

## “Quest For Feminine Identity Illustrated In Manju Kapur’s Novel Difficult Daughters”

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to present Manju Kapur’s novel Difficult Daughters in a feminist perspective. In her novels, she handles various issues like mother and daughter relationship, importance of education, joint family system, motherhood, etc. In all her novels, the protagonists encounter a lot of problems in the cruel patriarchal system which prevails in our society. The bitter experiences they undergo make them empowered women in the course of time. Manju Kapur portrays her women protagonists as modern women who always fight for their survival against all sorts of suppression in the patriarchal society. In this research paper, the researcher aims to discuss the main idea that the protagonists in Difficult Daughters are educated, caring but yet they search for their identity to live a peaceful life in the society. It is education which makes them enlightened and gives them the realization about their every existence in the society.*

**Key Words:** *Feminism, Identity, Patriarchal society, Education, Empowerment, etc.*

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The story is set in 1940s in Punjab and Lahore and is written by a daughter, who wants to know the truth about her mother Virmati. She is the eldest daughter of a respectable Arya Samaji family of Amritsar, who falls in love with her neighbour, a married Professor. The love story runs through the usual ups and downs and at last the Professor and Virmati get married despite the obvious social restrictions. However, the marital life remains somewhat unpleasant, with constant cold war between Virmati and the Professor’s first wife. The novel is set around the time of Partition and written with an absorbing intelligence and sympathy.

*Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. Virmati, a young woman born in Amritsar into an austere and high-minded household, falls in love with a neighbour, the Professor—a man who is already married. The Professor eventually marries Virmati, installs her in his home (alongside his furious first wife) and helps her towards further studies in Lahore, is small consolation to her scandalised family. Virmati, who finds that the battle for her own independence has created irrevocable lines of partition and pain.

Modern women, who are educated and aware of their rights, demonstrate their opposition to their own social exploitation. A woman's life is explored in Manju Kapur's novel, which explores the complexities of a woman's life through the lens of different cultural and social values, as well as her struggle against the unfair mechanisms of a closed society. A legitimate prologue to the women's activist perspective of day to day life and the female psyche is provided in this research paper, which is supported by concepts such as intimate jobs, double weights, equivalent freedoms, and different social strategies, among others. She is portrayed by the novelist as a woman who is on the verge of self-discovery when she suddenly makes the decision to take control of her life.

“The tradition that refuses to entertain doubt, or remains impervious to new thoughts and ideas, becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force” (*Difficult Daughters* 24). The main character is a woman who is looking for force and opportunity likewise fighting to find out the inward strength she has as an individual. Kapur's works add to our comprehension of the mind of an entrapped in a lady web of connections, some of which she has created herself and others which have been created for her. They exemplify a mystery of convention and modernity that many women in Indian society are confronted with. Their inner conflict between the desire to care for their husbands and children, as well as their longing to discover more profound modes of fulfillment that are outside of conventional social norms. Manju Kapur has captured the Indian way of life in a successful and proficient manner. At the same time, she demonstrates their profound insight into human nature as well as their understanding of everyday’s problems. In her work, she explores a variety of themes, including

the conflict among custom and innovation, the personality emergency of their heroes, and Indian ladies' mission for autonomy, among others.

The concept of Feminism, in general, has been concerned to an analysis of the trend of male domination in the society; the general attitude of male towards female; the exploitation and discrimination faced by females; the need for and ways of improving the condition of women; and, so on. In concern to literature, this movement has concentrated on the role played by literature to support gender discrimination as well as to oppose it; the reasons for lesser significance of the contribution by female writers in the literary tradition than that of the male writers (Research Article, Vol 6 ,2018).

The quest for feminine identity, which has emerged as a dominant social phenomenon in India since independence, is the central theme of all of her novels. A variety of topics are also considered, including the man-lady relationship, human craving, yearning, sex separation, minimization, defiance, and dissent. “I hate the word ‘simple’. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways” (*Difficult Daughters* 34). Throughout her novels, we see a glorified woman attempting to free herself from the weight of a burden she has been bearing for a long time. With the passage of time, the image of a woman shifts and changes.

The protagonist of the novel deviates from traditional depictions of a woman who is generous, suffering, humble, and calm. They are contemporary portrayals of confident, emphatic, cultured, protesting, and ambitious individuals who are raising society's awareness of their needs while also proving their identities to the world. Indian fiction, since its origin more than a hundred years ago, of women in society. Indian writers, especially women writers, in recent decades have produced plentiful literary output, their focus writing being gender and the role of women in society. These writers inquire into human relationships since they are closely concerned with the mind and heart. Women's work has both inspired and been a central theme in literature.

The researcher hopes to elaborate on these conceptual terms further with the help of the contemporary theorization of repression and resistance in feminist scholarship as well as in other fields. The problem addressed in this study is how Manju Kapur represents the issues of repression of women and what structures of resistance are made visible in them. The study aims at examining the status of Manju Kapur as a feminist writer and tries to investigate whether her works present a literary representation of feminist politics. The study also tries to identify the specific characteristics of her works within the tradition of feminist fiction in India. The novel *Difficult Daughters* illustrates the quest for feminine identity that every woman longs for .

