

## Indian women in the perspective of manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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### Abstract

Manju Kapur's novel "Difficult Daughter" is a story of a daughter back into her mother's painful past. It spans the genres of fiction and history and falters in both. The dream of independence and decolonization were portrayed clearly.

**Keywords:** relationships in manju kapur's difficult daughters background of the novel

### Introduction

In India, Women play a very important role in society. Women in India get a prominent role in all walks of life. Now women are shining in every field and are doing as well as men. For example- Mizoram has a higher proportion of women in its population than men. However most of the states in India have fewer women than men in their population. New colleges for women are being opened India all the time. Even male colleges are changing to co-educational faculties. Women are working on night shifts in their employment, just as men do. That is one side of the story. On the other hand, you should look at the other side of these optimistic statements. The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is on the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left the secured domain of their *Home* and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. They had proven themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female. There are 933 female per thousand males in India according to the census of 2001, which is much below the world average of 990 females. There are many problems which women in India have to go through daily. These problems have become the part and parcel of life of Indian women and some of them have accepted them as their fate.

Indian authors pay attention on the struggling life of women in their own *Home*. Manju Kapur is a writer who portrays the life of a woman especially Indian women's very minutely in her novels.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is a story of a girl from a wealthy and distinguished family residing in Lahore before Independence. Virmati's mother, Kasturi is educated too. Though Kasturi and other family members believe in education for girls, also opine that girls must be married off at the completion of necessary education. Girls are not encouraged for higher studies and selecting a carrier or a life partner for themselves. However, Shakuntala, Virmati's

cousin, is a M.Sc. in Chemistry and works at Lahore College. She is strong-willed and career oriented. She is self-assured and cherishes the idea of being something other than wife. In an intimate conversation, she tells Virmati:

Here we are fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry and nothing else <sup>1</sup>.

Shakuntala always inspire virmati, the protagonist, think above the rested interest and get involved and light for social and national cause. She says:

Time is changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you <sup>2</sup>?

Virmati too often marvels at the ways of Shakuntala, her cousin and has all appreciation for her, when virmati comes to know that Shakuntala reads papers, attends seminars and travels with her friends Virmati replies.

I want to be like you, Pehnji <sup>3</sup>.

This reflects that the seeds for aspiration and emancipation are already lying there in the heart of the protagonist even much before she meets Harish, the professor. We find the novelist speaking the protagonist's mind in the very ensuing paragraph:

It was useless looking for answers inside the *Home*. One had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore Colleges <sup>4</sup>.

As the story proceeds, we are apprised of the fact that Virmati, the representative of pre-independent India is not granted the freedom to pursue her studies. As a corollary, the task of shaping her future lies in her own hands. She feels awfully bad when she fails her F.A. and her parents start looking for a match for her but she insists on reappearing in the F.A. exams and starts studying in the college. Harish, the professor's neighbor who makes her understand his need for companionship, in reality takes interest in her as a beautiful female being. Manju kapur while describing the classroom scene writes:

Ignoring the half-dozen young men who rose to give her their place, Virmati sat on the floor in front of his desk, looking up at him with large eyes. The professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily <sup>5</sup>.

Further, in last line of chapter VIII Manju Kapur remarks the following where she informs the readers how Virmati finally

get embroiled in professor's wily predilection:

But by then, the professor's desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind <sup>6</sup>.

