



UGC Approved Journal

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065

Impact Factor : 5.27



Editor-in-Chief

Volume V, Issue VI June 2017

www.ijellh.com

[About Us](#) | [Editorial Board](#) | [Submission Guidelines](#) | [Call for Paper](#)

[Paper Submission](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Terms & Condition](#) | [More.....](#)

RASHMI

SEARCH FOR SELF IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

Abstract:

This paper deals with the search for self in male dominating society. The purpose of this paper is to study new women in the novels of Manju Kapur. Women in Indian society remain under patriarchal pressure. They are more categorized and prejudiced due to gender. We can see budding of new women in Manju Kapur's novels. She tried to carve them their own identity in this man's world. It is only the male ego that fills the woman with inferiority complex through the ages. Since ages women is used to exploit and suppress in this male dominated society. A country can never progress without the active participation of women. Men always see women as the weaker sex, as their object of pleasure property. Now modern women prefer to exercise their choices, desires and break away the shackles of their traumatic experiences. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur's Protagonist Virmati, an educated middle class girl explains her rebellious ideas against patriarchy and tries to gain her self. She experiences a journey of her inner self. *Difficult Daughter's* by Manju Kapur is the story of a woman who struggle for her identity. Her duty towards her family, her desire to be academically well equipped, her illicit love affair with a married man and her attempts to shape her own destiny stands at the core of the novel. Manju Kapur's novels focus on women characters struggling to break the shackles of patriarchy and are in search of self against the dogmas of social and cultural critical thinking. Manju Kapur portrays the situation of women in male dominated society.

Keywords: Dominated, inferiority, prejudiced, rebellious.

Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* presents the struggle of women to establish an identity. She tried to make a space that women have to occupy in domestic relationships. Today's woman has her own quest for self-fulfillment and self-discovery.

Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* is a story of a daughter's journey back into her mother's throbbing past. *Difficult Daughters* is a story of three generations of women. Ida, the narrator, who is a divorcee. Virmati, her mother, who had a love affair to a married man and marries that already married professor for love, and Kasturi, her grandmother. This was not a fictional family, but the story of a real, middle class home with mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers that one had seen and lived with.

Kapur portrays the suffering of women after marriage before marriage or throughout her life. When Virmati marries Harish she is not welcomed by his own family members as well as her husband's family. Harish first wife Ganga and his mother Kishori Devi treat her in a ruthless manner. Virmati later realizes that "I should never have married you ... and it's too late now. I've never seen it so clearly. It's not fair" (212). Virmati's marriage with Harish firstly makes her proud and gives a feeling of security, but she fails to make any space for herself in her husband's family "She wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life" (215). Now, she starts thinking that this isolation will continue till the last breath of her life. When she becomes pregnant her mother-in-law takes care of her, at that time she was relieved of her misfortune. But, unfortunately she suffers a miscarriage and this incident further intensifies her pain. Then, Harish sends Virmati to Lahore to study M.A. so that will bring her out of her depression, pain from that incident. Virmati starts realizing that even her voice, peace is gone after marriage, when Harish wants her by his side with him she does not think of education or anything else but when he thinks that she must pursue further studies and sent her to Lahore for M.A. She does it without raising her voice or without any argument. Unknowingly or deliberately she has become a puppet in his hands.

Man has dominated woman to his self-control, used to satisfy his sexual pleasure but never has he preferred to uplift her to a higher position in society. When Virmati gave birth to Ida, she suggested that her daughter be called Bharati but her husband named the child Ida, a

Persian name. Virmati seems to have a feeling of distress that she is not given the importance by her husband in any matter.

Virmati faced many problems throughout her life like abortion before her marriage and after marriage. Similarly, Virmati's daughter Ida, is also forced for abortion by her husband and it resulted into trauma of divorce. Kapur presents the existential dilemmas of women and their identity crises, frustration, aspiration, when they try to achieve their self-identity. Kapur in her novel presents the protagonist Virmati, her mother Kasturi and daughter Ida as difficult daughters and other minor characters like Shakuntala, Swarnalata also consider as difficult daughters.

