

Transforming Women's Image in Manju Kapur's '*Difficult Daughters*'

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Abstract

Women writers are noted for their originality, resourcefulness, and the indigenous flavor of the land, all of which are represented in their work. Indian women's writings emphasize the relevance of the man-woman connection in society to explain, analyze, and define the individuality of the Indian woman after independence. The patriarchal rule that has prevailed in India for generations has begun to be questioned by modern Indian women. Their women have a mutually beneficial interaction with their environment, society, men, children, families, mental makeup, and themselves. Indian women authors, whether educated or uneducated, do their most complexes in their writings to confront the dreadful plight of neglected women in Indian society, who are bound to suffer from birth to death.

Manju Kapur, like most second-wave feminists, thinks that women's oppression is rooted in cultural rather than biological factors and that women's artistic creation, such as the novel in issue, is critical to 'consciousness-raising' and, as a result, societal transformation. She wants to deconstruct heterosexual, masculine cultural power in her narrative. It's established a fake space where culturally marginalized women can, among other things, assert their subculture specificities. The current study examines how women's images change due to a conflict between their internal goals and reality.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur showed numerous pictures of women. Her woman in the novel appears to be a representation of a transforming woman, continuously seeking to shed the burden of embarrassments she has carried for a long time. Manju Kapur is deeply concerned about the limitations that women experience in a male-dominated culture. In the narrative, the holy woman is converted into a real woman. The modern altered woman does not want to be a rubber doll, waiting for the other hand to act as they like; instead, she can fight to improve her status and survive in society. The novel depicted the possibility of a reformed woman.

Keywords: Quest for Identity, Patriarchy, Responsibility, Self-confidence, Self-expression.

Introduction

In every genre of literature, notably fiction, Indian writing in English is exploding. In recent years, Indian English fiction has centered on the underappreciated condition of Indian women. A male was traditionally viewed as a protector, a master, and a woman's guardian. He was known as a pious God and woman, a man for the field, a woman for the hearth, and so on. Only boys, not daughters, are credited with writing most Vedic hymns. "A girl's birth grants abroad, while a son's birth grants here," the Atharvana Veda says (Prasad, 12). "A woman is described in the Koran as a 'Fitna,' one who tempts men and causes problems" (Prasad, 2). According to the Bible, God created a woman from a man's rib. As a result, there has been a long-standing gender divide. In this sense, Simone De Beauvoir's voice in her book *The Second Sex*.

"Female exists in the human species today as they always make up about half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are encouraged to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered, she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by ovaries? Or it is a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination". (Beauvoir, 312)

Kapur's novels depict women's struggles for fundamental rights and their need for self-identity and survival. The protagonists learn to be self-sufficient with the help of education. It also assists them in exploring new territory. They have a lot of freedom in their thoughts and expression. They not only compete with males in every sector, but they also work as effectively as men. Kapur's portrayal of traditional society's household life is rich and varied. It includes a wide range of domestic duties and concerns, from little to major. The author also discusses how men and women carry out their responsibilities, perform family duties, and enjoy their homes. We have evidence of Indian ethnicity and custom, such as wives assisting their husbands in housekeeping responsibilities, even though husbands do not help their wives in housekeeping duties according to conventional standards. Women are in charge of all domestic tasks, whether simple or complex. If they need to leave the house for employment, women must first obtain permission from their husbands. Moments of affection, quarrels, and arguments are depicted in home life.

Manju Kapur has established herself as a notable and recognized writer in India. She was born in Amritsar, a city in Punjab's northern state. Miranda House College, Delhi University, is where she teaches English literature. *Difficult Daughters* (1988), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), *Custody* (2011), and *Brothers* are a few of Manju Kapur's well-known works (2016). Her debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, gained widespread appreciation around the world. *Difficult Daughters* was a number one bestseller in India and won the Common Wealth Writers Prize for the best debut book. "Writing is a solitary vacation," she says. Gender discrimination, sex, man-woman interaction, human desires,

