

## **Transgression in the Select Novels of Ananda Devi and Manju**

**Kapur**

**T. Priya**

**Assistant Professor in French**

**School of English and Other Foreign Languages**

**Bharathidasan University**

**Tiruchirappalli**

**Tamil Nadu**

**India**

### **Abstract**

Patriarchy defines woman as incomplete, dark, passive, irrational and hysterical. Modern women override gender distinctions and venture in quest of their identity and space for existence. Their feminine strength boosts them to trample the moral codes and conventions to find their own feminine desire. This paper throws light on the New Women women protagonists who transgress the laws of patriarchy to gain autonomy over their body without any humiliation. It is indeed the rebirth of their personality, rebirth of their feminine strength and rebirth of their own existence.

## Introduction

Ananda Devi is a literary prolific, a Mauritian born francophone writer. Manju Kapur is a reputed Indian English novelist. These two women writers focus on the exploitation, confinement and the plight of the female subject within the patriarchal Indian and Mauritian cultures. The women protagonists are trapped by hard and fast religious codes and conventions, suppressed by fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. Women who seek to introspect on their enslavement and want to liberate themselves are labeled mad or witches. The texts of Ananda Devi and Manju Kapur offer a fruitful terrain for a feminist investigation on the female body and sexuality. Reclaiming the female body and identity from the clutches of the patriarchal world is the theme of Devi's and Kapur's texts.

## Analysis of the Novels

As the title of Devi's novel highlights 'Pagli' is a Mauritian creole for 'madness'. The text is a monologue, narrated by the protagonist of the novel, Daya who inhabits the village, Terre Rouge. An adolescent, Daya is raped at the age of thirteen by her cousin. Daya is portrayed as a strong girl who turns a deaf ear to the seducing words of her cousin but she is victimised, raped and exploited by him. Daya feels defeated, collapsed, paralysed and dead. She begins to nurture a poison tree towards her cousin and awaits an occasion to retaliate. Only does her inner conscience know that she is waiting to storm her revenge.

*"J'ai grandi sans autre but que ma vengeance" (55)*

Marriage is a very traditional and religious ceremony by which a woman becomes a man's property. Silenced by her parents, she undergoes the trauma of an arranged marriage with this brutal cousin. She accepts the marriage only to exact her revenge. Her cousin had desecrated her body without her consent and love, Daya, in turn desecrates the institution of marriage. In her ceremonial robe, Daya sits in front of the divine fire listening to the pandit recite his prayers for the union of the couple and the prayers for the bride promising to fulfill her wifely duties. With all revenge and pain, she refuses defiantly to chant the prayers. She recites very wildly her own prayers of resistance and defiance. Daya humiliates her cousin publicly and desecrates their union.

*“ J’aurai toujours le courage de dire non. Je garderai en mémoire le souvenir de ma douleur. Je garderai cet homme droit dans les yeux avec la certitude de ma haine . Je ne rejoindrai pas le chemin tracé de femme d’épouse de mere et de belle- mère.” (75)*

Daya is married to him, she becomes his property. *“J’étais à lui”*. (76) When it’s time for the grand lunch, Daya threatens her husband in silence of having filled his food with poison. To everyone’s stupefaction, he suffocates and perspires, daring not to eat the poisoned food. She has her next chance to humiliate him privately in the bedroom on their wedding night. Her cousin approaches her ardently but reluctantly. No sooner did he touch Daya, she menacingly threatens him. Though the scriptures and rituals proclaim that Daya’s body belongs to her husband, she refuses him the possession of her body. She screams and rubs the *Kumkum* on her forehead. She discards and tramples the sacred ceremonial sari, the sacred jewels and the sacred garland of flowers . She stands naked, terrorizing him with the sacred attire in rugs. The body which had been once a victim reclaims its power and becomes a weapon of her rebellion. The body shall never become his.

*“ Regarde ce corps que tu ne touchera plus jamais. ...  
Regarde ce ventre qui ne portera pas d’enfant de toi.” (77-78)*

The husband who had learnt of only silent and submissive women shivers at seeing this rebellious woman. He had never heard of such a wild feminine existence. The patriarchal laws pass from one generation to the other and the parents set examples of authoritative masculinity and timid and silent femininity to their offsprings. Daya also refuses to conform to the traditional roles of a wife and homekeeper. She daringly denies all her familial duties and responsibilities. She would let the rice burn and enjoy the burnt smell with a smile. She would crash the crockery and heavy pots to shake and destruct the silence of the peaceful home. Daya strongly rejects not only to cooking but also to the traditional gender roles of wife and daughter-in-law.