This paper deals with the changing role of women in Manju Kapur's novel *"Difficult Daughters"*. Kasturi, the mother of Virmati, belongs to that older generation. Kasturi may be regarded as the representative of the traditional women. Childhood, generally considered as the glorious period of innocent pleasures. But unfortunately, due to the force of circumstances, Virmati is deprived of these childhood innocent pleasures. The reason for this is, Kasturi has given birth to eleven children and the responsibility of looking after these children has fallen on Virmati. She has to play the role of a mother to all the children. She is exhausted and tired because of her continuous attendance on her siblings, at a tender age of ten. Virmati is deprived of being loved by her mother, Kasturi due to her repeated pregnancies. Kasturi has never expressed affection, love or even a single word of sympathy towards Virmati, who is actually busy in looking after her siblings and overburdened with domestic chores.

Virmati was always remain busy in organizing the house-hold affairs. Kapur writes about her duties in these words: "Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children. It wasn't only baby Parvati to whom she was indispensable, to her younger siblings she was second mother as well. She was impatient and intolerant of fuss. If they didn't eat their meals, on her return home from school she would hunt out the offending brother or sister and shove the cold food down their throats. If they refused to wear the hand-me-down clothes she assigned them, she slapped them briskly. Sometimes she tried to be gentle, but it was weary work and she was almost always tired and harassed". (*Difficult Daughters*, p.6.)

It seems that Virmati was enforced to take the responsibility in her very early age. Thus, Virmati is exposed as a common Indian woman. She has spent most of her time in the household affairs. Although she wishes to spend her life freely without taking any responsibility of household duties. She represents the modern woman who struggles for her identity. She fights against the conservative Indian male dominated society. Sanjay Kumar explores: “On the surface though, Virmati seems to represent the women of 1950’s who, in a patriarchal society of that period were subjugated to man-made injustices and indignities”. 4

On the other side, Virmati is a typical Indian girl. She is bound in the responsibilities of family. Her ambitions, desires are always vanished in the day to day struggle. Her dreams and hopes are merged in the deep-rooted tradition. Shakuntala comments on it: “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”. [Difficult Daughters, p.17.]

Virmati and Shakuntala always get involve in discussion on the matter of freedom and education. Virmati tells Shakuntala: “No, no really”, said Virmati, catching her hand. May be here was the clue to her unhappiness. It was useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside to education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore Colleges”. (Difficult Daughters, p.17.)

Manju Kapur writes: “Through the ensuing days Virmati followed Shakuntala around. She watches her ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother’s advice, buy anything, she wanted without thinking it is a waste of money, casually drop in on all the people the family knew. Above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything.” (Difficult Daughters, p.18.)

Shakuntala tells Virmati about the people of Lahore who are not narrow-minded: “You will find, Viru, that in Lahore people are not so narrow-minded. It is a pity the man was married. But you have done the right thing. Together we will face the family. After all, I have experience in resisting pressures.” (Difficult Daughters, p.115.)

Virmati gets pregnant. Then she goes to Amritsar and manages a bangle of gold from her father and sell it for her abortion. After this disheartening incident, she decides not to entertain the professor any more. Virmati blames the professor for this misfortune in her life. She says to the professor: "I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace... and why? Because I am an Idiot." (Difficult Daughters, p.149.)

"The Womanly Observation by Manju Kapur" observe:

Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more brunts and social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased.... The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. (55)

Kapur in her novels very realistically paints an unpleasant relationship between mother and daughter. Mother figure is not glorified but mother is exposed as an authoritarian and suffocating figure. In an attempt to get the daughter accustomed in the patriarchal society she controls her inflicts and rights, multiple psychological and physical tortures on her.

Manju Kapur projects the mother figure as a strong agent of patriarchy who opposes her daughter's impulses, desire for founding her self identity. Kapur successfully expose the reality of the society of male supremacy where women are taught to obey to the social norms at the name of custom for their survival. The traditional and conservative women hold those social norms as ethics as they tried their best to adapt in the environment which make their lives smooth as they learn to merge themselves with others. These women become the promoter of these values and they try their best to inculcate them in their daughters so that they can very well adapt themselves in male dominating set-up.

Manju Kapur's novels, *Difficult Daughters* and *Home* vividly exposes the stark reality of the exploitation, plight, of female children in the middle class Indian society. In these works she exposes the grim reality of such society where the girls are trapped into a complex web at the name of hackneyed tradition and so called morality, which ultimately prevents them from blooming fully. They are forced to keep their feelings, desires, emotions tightly in.