exploitation, and marginalization are all shown in her works. Her works also explore feminine emotional responses, female repression, and women's struggles for liberty in a patriarchal society. Every one of her books begins with a hopeful seed. The root of *A Married Woman* was a female friendship, while *Difficult Daughters* was about education. It was all about how families support and destroy each other at home. NRI marriages were the genesis of *The Immigrant*. *Custody by Kapur* is about an adopted child and explores topics of control, blood, and non-blood relationships.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* depicts women struggling to carve out their place in a patriarchal environment. She represents feminine pain due to an internal struggle between their inner desires and reality. Manju Kapoor delves deeply into female consciousness in her work. Three generations of ladies are depicted in the novel. Kasturi completely surrenders to custom and accepts it without question, and Virmani, whose tremendous desire for freedom and identity, is shredded by tensions resulting from clashes between tradition and modernity. Ida was portrayed as a modern-day self-governing woman who lacked respect for duty. Her female characters, Virmani, Ida, and Shakuntla, rebel against traditional standards to become self-sufficient but eventually come to an understanding of communal harmony.

Difficult Daughters is a story told by Virmati's daughter Ida, who is desperate to bring her mother back to life and honor her parents' "scandalous" marriage. Ida, divorced, childless, and lonely, returns to all the sites where she spent her childhood with her mother, particularly Lahore, where her mother and father celebrated their courtship. Her mother's rebellious nature may have traded one form of servitude for another. But, in the end, she achieves freedom, even from her husband's stifling love. The novel's title, *Difficult Daughters*, convey that a woman who tries to find her identity is labeled as a problematic daughter by her family and society. The story depicts her between familial obligations, a desire for education, and the need to elicit love. This is a story of loss, love, and forgiveness. Ida, Virmati's daughter, is the second protagonist, and she is solid and well-versed in the socio-political game. Her marriage is shattered when her husband refuses to give her maternity leave. Her character in the novel appears to represent a transformed woman who has been trying for years to shed the burden of embarrassments she has borne.

The protagonist of the novel is Virmani. She opposed patriarchal constructs and was labeled tough in *Difficult Daughters* because she rebelled and defied them. Because she is the family's eldest daughter, she is drawn to home chores. She is a young Punjabi girl from an ascetic, high-minded, conservative Amritsar household. She devotes all her time and energy to caring for her younger siblings. She takes on the role of the second mother to her ten more youthful siblings. She is an outgoing young lady who puts in a lot of effort. She is, nonetheless, an extremely intolerant person. She never receives the care and love she expects from her family, particularly her mother. She never has time for herself because domestic responsibilities have enslaved her since childhood. She has always worked for others since she was a child.

Difficult Daughters is based partly on the life of Virmathi, Kapur's mother. Ida recounts her mother Virmathi's struggle in this novel. Difficult Daughter is a story about a young woman torn between the traditional values she was taught and the values she wants to live by. It isn't quite a struggle...but it is a tale of errors and compromises. It is not just the narrative of one girl caught between tradition and modernity; it reflects the dilemma through generations of mothers and daughters. Kasturi, Virmathi's mother, is a perpetually pregnant woman who has given birth to eleven children. Virmani is their mother, even though she is their sister. In every pregnancy, she assists her mother. Manju Kapur focuses on Virmathi's feelings in Difficult Daughters. She discusses a variety of other female characters and how they might struggle for independence. Difficult Daughter is a heartbreaking story about a sensitive girl working in a patriarchal world. Manju Kapur appears to defy Simon De Beauvoir's notion of femininity. "A woman is a womb, an ovary, she is a female, this is enough to describe her," Simon has remarked (Beauvoir 12). The heroines of Manju Kapur can make their own decisions. They don't want to be labeled traditional women because they are just rubber dolls.

Kasturi, Virmathi's mother, comes from a previous generation. Kasturi could be thought of as a traditional woman's representative. Childhood is a lovely time of innocent delights in general. On the other hand, Virmani is denied these delights due to the force of circumstance. The immediate reason is that Kasturi has given birth to eleven children, leaving Virmathi with the unfortunate task of caring for them. She is expected to function as an unofficial mother to all kids. Even at ten, she is frequently tired and exhausted due to her constant attention to her siblings. Virmani is denied the rightful joy of being loved by her mother, Kasturi, who is becoming increasingly impatient due to her numerous pregnancies. Kasturi has never shown Virmathi sympathy, despite being swamped with domestic responsibilities and caring for her siblings.