Her *Virmati* reminds us of *Sarita*, the protagonist of the *Dark Holds No Terror*, a novel by Shashi Deshpande. *Virmati* like *Sarita* dares to challenge the age-old traditions. The only difference is that *Sarita* goes to marry a man outside of her cost where as *virmati* marries *Harish* who also does not belong to Punjabi community but she agrees to become a second wife. However, both the marital bonds finally prove to be fruitless. Nevertheless, like *Sarita*, *virmati* sounds bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented when she lift cudgels against male chauvinism yet she realizes the hopelessness of her illicit love soon as she becomes the second wife of *Harish*, she turns into a block of wood even before the first year of her marriage lapses. In her husband's company, she becomes a penumbra, a cast shadow as she fails to excise her rights and freedom as an individual. Though the social opprobrium is not expressed openly, yet she apparently becomes isolated, silent and withdrawn. She is unable to discover her own identity in *Harish's* world. She fails to get a sense of belongingness, which is usually share by couples. She finds herself dislocated, displaced and disoriented. She suffers both from the loss of identity and alienation at her marital *Home*. Their love does not seem to be profound but a nauseating apology. Consequently *Virmati* faces intense frustration, bitter disappointment and awful disillusionment. Her mind and her heart are constantly agitated, rippled and tumultuous with thoughts of her freedom and position in the society and family. When *Harish* takes pride in discussing the political scenario at national and international level, she is worried about her own freedom. In the conversation that takes place on 8 May, *Harish* tells *Virmati*:

Now it's our turn next. Now they will have no excuse. Cripps had given a commitment. At the San Francisco Peace Conference the eyes of the world will be on *Briatin*. There will be pressure put on her to recognize our sovereignty... No, Britain is now finished, *Viru*, Finished <sup>7</sup>.

She does not respond to the above statement by *Harish* but she reminds herself of her dormant dream of emancipation:

And me, thought *Virmati*, what about me? The war, or the end of it.... Suddenly he is transformed. He becomes visionary.... I feel so utterly left out, so utterly cold. Will there be any change in my life, I wonder <sup>8</sup>?

She starts pondering over her own position and wishes her voice to echo so that her needs are acknowledged. For this obvious reason she refuses to go back *Home* and tells herself bluntly:

I will relate to you with dignity or not at all. None of this hiding and whispering and keeping my voice down and struggle over who is going to wash your underwear and who is going to clean your shoes. None of this for me <sup>9</sup>.

*Manju Kapur* displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Striking a balance between a natural co-existence and unfettered freedom and space on the other, *Kapur's* eloquent narration of women's issues is nevertheless, both Indian and universal. *Kapur* says,

"No, there is nothing just to happen about that, I do write about women. I find women's lives fascinating, the way they

have to negotiate public and private space. They have to do many things, they have to play so many roles, there's a lot of stuff to say about women. And it is also what I know <sup>10</sup>."

*Manju Kapur* is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world where

"Family group sleep in the open air on the roof and wash themselves in the yard----- where love making is furtive and urgent because another wife may be listening and women's lives more to a complete pornography of cooking, washing weaving and mending, growing, picking, chopping and blending <sup>11</sup>."

Sensitivity threads the events that form these books. These are so naturally written that along the way one forgets these are the works of fiction. It feels more like a lifetime unraveling in front of our eyes, with real people in it, experiencing happiness, sorrow, pleasure and pain.

The writer's sensitivity is reflected even in the issue that whether or not a girl has the right to make her own choices in life is an issue dragged this way and that, for a long time in our country. Facing equal assault from the chauvinists who declare that woman's place is inside the house, and feminists who condemn the idea of taking the husband's surname after marriage, the idea finds a middle path here. There is after all a difference between possessing and protecting. The books deal with the idea of education for a girl for her sake, not just to enable her to land a suitable match.

Today is not the day following yesterday. Things might have changed, but how much really? Even today, thousands of girls sit within the four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to choose their own lives, decides for themselves whether they want to be *home* makers or more. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for a pizza with friends. *Manju Kapur* comments on her area of writing

"I am exploring the space that women occupy in domestic relationship. It is a world I know and understand. The mother-daughter nexus is only one of the many manifestations of Indian woman's role. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law in fact; there are so many aspects of a woman's life she still need to write about that.

"I was nothing, husbandless, childless, I felt myself hovering like pencil notation on the margins of society <sup>12</sup>."

This statement by *Ida*, the narrator in *Manju Kapur's* novel "*Difficult Daughters*" summarize the concern of self-identity at conflict with socio-cultural identity, which pervades Indian women writing.