"An all-round development of the personality of the child is required to make him a well-adjusted and happy being" (Mohan), and for the complete development of the child's personality, maternal love, affection should be poured out to him or her. But Virmati is kept deprived of love, affection during her childhood. Even after performing all her duties, responsibilities efficiently and sincerely, her mother neither treats her like a child with love and affection nor pampers her. Paramjit Kaur observes, "Virmati looks after her brothers-sisters as a second mother but Kasturi has no loving words for her dutiful daughter" (24).

Kapur effectively emphasizes Virmati's mother's cold and unemotional behaviour towards her daughter :

At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. However, when she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother's arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. 'Have you their food-milk-clothes-studies?' (Difficult 6)

Kasturi never realized her daughter's inner need of love, to be loved as a child rather than as a responsible daughter. Instead of treating her daughter with love, she always expects her to do her duties properly, subsequently making her an adult in her childhood. Paramjit Kaur points out:

She is always sick lady, so all the burden of household work and younger brothers-sisters had dropped on Virmati's susceptible childhood. She spends her life under the

pressure of domestic duties and mother's restrictions at an early age. The pampering days of her childhood, she destroys in domestic affair and nurturing her siblings, so she procures maturity in an early age. (24)

Today's modern woman has her own quest for self fulfillment and self-discovery. Woman is now preparing herself as a gravitational force, beyond the pull of patriarchy set-up. Woman in contemporary society have become aware of the facts, of her abilities, power. Women are trying to unshackle themselves from patriarchy domination. In this rapidly progressing world they are reconstructing redefining, relocating their proper place. They have revolted against their marginalization, victimization and exploitation. They are busy in reshaping themselves in humanistic mould, emphasizing the need of thorough re-examination of marriage and man-woman relationship for the better understanding and for sharing mutual love and respect for each other.

Kapur exposes the responding mind of Virmati who is disappointed by the betrayal of her lover; her distressed mind is revealed in her words of the following lines. "Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find me out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace and.... Why?" She refers to Swarnalata's declaration about this dominance and selfishness of men over women. Swarnalata states "Men take advantage of women". (DD 149) Virmati holds the conservative view of the chastity and purity of woman's body. "She was his for life, whether her ever married or not". She could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice". (DD 177)

Thus, Virmati dares to cross one patriarchal threshold, she is caught into another, where her free spirit is curbed and all she does is adjust, compromise and adapt. She is a loser whose acts totally alienate her from her family and she fails to create a space for herself for which she had been striving all alone. Perhaps it is this inability of Virmati to strike independent roots and grow and forces Ida to remark, 'the one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.' (DD 1)

Hence, one can conclude that Virmati being brought up in a broad-minded, progressive family. Virmati is educated and exposed to western ideas. She confronts the family and follows her heart. She struggles a lot for the search for self and to get his own identity. In her self discovery or quest of Identity, she struggles at every step to make space for herself on her own. Her rebellious approach takes back stages whenever it has to be strong to refute Harish's sexual subjugation, exploitation . Manju Kapur constantly shows effort to consolidate the position of woman in Indian society. The splendor and beauty of her novels undoubtedly lies in her unique presentation in which she seems to present the conflicting situations of woman in which woman are in search of their identity and location.

Works Cited

Bhat, Azad Ahmed, Showkat Ahmad Wani and Dr. Alka Gopal. "Search of Identity:

A study of Manju Kapur's novel "Difficult Daughters" International Journal of

Humanities and Social Science Invention. Vol. :5 .Issue:7., July 2016. Print

Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1998. Print.

Lizy, V. "Women in the novel of difficult daughters by Manju Kapur" *Indian Journal Of Research*. Vol:5 Issue:2., Feb. 2016. Print.

Sinha, Sunita. "Discovery of Daring and Desire in Manju Kapur's fiction." *Post-colonial women writers: New perspectives*, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008. Print.

Sudha Shree, P. "Difficult Daughters : Travails in Self Identity". *Indian Women Writing in English: New Perspectives*. Ed. Sathupat, Prasanna Sree. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005. Print.