



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.1., 2017 (Jan-Mar.)



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MANJU KAPUR'S
DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper concentrates on Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters*, set against the background of India during 1940s. It presents the issues of an upper white collar class urban Arya Samaj Punjabi family in Amritsar. The image of women in Indian novels has experienced many changes amidst the most recent four decades. Many Indian feminist writers composed novels, which uncovered the original state of Indian culture and its effect on women. Manju Kapur is considered to be one of the obvious novelists who expounds on the issues identified with women in the general public. In her novels, Manju Kapur represents her female characters as an impression of the basic Indian women battling for their rights in a patriarchal society. Their internal sentiments, longings, sufferings, and battles have been plainly depicted in her books. The novel manages issues like women education and female flexibility. In this novel there are various types of women protagonists who belong to different generations. She plunges into the mind of Indian ladies living in joint families under male mastery.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala

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Literature is the reflection of the society. It has major impact on the development of society, political system, culture, and civilization. Manju Kapur, in her novel presents the problem of the Indian women in the male-dominated society. Manju Kapur vividly shows the importance of education and freedom for Indian women. Through the character of Virmati, the protagonist of the novel, Manju Kapur makes the society aware of women's inner conflict and the cultural diversion in their life. She proves herself that there is no hierarchical division from male to express her 'self'. The women characters in this novel have explored themselves to establish an identity, not imposed by the male patriarchal society. Based on these perceptions many Indian novelists like Manju Kapur have tried to bring out the self-sacrificing nature of women and their sufferings throughout life.

Manju Kapur is a feminist who lives in Delhi and teaches in Delhi University. Her novels are concerned with feminism and its impact on her female characters. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* focuses on the

relationship between the mothers and daughters who belong to different generations. It is the story of a woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and her longing for education, affection, and freedom. There are different perspectives between the female characters about their exciting culture and norms. When Kasthuri, the mother of the protagonist, Virmati, compels her daughter to accept the marriage as a traditional norm, Virmati refuses to accept it; instead she seeks knowledge. The narrator of the novel, Ida, is Virmati's daughter. Through her voice the novelist distinguishes the women from three generations. Manju Kapur takes Virmati as a weapon of her writings and through her she highlights the problems of marginalization suffered by women who are primarily concerned about their individuality and dignity.

Virmati, the heroine of the novel, is the eldest daughter of a family, who has many responsibilities towards her siblings. As Kasthuri, mother of Virmati is busy in delivering a baby year after year, it is Virmati who is in charge of the family and sacrifices herself to bring up her siblings. She remains as second mother for those children. Amidst this Virmati has no time to realize herself. She loses her days in taking care of the family. The family's old tradition of getting marriage is delayed for Virmati as she doesn't have any interest in it. Though her mother forces to get married she ignores, because she has interest towards education. She has keen interest in completing Fine Arts. In addition to this, Virmati longs to have independence, she wants to have her own space and freedom and her own identity.

Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin is a symbol of modernity whom Virmati inspires a lot. Kapur portrays Shakuntala as an independent, defiant, and assertive girl. She does not have any limitations towards the tradition of getting marriage, and family relationship. This is shown through the voice of Shakuntala "These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else" (17).

Shakuntala having been inspired Virmati for tasting the wine of the freedom, encourages her for freedom and equal rights for women in the patriarchal society. As Virmati has many responsibilities towards her family she eventually fails in her studies. So her mother insists her to get married. Meanwhile Virmati enters into the scandalous relationship with the married neighbour, Harish, a professor. She is haunted by a deep sense of guilt whenever the professor indulges in illicit relationship. So now she thinks that marriage is the ultimate goal of existence in the society to live in. The official marriage, a social and public acknowledgement is a must for her. This approval establishes her identity and enables her to free from insecurity and uncertainty.

Virmati, the poor soul of the patriarchal society does not realize her fate after marriage. Though Harish has his concern towards her, the family never. After all the years of struggle and hardship to her family, Virmati expects that the new family relationship will console her. But the situation is upside down. The first wife of Harish does not allow her to be free with the family and even she is not allowed to enter the kitchen. She does not secure any space for herself in the family. Even Kasthuri blames her for all the problems. Kapur recklessly says, "Ever since the visit home, Virmati had felt blank and dazed. She didn't know how to tell the professor what had happened, she could barely understand it herself. Were all ties between herself and her family broken?" (222). Virmati is heartbroken when she analyzes the society's view on woman as well as man who marries a second wife. When Virmati's family bond is broken she is not allowed to attend her father's funeral ceremony, whereas her husband is accepted everywhere. She accepts her mistake and feels that despite all struggle for freedom and equality, Indian society has not yet attained its fulfilment in banishing patriarchal influence.

The next phase of problem arises when Virmati gives birth to her girl baby. As a remembrance of independence she names her baby as Bharati. But this is rejected by her husband saying that, "I don't wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred?" (276). Though the country has got freedom, the man who speaks about the country's freedom, cannot provide freedom for his wife even for trivial matters in the family. When India was fighting for the freedom from British government, Virmati literally fights for her own identity and affirmation. Her life from beginning to end is full

of sufferings, searching for 'self', her own identity, conflict between mind and heart. She loses all her hope. Even her daughter doesn't want to be like her mother.

Manju Kapur's novels are self-reliant in which the theme of the novels has been focused mainly on female characters. Ida- Virmati's only daughter and the narrator of the novel who travels throughout the story with the readers, reflects the modern era after the independence. She has different attitude towards tradition and modernity and strong and clear minded towards her problem, which is totally opposite to her grandmother and mother. She wants to lead her life in a free manner and face the trials and tribulations with full enthusiasm and self-confidence. Manju Kapur has created many female characters with different attitudes towards their new problems. While Kasthuri and Virmati view their problems as the product of patriarchal society, Ida looks forward the problems as the foundation for individuality.

Ida considers Virmati as her soul companion although her mother is not physically present. Manju Kapur brings out characters of Virmati and Ida side by side to show the contradiction between the characters to the readers. While Virmati struggles to explore her identity Ida breaks up her marriage as she is denied by her husband. She frees herself from the marriage bond. She is not ready to accept any social conventions and customs imposed by the society. She possesses the mental strength and courage which Virmati lacks.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is a woman activist's talk not on the grounds that she is a lady expounding on women's issues. But since she tries to comprehend a lady both as a lady and as an individual pressurized by obvious and imperceptible contexts. She displays a look at women's liberation remembering the Indian setting. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* figures out how to be at the same time both Indian and Universal. Hence, *Difficult Daughters* demonstrates Kapur's development as a woman's activist in Indian writing in English. Conceived out of commonly Indian circumstance, the female characters in the novel are gotten amongst custom and advancement, self-glorification and self-acknowledgment, and self-declaration and encounter. It just outcomes in self-alienation and they turn into an image of female creative ability reacting to weights and persecutions of patriarchal culture where marriage is seen just as a bargain. Though *Difficult Daughters* is viewed as a feminist artistic work, it handles the issues confronted by Indian ladies with credibility and knowledge. It symbolizes a battle against taboos, social limitations, and artificially implicit rules in a conventional society. Manju Kapur is one of the women authors from India who's protagonists are women attempt to keep up an adjustment constantly. Their agony has made them solid and they attempting to set themselves free from the shackles of custom and different partialities. Her distraction with the female rebel against profound established family values and the organization of marriage is the point of convergence of enthusiasm.

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