*“ Moi qui laisse bruler le riz parcequ ej’aime cette odeur d’amertume..., moi qui fais tomber au milieu du silence des après-midi les lourdes marmites en fonte pour le plaisir d’entendre cet oura gan de metal qui se proplonge longtemps dans l’air immobile ...” (23)*

Daya’s association with a prostitute provokes the mofines, the enforcers of patriarchal laws who judge the conduct and behavior of the women in the village. Daya visits her often and

finds comfort and happiness in the arms of Mitsy. The mofines wail to condemn Daya's relationship with the prostitute. She is taken back home and locked in darkness. Daya ignores all the accusatory words of the society and frequents Mitsy's home.

*“ Je rentre au bercail , fille maudite comme toutes les filles qui se refusent ” (66)*

Daya goes a step further to disrupt the phallogocentric rules by inviting home a beggar woman. She adorns her in her own silk sari and gives her a feast to quench her hunger and thirst. When her in-laws notice this scene, they chase the beggar woman and throw her out. She is an untouchable, a person whom the conventional Hindus dare not touch or move with. They are treated as animals and trampled upon. The women at home clean the entire home with detergent and ignite the incense sticks to sanitize and restore their sacred home. Daya is cursed for having disturbed the Hindu culture and beliefs. She is accused for having violated the religious sanctity of the ceremonial sari and the social institution of marriage

Daya continues to disrupt the sanctity of traditions and cultures. She dreams of her extra-marital life with zil , her love. It is the love for Zil which gives her the tonic and spirit for her existence. Zil is the mirror where she admires her look and life. It is Zil who awakens and ignites her passion and female desire.

*“ ...tu es mon miroir dans lequel je me vois belle...”(83) “ Je veux que tu me reclaims, que tu m'exiges. Dis-moi :Tu es à moi. Ce ne serait qu'une vérité. Je le suis. A toi.”( 89)*

Daya prays for an immortal union which would liberate her from the raging society. She loved the sea and the odour of the sea in him and around him. *“ L'odeur de la mer est partout en toi et autour de toi.”* Daya is prepared morally to cross her barriers and fly like a bird in the arms of Zil. Nothing shall creep between the caress of Daya and Zil. Daya confesses that she would never have a baby with her husband but yearns for a baby with Zil which could make their love immortal. It is through Zil that Daya discovers the positive potential of the female body and dwells in an imagined childbirth. Daya asserts her true self by offering her body to her lover and by not offering food to her husband.

She recollects her childhood days when she grew up herself without her mother at her disposal. An old lady raises her instructing her on societal codes and conventions. She always observed that women were born from the seeds of pain. She would chant always that the destiny

of women was written in blood, and inscribed in her body. The body of women always had to be in pain, in the pain of menstruation and in the pain of child birth.

*“ Il y a encore beaucoup de douleurs qui t’attendent, ..., c’est écrit sur ton front et dans tes mains ” (29)*

Daya grows up internalizing such negative representations of femininity but had never yielded to these notions. Daya experiences the positive, rebellious and transgressive potential of her body through her sexual relationship with Zil . She breaks the strangling chains of phallocentrism thanks to her positive weapon, the body. Daya discovers her body, her jouissance and her femininity through her mad love for Zil. Daya is branded as ‘Pagli’- Mad for having disrupted the masculine order and locked in a chicken shed when they discover her adulterous affair with Zil. Daya accepts her new identity because she is madly in love with Zil.

*“ Une Pagli, une folle, oui, pourquoi pas? Ils m’ont donné ce nom et je le prends, puisque je le suis ” ( 13)*

It begins to rain cats and dogs in Terre Rouge. Pagli is locked in a chicken shed for having dishonoured the family. The heavy rain which drenches and engulfs Pagli begins to flood the entire village. She starves but breathes thanks to her violent passion for Zil and left to perish. Daya is portrayed as a desiring woman whose relationship with Zil gives her a sexual and psychological liberation from the traumatic patriarchal world

*“Il y a toi.Ou ce que tu as en fin réussi à me donner. il y a un enfant de toi.” (139)*

*“ Je dois tenir, pour donner naissance a ta fille ”(139).* Daya breathes her last.

