Converging Divergence in the Select Novels of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan

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Abstract
The present paper focuses on the theme of converging divergence in the novels such as Difficult Daughters (1998) and Custody (2011) by Manju Kapur, Sisters (1992) and Sethji (2012) by Shobhaa De and The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) and In Times of Siege (2003) by Githa Hariharan. The tension between the desire of people for independence and the social, cultural and familial forces that limit them is encapsulated by the phrase converging divergence which frequently results in moments of reconciliation or unresolved conflict amidst India's economic liberalization and partition. Kapur's realist stories examine middle-class women's battles against patriarchal standards. Elite urban settings where materialist and political aspirations collide with gender and structural limitations are highlighted by Shobhaa De's sensationalist lens. In order to address the interaction of individual and ideological liberties in postcolonial India, Hariharan's poetic style combines mythology with socio-political criticism. The novels traverse the conflict between individual agency and collective identity, personal aspirations and societal constraints and tradition and modernity through gendered and class-based perspectives. These conflicts are exacerbated by historical contexts such as Partition, economic liberalization and post 9/11 communalism which expose the fragmented character of Indian identity. While Hariharan and Kapur provide feminist critiques, De's emphasis on drama occasionally restricts the depth of subversive thought. Together these pieces shed light on the intricacies of identity, gender, and power highlighting the ongoing fight for autonomy in the face of convergent socio-cultural forces. The aim of the present article is to analyse female desire, sibling rivalry, converging, divergence, tradition, modernity, identity and patriarchy in their novels.
Keywords: Converging, Divergence, Tradition, Modernity, Identity and Patriarchy

Introduction

The works of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan strike a deep chord with the theme of converging divergence wherein personal desires, identities and aspirations clash with cultural norms, societal expectations or familial obligations but find moments of tension or reconciliation. This paper examines how this theme is conveyed through the characters, settings and narratives of the novels *Difficult Daughters* and Custody by Kapur, Sisters and *Sethji* by De and *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *In Times of Siege* by Hariharan. The scope of the research may be on culture, identity crisis, human relationships, women in culture, conflict, a feminine perspective, rural life, mother-daughter relationships in these women novelists.

Review of Literature

Prabhakar rightly points out: "Kasturi, Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala, Swarnalatha, and Ganga are the difficult daughter in Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. Virmati has been portrayed as a difficult daughter, a scapegoat under the ruthless patriarchal dominance, who is caught up and sandwiched between tradition and modernity" (2928).

According to Valantina, "Shobhaa De has tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which unlucky and abandoned woman longs for love and pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom" (59)

G. Umadevi says: "Hariharan's novel depicts the changing status of women in India. Women are shown as opening the windows and breaking the barriers. In *In Times of Seige*, Meena is the voice of Hariharan. She is the one who forces Shiv to fight against the pseudo-secularist" (172).

Anita Singh observes: "*Difficult Daughters and Thousand Faces of Night* feature strong female protagonists who strive to make it in a male dominated world" (24).

Methodology

Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan explore the lives and experiences of Indian women, frequently addressing issues of identity, social expectations, and the fight for independence within patriarchal systems in their novels. The novelists illustrate the intricacies of female characters resolving social and personal difficulties through a variety of narrative styles in *Difficult Daughters* and *Custody* by Kapur, *Sisters and Sethji* by De and *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *In Times of Siege* by Hariharan.

Converging Divergence

Each author offers a unique perspective influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds and the theme is expressed in the conflict between tradition and modernity, individual agency and collective identity and personal aspirations versus societal constraints. Through Virmati, the main character in *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur examines how differing forces of tradition and social expectations can coexist with individual desires. "She wanted to be a new woman, but the weight of the old one was always with her, pulling her back into the house, into silence" (Kapur 145). This quote captures Virmati's struggle to diverge from traditional roles through education and love, yet her convergence with patriarchal expectations as she remains tied to familial duties.

Virmati's love for a married professor set against the backdrop of India's Partition pushes her to rebel against her family's expectations in their pursuit of education and independence. She is unable to completely break free from patriarchal structures though as her relationship forces her into a new kind of subservience. This tension is further embodied by the narrator of the book, Ida, Virmati's daughter who struggles with her mother's legacy while establishing her own identity. Through the generational divide Kapur exemplifies convergent divergence as Virmati and Ida's pursuit of selfhood depart from conventional roles but unite in their mutual resistance to patriarchal norms. This internal and external fragmentation in which national and personal identities are split and entwined is symbolized by the Partition. "I wanted to know her, to understand why she had done what she did, but all I had were fragments, and those fragments cut me" (Kapur 12). Ida's reflection as the narrator highlights the generational divergence between her and Virmati, yet their convergence in shared struggles against societal norms.

