions of successful business ethos, 'love is indistinguishable from status and honors', while for women like Tara, love was indistinguishable from 'duty and obedience.'

The way globalization has impacted human relationships in the direction of making them a site of profit and contest and how it affects the lives and autonomy of women in particular is more sharply reflected in the present novel due to its cosmopolitan nature and appeal. The traditional rituals and pressures go hand in hand with market glitter and temptations. Tara and her sisters are the descendants of Tara Lata, 'the tree bride' – a young girl, who was married to a tree, to save her from a disgraced and humiliated life of enduring widowhood. And around eighty years later, Padma Mehta of the same family heritage, becomes 'an icon' among Bengalis of the New Jersey and 'what she wears and what she recommends are taken as fashion statements in the community.' (231). Yet all this exhibition of wealth and splendor, all the material possessions, all the worldly success fails to fill the 'emptiness' and 'collective guilt' that abounds in a 'life of plenty.'

Tara comes closer to understanding the intricacies and challenges of the changing times where 'dharma and duty' do not mean a 'damned thing.' In the slightly earlier times and the world of ancestors, before the assault of global forces, the values of 'dharma' meant everything' but the world is fast racing ahead and it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope up with the changing times and values. The whole nineteenth-century Bengali debate between 'traditionalists' and 'Westernized progressives' was getting 'restaged and replayed' and one has to decide where one stands. Following a middle path and trying to snatch the benefits of both the worlds may not really help when it comes to 'difficult'

daughters embarking on a difficult journey of self-discovery. Daughters like Padma and Parvati can be contended with utilizing and manipulating tradition and modernity in a way that suits them and their families' best but Tara has different priorities in life. Having come from a family which had never known any tradition of 'seeking after individual identity', Tara, at the end of her journey, turns to her roots back in Mishtiganj, Calcutta, to attain her redemption 'from earthly terrors and longings.' (292). Her affinity and close connection to Tara Lata, the Tree Bride, who in spite of her confinement within the four walls of the house, created history by indulging herself totally in the selfless service of humanity, completes her journey and her search for a meaningful existence.

Bharati Mukherjee presents an incredible image of a frail widow, doomed to a life of seclusion and yet makes invaluable contributions to the country's liberation movement. She comments that such a historic feat was possibly facilitated by the fact of her being unmarried and single but that by no means should send a general message that only the women without 'emotion-draining marriage and children' are able to contribute for the larger purposes. The images of many 'difficult daughters' in the earlier discussed text, reveal that it is more a matter of setting up one's goals and priorities in life rather than looking for any kind of escape routes or mechanisms. The process of expansion of inner and outer horizons and defining a woman's life and role in the light of modern institutional structures of democracy is an ongoing quest and protagonists like Virmati and Tara, in spite of their confusions and conflicts, are able to make a decisive breakthrough in this direction. As Virginia Woolf asserts: 'Nothing follows a regular course. The paths wind between bogs and precipices; the trees roar and rock and fall in ruin, but then everything falls into place. (Virginia Woolf, 1996: 227)

In 'Difficult Daughters' and 'Desirable Daughters', the reader is able to analyze and interpret the respective journeys of the women characters in the contexts of broader colonial, patriarchal and neo imperialistic oppression and suppression. Where as the mothers get stuck in the trap of emerging contradictions but their daughters (Ida) and sons (Rabi) are involved in 'rejecting the material' that does not fit into their scheme of things and in reconstructing and redefining the old and the new connections in keeping pace with the changing times. In the case of daughters in particular, it is the 'difficult' that is 'desirable' in the sense of questioning the conventional and the orthodox opinions and practices and hence the images of women in the two novels make a decisive leap from 'difficult daughters' ultimately taking up the place and authenticity of 'desirable daughters.' Desirable daughters shall expectedly send 'signals' that might seem to be inconvenient and difficult to understand but their 'mission to discovery' necessarily involves such familial, cultural and civilization clashes. The complexity and heterogeneity of the images related to such crucial and defining 'mission', as reflected in the literary texts of Indian English writings by women, the two discussed above and the others as well, challenges the existing media and traditional stereotypes of women and brings the readers into contact with a very wide and divergent spectrum of a 'new woman' emerging in the midst of complexities and contradictions of neo liberalization era where global and local meet to provide a homogenous and corporate media constructed identity of woman. The multiple challenges and multiple identities as

represented in majority of the literary texts and in real life provide much hope and assurance to the new generation of mothers and daughters in the direction of transformation of the individual and collective consciousness of society paving way for the emergence of an actually empowered and emancipated new woman.

Works Cited:

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang: 1977. 65

Berger, John, "From Ways of Seeing." *The Feminism and Visual Culture*. Ed. Amelia Jones. New York, 2003. 37

Jabberwuck. "Manju Kapoor's Home." *Truths Sunday*, 7 May 2006: Posted

Jandial, Gur Pyari. "Evolving a Feminist Tradition: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapoor." *Atlantic Literary Review* (Delhi), 4:3, 2003(July-Sep. 2003) 108-128

Kapoor, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. Noida: Gopsons Papers Limited, 1998

Khorana, Sukhmani. "Women Writing and Indian English: A Conversation with Manju Kapoor." March 15, 2010. <<http://www.killyourdarlingsjournal.com/2010/03>>

Mukherji, Bharati. *Desirable Daughters*. New Delhi: Rupa Co., 2002

Ross, Karen. *Women and Media: International Perspectives*. Ed. Karen Ross and Carolyn M. Byerly. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.62

Woolf, Virginia, Harriette Wilson. *Collected Essays*. Ed Leonard Woolf. London: Hogarth: 1996. 227