Manju Kapur is an Indian English novelist who highlights in breaking the constructions of feminine stereotypes. ‘Difficult Daughters’ is an enticing novel which portrays the lives of Indian women which revolve around cooking, washing, weaving, mending, growing, picking, chopping and blending and urgent love-making.

Ida, the daughter of the protagonist Virmati recollects the bygone days of her dead mother who had lead a transgressive life trampling patriarchal norms for the fulfillment of her love and pleasure. Virmati was the eldest among eleven children at home. She gets tuned to the feminine and maternal duties and responsibilities owing to her mother’s repeated pregnancies. Virmati’s mother , Kasturi, a patriarchal construct brings up her daughter instilling in her the traditional values of womanhood- virtue, chastity, self-sacrifice, nurturance and devotion. Kasturi preached

that a woman's sacred enclosure was her home and marriage and maternity were her divine responsibilities.

*"A woman's shaan is her her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shaadi."*(16)

It was Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin who inspired her and sowed the seeds of autonomy and independence in Virmati's minds. Virmati dreamt of an intellectual life which could set the platform for a liberated life. She admired her cousin and marveled at her dominant status.

*"Viru, How much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life , in being independent."*(17)

*"... times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?"* (18)

Virmati struggles to complete her class X and proceed towards her Fine Arts Degree. She finds it difficult to strike a balance between her studies and her domestic duties. Virmati was thirteen year old then and her parents and elders at home decide that she shall be married within two years. Virmati trembles at the fast approaching rites. It is at this juncture that a professor, Harish Chandra rents a portion of Virmati's residence with his wife, daughter and mother, returning from Oxford with impeccable knowledge in art, music and literature. Virmati and the other little ones visit their neighbours often and exchange food. Harish glorified woman's education but there was a scar and pain within himself that his wife was illiterate. He had taken all measures to instruct his wife but in vain. She was a traditional Indian wife who excelled in domestic and culinary art.

When Virmati completed her Fine Arts degree, her parents were happy to start the preparations for her marriage. Her fiance's parents thought that she was well qualified to be the wife of their son, the canal engineer. Unfortunately the fiance's father dies and the marriage had to be postponed. This favours Virmati who enters AS college, 'the *bastion of male learning*' (45). It is at this institution that the professor served and assured Virmati's parents of her safety. Her bright dazzling face and gaze stirred feelings of amour in the professor who desired to possess her and proposes his love.

The professor replaces Virmati's thoughts of her fiancé. Virmati completes her BA and her wedding date is fixed. Her thoughts were shuttling between her sacred marriage and her desire for Harish. She was afraid of betraying and humiliating her family. Mustering all her courage and will, she discloses to her mother her disinterest in marriage. Her rejection of marriage baffles Kasturi who screams and yells at her daughter

Virmati has a passion for higher studies at Lahore. It is also a pretext to reject her marriage and cherish her love with the married professor. She is quite conscious that her affair with a married man would fetch humiliation to herself and family. Society would discard her femininity and give her a harsh and shameful label. She shall be cursed, spitted on and looked down upon for having trampled the conventions and culture of the society. Overcoming her fear, Virmati gets determined in resisting her marriage. It is her desire for love and education that gives her the strength to rebel against her family.

*“What is wrong with not wanting to marry?” (58. Kasturi bumps her daughter’s head against the wall and curses her. “What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one ? (59)*

Ignoring the claims of Virmati began the wedding preparations. Virmati rushes for a clandestine meeting with the professor. He embraces her and gives the input of courage to decide her own life and self. Virmati’s thoughts were focused on his touch for which she was prepared to lose everything. Unable to yield herself to her parents’ sacred responsibility, Virmati leaves a letter to the professor and drowns herself in the overflowing canal water. With fear and tears, the professor’s wife Ganga conveys the news to Virmati’s mother. They rush towards Tarsikka to rescue their daughter. Thanks to the lord, Virmati is saved by the local men. Her father and grandfather thank the saviours and lead their agitated daughter home. Virmati is clouded with a sense of shame, fear and guilt of her brave thoughts of renunciation.