Virmani and her daughter Ida are compared in this novel by Manju Kapur. She investigates how Virmathi manages her life. On the other hand, Ida is a libertarian who refuses to be swayed by ancient customs. Through her first and second protagonists, Virmathi and Ida, Manju Kapoor creates a stage for both modern and traditional perspectives. Virmani's 'difficult daughter,' Ida, becomes her representative. She could not reach an agreement with her mother during her existence, and this understanding now fills her with regret after her mother's death. Ida begins a quest to learn and know her mother's past. Despite their tight kinship, she and her mother have a strained relationship" without her I am lost, I look for ways to connect" (Kapur, 3). The point made by Simone de Beauvoir is particularly relevant in this case. She claims that she, the mother, sometimes tries to impose her fate on the child. What was excellent enough for me is good enough for you; I was raised in this manner, and you will share my fortune. (Beauvoir, 533-34)

The novel portrays an endless debate between education and marriage, with the fundamental focus of the story being a marriage or the man-woman relationship. In the book, Virmathi and Professor Harish have a premarital or extramarital relationship in which they meet

and fall in love. She eventually marries the man she wants after a tremendous upheaval. Even though it hurts Virmati, it demonstrates a shift in social attitudes. The novel depicts the emergence of a new woman who is no longer the "chaste wife whose pain can only make her more virtuous, the loving mother who denies herself, the vengeful Kali, or a titillating strumpet." (Kapur, 5) Her family and professor criticize Virmani's drive for self-expression and self-realization as futile. The novel delves into Virmati's character's struggles with self-identity vs. socio-cultural identity. Toni Morrison remarks on this concern.

"Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin? What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company". (Morrison,6)

Virmani opposed patriarchal constructs and rebelled against them, which is why she is considered challenging in *Difficult Daughters*. Virmani despises this way of life and seeks refuge in Shanti Niketan to avoid the professor's torments. However, the professor recognizes the situation's urgency and marries her quickly. Then Virmati marries him and finds some satisfaction in the fact that she now feels herself a member of society, wearing red bangles like other girls when they get married, "The only thing she claimed she wanted were the red ivory bangles her family's women wore when they married," says the narrator (Kapur, 186). However, she is more worried, disposed, unsatisfied, and bewildered due to her marriage. "She was dispossessed even though she was married." Okay, fine. She'd travel on the route her destiny had carved out for her, tight-lipped and deafeningly silent" (Kapur, 196). "Although Virmati succeeds in marrying the Professor, her marriage proves to be a failure," Maneeta Kahlon says, "this life proves to be devastating for her because it brings many bad experiences for her" (Kahlon, 02). He wants Virmati to continue her education. Still, he doesn't want her to mix with other people, "becoming engaged with Swarna Lata, Leela, Kiran, everyone and everyone except your spouse" (Kapur, 241). "I should never have married you" (Kapur, 212) Virmati believes it would have been better if she hadn't married Harish. Virmani occasionally blames herself for Ganga's life. "At her marital home, the mother-in-law feels she is a lady who strayed, the stepsons call her a 'Gandi' (bad) mommy, the step-wife or co-wife does not allow her into the kitchen or to carry for family members," Sudha Shree says. When she tries to come home to visit her sibling, her mother beats her up. She abuses her" (Sudha Shree, 166). Manju Kapur presented here an image of a helpless woman trapped due to decisions taken by her only for a man's physical appearance. She highlights a second wife's problems and a woman's hopelessness through the protagonist, Virmani.