V. T. Girdhari said: The male, as the delegate of male centric culture, has at last been yanked away from the focal point of ladies' attractive energy, and a lady is currently getting ready to be her own gravitational power past the draw of man centric society (Girdhari 2002: 78).

In the post-Independence period, we are able to see multiple female writers with a prolific and innovative mentality coming into existence. Their writing style, depiction of women, and depiction of social issues are quite unique and striking. They do an excellent job of instilling and inculcating female characters in their work. They have uncovered the suffering, torment and oppression of the female characters in an exceptional way. We witness the rise of new young, creative female novelists in the 1980s who share their message that their work is universally praised. For a time, male supremacy reigned supreme in Indian English novels, but after the arrival of women writers in the post-Independence era, their contributions to the realm of Indian literature.

Female aesthetics, being emerged by the feminist critics of different countries, has become one of the themes of feminist criticism. It is based on a universal view—a universal woman nature and culture. This general notion was developed because of a special social phenomenon aroused in America, Germany, Italy, and Russia. The feminists who were against the patriarchy, notion of canon formation in literary creation and criticism, formed a distinct movement ‘Women’s Liberation Movement’ (P 203).

In half a century of independence, Indian women have won their victory, but much work remains to be done if genuine female freedom is to be accomplished. The battle for self-rule stays an incomplete clash. However, writing in 1998, Manju Kapur, in her novels, presents ladies who attempt to set up their own personality. In her search for identification, she can safely be called quite possibly the most compelling writers of the cutting edge Indian family. In her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur emerges as a feminist author, basing the entire work of fiction on the interwoven lives of the female characters, Kasturi, Virmati, Ida, Ganga, Shakuntala and Swarnalata.

The novel revolves around the aspirations and attempts of female characters like Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala and Swarnalata, who break free from the traditional roles of motherhood and homemaker and assert their individualities in their due roles in the social and political upheavals of the times. Each of these female characters, through their defiance of tradition and assertion of human requirements, represents generations of difficult daughters. The challenges they face from family and society, as well as the challenges they throw at family and society, become a saga of struggle, resulting in an irreversible line of pain that spans three generations of motherhood.

Ida always used to protest against her mother. There was an opposition between the opinions of the defiant daughter, Ida, and her mother, Virmati: ‘There are different things throughout everyday life,’ she revealed

to her mom... You mean living just for yourself. You are frustrating your dad. For what reason is it so imperative to satisfy him?... She wanted to please herself sometimes.... I grew up attempting to be a model girl. Strain to perform day and night....looking pretty, perfect,... do well in school, learn old style music, take dance exercises, read literature,... Accordingly, I'm continually searching for get away from courses (Manju Kapur ,279).

This discovery of her mother's true self, which presents a new Virmati, liberates Ida from her own psychological baggage as she doesn't feel threatened by her mother's shadow anymore. When Ida emotionally reconstructs her parents' relationship, she is able to see and visualize the tribulations that her mother must have undergone in order to reach her final destination. Ida's journey of discovery establishes a deep psychological connection between the two different daughters. She imagines a mansion in her heart, built with words from the book as bricks, for her newly discovered mother to live in.

Ida is truly free, solid, and clear in her thoughts and activities, not the same as her mother. She isn't trapped in the web of the desires of her mind, male-controlled society and love. She must continue to live a free life, eventually achieving it. Her marriage ends when her husband denies her the right and desire to be a mother. Ida's journey of self-sufficiency and character is acknowledged at the end of the narrative. She chose a method that her mother could not have done. Looking at the topic of 'marriage' in Kapur's novels for the investigation of restraint and opposition of 'female characters' through the establishment of marriage, it is found that offering her female characters is absolutely critical to the creator.

The reasons can be social, strict or even status identified with save the family from outside analysis for not getting hitched 'at the ideal opportunity'.Manju Kapur's composing features the actual essence of the issue. How a mother responds to the question of marriage is an extremely normal issue in families where there are little girls of eligible age. The following occasions project how the young ladies are surveyed with isolates energy with regards to their marriage.Kasturi, mother of Virmati, feels, "it is the obligation of each young lady to get hitched" (Kapur 1998: 15).

The rising violence against women is nothing but a testimony to the normalization of victimization. The victims of violence never yearn for sympathy, but they do wait for strong action against the offenders. Kapur explains how the victims are left unprotected on a dangerous Indian island. Ida in *Difficult Daughters* is a victim - but nobody ever bothers to help her.As a true feminist, Kapur charges a society that has no qualms about reducing long-awaited marriages to mere mechanical arrangements. Because of the polemical seeds embedded in it, her fiction is a manifestation of a feminist critique. She tries to deconstruct a superstitious society in order to reconstruct a new society. According to her, only a desirable change in the attitude of society can bring about a transformation. Her novels are not the result of skepticism, but they are an expression of hope. She envisions a "brave new world" where women have greater roles to play.

According to the events in the novel, all women do not necessarily want equality with men, but they do want to be seen as human beings and in terms of differences. Internalized patriarchal values have a significant role in the lives of women. Every woman wants to lead a life with self dignity and identity. If women begin to bring these values to the surface, they will be able to progress on their path to emancipation. One thing that becomes clear from studying the novels is that women do have strength within themselves; the problem is that they get caught in the web of patriarchy and forget their strength.They need to move towards self-realization, but the process each one goes through is different from the other.

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