The family raged, grieved and interrogated. They mused on several questions: Why did she run away and bring humiliation? Why did she pass the message to a stranger? Why didn’t she have the least consideration for her family? Has her education misled her? Virmati was very weak and fragile but her response was quite daring.

*“I want to study.” (86)*

*“I don’t want to marry” (87)*

Her mother denied her urge stating *“You know every girl has to go to her own home.” (87)*

Observing Virmati’s firm resistance to marriage, She is locked in the storeroom amidst foodgrains and spices and arranged for Indu to marry her fiancé. Virmati’s body and self were associated to objects meant for consumption. Letters of love and passion float between Harish and Virmati with the help of Virmati’s youngest sister Paro who is barely three years old.



Virmati affirms “ *If I was to be rubber doll for others to move as they willed ,then I didn’ want to live*” (92) She resisted being an object in the clutches of patriarchal norms. She thought of her individuality, her self , her existence and her own body and desire. She longed to live her own life and let her body feel it’s own desire and pleasure. She grieves over her status at home and burns with anger and humiliation.

“ *I am just like the sacks of wheat and dal here without my own life.*(93)

Harish also sows the seeds of independence in Virmati’s minds. He contests that education shall be a liberating force releasing her from the chains of tradition. Virmati gets determined to pursue her education at Lahore with her family’s approval. Kasturi accompanies Virmati to Lahore to ensure the security of the training college.

“ *I’ve come. I’m going to be on my own, this is a new beginning.*( 112)

She hugged her mother and relished the atmosphere of Lahore. She was light and floating in air. She longed to fly with her own wings. She admired the institution which promised her autonomy and freedom. Virmati settles down and gets acquainted with new friends. The professor attempts to meet Virmati but has no chance. Luckily, he is successful the fourth time. He worshipped Virmati and expressed his ardent passion for her. He promises to marry her and spends his Diwali purchasing an exquisite sari for her and adoring her glowing body. Her fear of her family, her guilt, the terror of being exposed to society fades and vanishes. But she was ashamed of having a clandestine affair. Her heart and mind were seeking marriage to validate and fulfill their relationship. Besides, she is overpowered by shame as she saw her friends engaging themselves in constructive work fighting for the nation whilst she had broken her engagement, tarnished her family’s reputation, locked in the cellar and then reached Lahore only to be his secret wife with shame. Virmati sought recognition in the society as his wife. “*Why don’t we get married?*”(149).*Fulfillment lay in their union.*(154)

Very soon, Virmati discovers that her foetus was popping in her womb. The child was a product of their love but its birth shall further stigmatise her and humiliate her family. She decides to tackle her problems independently, claiming responsibility for her life with power and strength. She seeks her friend’s help and has her baby aborted. She yearned to meet the professor and throw her body into his arms to feel his love and pour over her agony. She could never dream of a man beyond the professor as her body always longed for his touch. Virmati



finishes her studies and returns to Amritsar. Fortune favours Virmati when her qualifications attract the queen of Nahan who appoints her as the headmistress of her school. There is again struggle at home when the subject of marriage takes the upper hand. Virmati's distress renders her stubborn as a rock. She becomes violent and hysterical preparing herself to face any disgrace that would rebuke her.

Virmati always had the urge to broaden her horizons and cherished her independence. She established good rapport with the teachers and administered the institution successfully. She was proud of shouldering the responsibilities of the institution and sensed the satisfaction of achievement. From time to time, she had a longing for the professor who reciprocated his love by visiting her at Nahan. Virmati continues to be his secret wife and spends the night with him with no fear for anybody. Much to the shock and the dismay of the queen and his minister who dismiss her from the institution!

*"How many new beginnings had her relationship with the professor led her to?" (197)*

She left the institution giving herself the courage to forge her identity elsewhere. Virmati had no other go but to seek the help of the professor's friend. He sends Harish an urgent telegram in the name of Virmati. No sooner did he arrive that Harish's friend compelled him to marry Virmati with threats that the professor will have to lose Virmati. The next morning, Harish arranges a pandit and buys a golden bridal sari for Virmati. The ceremony with its rituals are performed smoothly, the couple pronounced husband and wife. Virmati leaves for Amritsar with her husband who is no longer her secret hubby. Harish enters his home dreading to face the family. His mother Kishori Devi and his wife, Ganga panic and burst out.