In *Custody*, Kapur moves to a modern urban environment and explores how societal pressures and personal desires diverge within the institution of marriage. The protagonist Shagun's desire for personal fulfillment is reflected in her decision to leave her husband Raman for a more glitzy life with Ashok. "She thought she could choose her life, but the world had other plans, dragging her back to what she was supposed to be—a mother, a wife" (Kapur 89). Shagun's attempt to diverge through her affair with Ashok is curtailed by converging societal and legal pressures, epitomized in the custody battle. "The new India sparkled with malls and dreams, but for Raman, it only meant new ways to lose what he held dear" (Kapur 203). This reflects the divergence enabled by economic liberalization, contrasted with the convergence of traditional family values that Raman clings to.

But the social criticism and ensuing legal disputes over child custody coincide with her departure from conventional roles as a wife and mother. In contrast Raman negotiates his own departure from the submissive role of the husband by exercising agency during the custody dispute while still conforming to the norms of male authority. Kapur emphasizes how these tensions are exacerbated by economic liberalization in India in the 1990s as traditional values collide with consumerist desires resulting in a fractured middle-class identity. Converging social and legal structures frequently limit individual divergence leaving characters in a liminal space of partial freedom as the novel emphasizes.

In *De's Sethji* and Sisters, Mallika and Alisha two half-sisters who inherit their father's business empire are the subjects of Shobhaa De's *Sisters* which explores convergent divergence. As they negotiate corporate power and interpersonal relationships in Mumbai's elite circles their opposing personalities, Mallika's ambition and Alisha's rebellion, clash. Their shared fight against a male-dominated corporate environment and societal expectations of women's roles however is where they all come together. "Mallika wanted the boardroom, Alisha the bedroom, but both ended up fighting the same men for their place" (De 112). This encapsulates the divergent ambitions of the sisters, converging in their shared struggle against patriarchal corporate and social structures. Alisha's pursuit of freedom through wealth illustrates divergence, but societal expectations of women's roles converge to limit her. It is apt to remark: "Money gave her wings, but the cage was still there, gilded and locked" (De 178).

Shobhaa De presents a glamorous urban India where traditional gender norms converge to restrict their agency despite modernity providing opportunities for divergence, career sexuality. The sisters eventual reconciliation shows how their disparate paths eventually came together indicating that conflict can lead to unity. De's emphasis on materialism and power relations draws attention to the ways that social norms continue to be a unifying factor even as economic privilege shapes the extent of divergence. De examines convergent divergence in *Sethji* by examining the relationship between familial loyalty and political ambition.

The corrupt politician Sethji and his daughter-in-law Amrita represent opposing desires: Amrita longs for independence and moral rectitude while Sethji seeks power and control. "Amrita thought she could escape Sethji's shadow, but family was the chain that bound her to his game" (De 94). Amrita's divergent desire for autonomy clashes with the converging force of familial and political loyalty to Sethji. "In this new India, power was the only truth, and every truth came with a price" (De 231) and this highlights the divergence of individual morality against the converging reality of systemic corruption. In the political dynasty of the family where individual goals are intertwined with group survival their paths meet. Amrita's attempts to escape Sethji's sway are foiled by the combined forces of patriarchal control and political corruption demonstrating how systemic forces supplant individual differences. De uses satire to examine India's political system highlighting how modernity, urbanization media, fosters diversity but also converges with established power structures trapping people in a never-ending cycle of compromise.

Hariharan explores convergent divergence in *The Thousand Faces of Night* through Devi who negotiates the conflict between her Western education and the conventional norms of Indian womanhood. Devi's quest for emotional and intellectual fulfillment parallels the mythological archetypes. Sita and Gandhari evoked by her mother's stories but it also deviates from her roles as daughter, wife and daughter-in-law. Because they provide resilient role models while upholding patriarchal norms. These myths both empower and constrain Devi. "Sita, Gandhari, Damayanti—they were her mirrors, but they also bound her, their stories chaining her to a past she wanted to escape" (Hariharan 67). Devi's divergence through education and personal choice is tempered by the converging weight of mythological archetypes. "She wanted a life of her own making, but every step forward brought her back to the threshold of someone else's story" (Hariharan 132) and it reflects Devi's struggle to diverge from traditional roles, converging with societal expectations of womanhood.

Hariharan draws attention to the differences in individual desires, and the similarities in social

judgment by using Devi's relationships with her husband Mahesh and her lover Gopal. Devi departing to pursue her own path at the novels conclusion implies a partial escape from convergence but the narratives open-endedness highlights the tension that persists. Hariharan's feminist analysis shows how conflicting goals and overlapping cultural narratives interact to shape women's identities.

Converging divergence is explored through the conflict between individual intellectual freedom and communal orthodoxy in *In Times of Siege* which moves to a larger socio-political canvas. A history professor named Shiv encounters criticism for a class he taught on the medieval reformer Basava that questions Hindu nationalist myths. The growing wave of fundamentalism combines with his divergence, supporting secular critical inquiry, to endanger his safety and career. At the same time his relationship with Meena, a young woman recuperating from an injury illustrates how mentor-student dynamics and conflicting aspirations for independence can personally converge. Hariharan depicts a post 9/11 India in which local and international tensions intensifies these conflicts and demonstrate how combining political and cultural forces limit individual differences. Gopal analyzes, how *In Times of Siege* addresses the convergence of communalist forces with individual intellectual divergence, situating Hariharan's work in the context of post 9/11 India. "Hariharan's narrative pits the individual's quest for truth against the collective force of orthodoxy, revealing the fragility of secular divergence" (Gopal 150).