*Kapur* does a wonderful job dissecting the everyday of an ordinary life, showing how even the ordinary in this generation can be claustrophobic. *Kapur's* women were made to believe that anything outside the small world created for them was not normal.

Thus a woman should basically strive towards a fine interdependent partnership. But if she feels suffocated, then voice ought to be raised and there should be a total breaking away, like *Ida*. But merely transcending societal norms is not enough. A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense. Thus *Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters* is a feminist

discourse not because she is woman writing about women but because she “has understood a woman both as a woman and a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts.” She presents feminism at its most sane, keeping in mind the Indian content.

Kapur’s fiction stresses on the woman’s need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, and a fight against her own destiny, independence individuality and self-actualization.

The age old respect for the Laws of Manu still dictates the position of woman within the family. The popular saying: “Women drive their status from their husbands and power from their sons” has its full meaning. It is the narrow margin that separates the grandmother, regarded as a saint by the whole joint family of which she has eventually become the spiritual leader from an ordinary woman who, throughout her life willingly slaved for men. Since her very position within the family makes her pillar of society. The central part played by women in traditional India cannot be challenged. Questioning the position of women comes to questioning the structure of Indian society.

Women are presented as victims, which in keeping with the spirit of the time, leads to some sort of rebellion. A mention must finally be made of Anglo- Indian women, a difficult status to assume in those days. Narayan insists upon this attachment to tradition to make the reader aware of the fact that, In India, not only has men every right but they also have edited moral duties.

India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realized that a woman’s primary duty was being a wife and a mother.

Nisha leaves her business to fulfill her duties as a good wife, a daughter-in-law and mother. Ganga plays all the role of a maid to take care of her husband.

In our society, a woman on her way cannot survive outside the system in which a place has been assigned to her, a woman cannot manage. Indian society does not tolerate individualism, except in the case of Sanyashood. Feminine individualism is not acceptable. Here we can have an example of Shakuntala, Virmati or Nisha. Shakuntala does not want to marry, she lives a free life. But due to her, her mother suffers a lot and feels helpless. Virmati denies marrying Inderjeet and this becomes a big reason of her helpless condition. And even in the marriage, her qualities, her education are not enough. Even if the girl is good-looking, entry in a respectable house is difficult.

It has become clear what would be the result of women’s education in a society where individual freedom is strictly limited. Education contributes to the social promotion of a girl only in as much as it allows her family to find her a better husband, education is not an end in itself but a long term investment.

This is what Manju Kapur has depicted in her novels women’s emancipation is no longer to be decided upon by men. It is no longer up to them to decide what a woman can be or not. Manju Kapur’s novels show the condition of woman in our society. Through the girl or woman is from a respectable family, good-looking, well-educated still she has to suffer. She remains in the society like a puppet whose strings are in the hands of their destiny. These characters try to liberate

themselves from the pangs of orthodoxy but they remain unable to come out of their family, whether their paternal *home* or in in-law *home*, they have to remain dependent or others. They can’t take decisions on their own but the decisions of others are enforced on these characters. All the female characters rebel against society or patriarchal norms to make their own destiny but unfortunately, the condition become worse for them.

Manju Kapur teaches in a respectable girl’s college where she gets the themes of her novels. She feels inspired by those girls. She creates those situations in a realistic way. In our real life also we feel helpless in front of our destiny. Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence –independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also independence yearned after by a woman. Here, a personal jouissance, a woman’s self-expression is put in a marginal position.

Manju Kapur, in her novels, presents women who try to establish their own identity. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati, in her quest for identity, who is also the central character of the novel, rebels against tradition. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. Mrs. Kapur herself asserts that “conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable and I suppose I was a difficult daughter. The conflict carries on through generation because mothers want their daughters to be safe. We want them to make the right choices- "right in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married; I want my daughters to have good jobs.” (Bala and Chandra).

The very title of the novel '*Difficult Daughters*' is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries in search of an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well.

## References

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