They yelled, cried and had to remain passive. They made their way towards the other room leaving the domain, the bed room to the new couple. Kishori Devi declared *"We have to accept. This is our lot in life"* (211). Virmati had nothing to do at home rather than making love with Harish to satisfy her intense feminine desire. All the household duties were fulfilled by Ganga who treated Virmati as a stranger. She feared visiting her parents either. Though she had transgressed, she tries visiting home but with hopelessness. Her mother, Kasturi flung her chappals over her back to express her fury and turned her back.

*"You've destroyed our family, you badmash, you randi ! You've blackened our face everywhere!" (221)*

Virmati walked back home retrospecting if all her familial ties were broken. She was prepared for this reception but still had a wavering hope of care and concern. Virmati's only pleasure was in bed with Harish – that was her only domain. Besides, she found happiness in joining the male gathering which discussed several global issues and in relishing the hot samosas and kachoris that Ganga prepared. Alarmingly, one day, she learns the death of her father and rushes home. With hesitation, she made her way home. She was conscious of the curious gaze around her and covered her face with a dupatta. On the other hand, she was shocked to notice Harish being accepted and his condolences accepted whilst she had wandered like a pariah on the outskirts of the family. Her humiliating status added fuel to the fire burning within her. She interrogated the inferior status of women who were marginalized and objectified. The next morning, She wakes up to learn that she was pregnant. Virmati, whose fulfillment lay with the corporal union with Harish blossoms but unfortunately, she undergoes a miscarriage and turns pale and weak.

Observing her frustration, Harish sends her to Lahore to pursue her MA in philosophy. Virmati spends her time in the company of books at the library. The urge in travelling to meet Virmati brings back the romance and charm in life. She also refuses to go back home during the vacation and returns only after acquiring her post graduation. Amidst tension in the scene of pre-independence, Virmati delivers her baby Ida.

Ananda Devi's text and that of Manju Kapur focus on the female body which is the portrayal of the self. It is the symbol of identity and the medium of communication to the external world. The female body emerges as the celebratory positive source of abundant energy, desire, pleasure and agency provoking women to seek the path of resistance, rebellion and recuperation of their bodies to assert their identities. The body becomes the battlefield where woman fights for liberation. The French Feminist, Hélène Cixous fires at patriarchy which fix women as commodities and sexual objects traded among men. Cixous' 'Écriture féminine', exemplified in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' communicates between language and feminine sexuality. Cixous seeks to liberate the suppressed desires and sexual impulses of woman. Cixous' Écriture Feminine invites women to write her body in order to discover herself. She must explore her jouissance, her sexual pleasure so as to break phallogocentrism and change the world. Cixous affirms that once woman reclaims her body, she can reclaim her position in the

world and gain autonomy. Cixous dreams that by transgressing the masculine constructs, women shall live in a deconstructed world with neither rigorous codes of conduct nor social, cultural or traditional values. The novels of Ananda Devi and Manju Kapur draw from these critical writings to determine how their protagonists differ from the stereotypical women in transgressing the patriarchal world. Cixous writes in *The Laugh Of the Medusa*

*“Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth”.*(350,351)

The novels of Ananda Devi and Manju Kapur draw from these critical writings to determine how their protagonists differ from the stereotypical women in transgressing the patriarchal world. Cixous writes in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Devi’s heroine Daya takes her last breath in the memory of Zil. Pagli is a new woman who tramples the moral codes and conventions to find herself anew and her own feminine desire. Transgressing the laws of patriarchy, Daya gains autonomy of her body without any humiliation. Daya celebrates her feminine sexuality which has achieved its self-fulfillment through an exotic sexual relationship with Zil. Daya discovers her body, her jouissance and her femininity through her mutual love with Zil. Kapur’s heroine Virmati transgresses her family, society’s moral codes to seek pleasure in the arms of her desired man, the married professor. She also establishes her identity as a well-educated and enlightened woman not confining herself to domesticity but devoting herself to teaching. Like Daya, Virmati is a new woman who achieves fulfillment through an erotic relationship with a married professor Harish. She gains autonomy of herself without any humiliation. Daya and Virmati challenge the constructs of patriarchy and become self-directed women who sculpt their own life to satisfy and fulfill the desires of their body.

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