Due to their husbands' selfishness, Virmati and Ganga are cast aside in *Difficult Daughters*. The author convincingly exposes the hierarchical system in which the woman is the principal perpetrator of a member of her sex being victimized and subjected by a man. The narrative also reveals society's evil marriage tradition, which allows a man to have numerous wives simultaneously, resulting in societal psychology. As a result, Virmati fails to prevent herself from marrying an already married man who lives with his wife, despite her vital teaching

career and personal identity. Her decision proves to be a life-changing disaster, sinking her into an endless circle of suffering. Her character in the story looks to represent a transformed lady who has struggled for a long time to overcome her embarrassments. Manju Kapur is concerned about the restrictions that women face in patriarchal societies. The elevated woman is transformed into a real woman in the novel. The modern transformed woman does not want to be a rubber doll who waits for the other hand to do what she wants; instead, she can fight to enhance her status and prosper in society. The novel depicted the possibilities of a woman's transformation.

She is seen as a woman from nowhere because she is not accepted in either her husband's or her parent's homes. "Virmati's wedded life with the Professor in Amritsar turns out to be a nightmare," Christopher Rollason correctly asserts. She wilts beneath Ganga, her husband's first wife, who she is forced to live with (Rollason, 3). Ganga, Harish's first wife, takes care of everything. Ganga is a traditional woman in every sense of the word. She is an illiterate woman with a professor for a husband. Harish tries to teach her because she is illiterate. In her home, she does all kinds of tasks. She takes care of everything around the house, from washing clothes to polishing shoes, mending clothes, dusting books, tidying the desk, and stitching shirtsilling fountain pens. Virmani is taken aback by her marriage to Harish. His action has disappointed her. She ponders her remorse but cannot discover the source of her guilt. Ganga is an unqualified woman who is obedient. She is made to be a victim of a patriarchal culture.

Virmani defied the patriarchal society but could not build a fruitful life for herself. Even though her son-in-law is warmly greeted, she is not allowed to visit the house following her father's death. "She realizes the maternal and paternal family doesn't forgive her for the mistake of trying to put her own needs first over others' needs," she says (Sudha Shree, 166). Her inability to assert her individuality resulted in the sense of uncertainty in her life. Virmani's story exemplifies the attributes of attraction, awareness, and economic independence that women greatly value. Only autonomy is insufficient; to achieve the most significant changes in her life, a woman must also have self-control, self-assurance, and self-confidence. Manju Kapoor's protagonists in *Difficult Daughters* emphasize the feminine urge for self-sufficiency, self-realization, sovereignty, and originality.

Conclusion

Thus, in her novel, Manju Kapur highlights the changing position of women and how, as they pass through a period of transition, crossing the threshold of patriarchal control, they embark on a relentless crusade, defying the oppressive conditions till they emerge as emancipated women. Manju Kapur's work emphasizes a woman's yearning for self-actualization, autonomy, and self-realization, as well as a fight for her destiny, independence, and individuality. In her novels, she explores the hidden complexities of the female psyche. Her protagonists make a concerted attempt to break down gender polarisation to a large extent.

Difficult Daughters' rich social web expresses Kapur's fear for a woman who, uprooted from her familiar environment of childhood, girlhood, and youth, leaves behind the most defining part of her life and molds her anew in a unique atmosphere, with an entirely new set of rules, and regards it as the only permanent fact of her survival. The concept of contemporary women in Indian society differs from that of modern women in the West; therefore, Kapur set out to create her stream of new women anchored in reality. She has her interests, priorities, and strategies for dealing with her female protagonists' dilemmas. Her works contribute significantly in this direction.

Manju Kapur thoroughly understands women's place and influence in society. As a result, she might be classified as a feminist author. As a result, Virmati's battle in *Difficult Daughter* can be interpreted as a female's attempt to achieve an equal position in society. It can be stated that Kapur has shown Virmati as a conscious, brave, and fearless woman who battles patriarchal society for women's rights. Her bravery and demeanor enable her to confront patriarchal culture and triumph against it, allowing her to achieve autonomy and individuality in her life. She knows that looking for answers within the house is pointless. A woman should be self-aware, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-sufficient, reasonable, and believe in her inner strength. Virmani's struggle for autonomy is a half-completed project. Only through being free in a more profound psychic sense can genuine change be brought about from inside. India's women have made significant progress in half a century, but there is still much work to be done.

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