In the midst of their continued differences the novel's resolution in which Shiv and Meena tentatively unite, suggests a shaky hope. "Shiv thought truth was his weapon, but the mob outside his door saw it as a threat" (Hariharan 45). Shiv's divergent commitment to secular scholarship converges with the communalist backlash he faces. "Meena's body was healing, but her mind was caught in the siege, just like Shiv's" (Hariharan 109). This illustrates the convergence of personal, Meena's recovery and political, Shiv's ideological battle, divergences in a shared struggle.

Each author's work reflects the theme of convergent divergence in a unique way influenced by their thematic and stylistic priorities. The stresses of societal convergence especially, marriage, family on divergent desires, education, love are highlighted in Kapur's realist narratives which center on the struggles of middle-class women. Bose's book analyzes the works of Kapur and Hariharan, focusing on how women's narratives negotiate identity and autonomy within postcolonial and patriarchal frameworks. It discusses *Difficult Daughters* and *The Thousand Faces of Night* as texts that explore the tension between individual divergence and societal convergence. "Kapur and Hariharan craft heroines who challenge tradition but remain entangled in its web, reflecting the postcolonial Indian woman's liminal identity" (Bose 92).

Elite urban environments, where political and economic power both reinforce differences and converge with gender norms and systemic corruption are highlighted by Shobhaa De's sensationalist style. De's portrayal of urban Indian women in *Sisters* and *Sethji*, argue that her sensationalist style underscores the tension between materialist divergence and societal convergence in elite settings. "De's characters embody the paradox of modern India: empowered by wealth yet constrained by gendered expectations" (Sharma 130).

Through the exploration of how cultural and political convergence shapes individual divergence Hariharan's poetic and intellectual approach incorporates mythology and history into personal narratives. A major theme in these books is the conflict between tradition and modernity. The characters Devi and Shiv from Hariharan, Mallika and Amrita from De and Virmati and Shagun from Kapur all aim to deviate from expected roles but they are constrained by patriarchy family or communalism.

The historical backdrops, economic liberalization in *Custody* and *Sisters*, post 9/11 communalism in *In Times of Siege* and partition in *Difficult Daughter* samplify the tensions and demonstrate how micro-level conflicts are shaped by macro-level shifts. One crucial lens for convergent divergence is gender. Hariharan and Kapur openly criticize patriarchal systems demonstrating how cultural and familial norms limit women's individuality. De draws attention to gender dynamics in the political and

corporate arenas where women's socioeconomic status both permits and restricts their uniqueness despite being less explicitly feminist. Class also matters, Hariharan's intellectual protagonists' struggle with ideological conflicts while Kapur's middle-class protagonists encounter different limitations than De's elite characters. Menon examines how Kapur's and Hariharan's novels address the conflict between personal agency and cultural norms, particularly in *Difficult Daughters* and *In Times of Siege*. The article highlights converging divergence as a feminist strategy to navigate identity. "The protagonists' quests for selfhood are marked by a constant negotiation between divergence from patriarchal norms and convergence with cultural expectations" (Menon 349).

In the context of Indian literature, the idea of convergent divergence is especially relevant to larger postcolonial and feminist discourses. By presenting characters who straddle tradition and modernity individual and collective these novels challenge the one-dimensional representation of Indian identity and expose its fractured nature. However, the authors' narrow focus on particular urban and class contexts, intellectual in Hariharan, middle-class in Kapur and elite in De, reduces the breadth of their critique by excluding voices from the countryside or underrepresented groups. Furthermore, De's sensationalism occasionally weakens the subversive potential of her stories by emphasizing drama over criticism whereas Kapur and Hariharan focus heavily on feminist themes.

These novels resolutions show different reactions to convergent divergence. Partially successful characters such as Shagun's custody struggle and Ida's self-awareness are frequently stuck in liminal spaces in Kapur's works. Amrita's captivity and the sisters' unity are two examples of how De's stories tend toward compromise or reconciliation. Hariharan presents a shaky hope with Devi and Shiv paving shaky new paths. These results highlight the intricacy of converging divergence where moments of agency arise through struggle but complete freedom is uncommon. Paranjape discusses Kapur, De, and Hariharan within the broader context of Indian English fiction, focusing on how their works negotiate modernity and tradition, a key aspect of converging divergence. "The Indian novel in English captures the dialectic of tradition and modernity, where individual aspirations are both enabled and curtailed by cultural forces" (Paranjape 78)

Conclusion

To sum up, *Difficult Daughters*, *Custody*, *Sisters*, *Sethji*, The Thousand Faces of Night and In Times of Siege all effectively illustrate the theme of convergent divergence by showing characters balancing their own goals with those of society. In order to provide insights into the ongoing fight for agency in the face of convergent forces each author develops a unique story that captures the complexity of identity gender and power in contemporary India. These women writers have used extensively innovative narrative techniques. Their art of storytelling differs from their predecessors.

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