

Aspects of Gender Conflict in English Literature

**Patriarchal Pressure and Silent Sufferings of Women in
Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* – A Study**

Dr. J. BalaSubramaniam



Manju Kapur

Courtesy: [http://www.azquotes.com/author/53403-Manju Kapur](http://www.azquotes.com/author/53403-Manju_Kapur)

Abstract

In India ethnicity and heritage, individualism, quest for identity, protests and concepts of rebelliousness have often remained alien ideas, as far as women were concerned. Women were not supposed to raise their voices for their rights, protest against injustice or question the already existing social norms, beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. They have to merely exist, subjected to the patriarchal system. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* stresses woman's need for self-fulfillment, self-sufficiency, self-realization, independence, individuality and self-actualization. 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 about only from within, by being free in the deeper intuitive sense. In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju

Kapur presented women's liberation and striving for some space in such a manner that we read not just with our eyes, but also with our heart. Kasturi holds patriarchal values as an ideal. As her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self. By suppressing Virmati's desire for freedom, she becomes the voice of patriarchy.

Key Words: Manju Kapur, patriarchal pressure, silent suffering, *Difficult Daughters*, women's liberation,

Introduction

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women to conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization.

Patriarchal Pressure

Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more oppression and social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased in lieu of their sex. The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian society varies from the one in the west. Manju Kapur has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways

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of dealing with the predicament of the women protagonists. This study is based on Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. The women's question today is, therefore, no longer an issue confined to the position of women within the family or their rights to equality with men in different aspects of social life. It is part of the total, far broader question regarding the direction of change that our society is taking - economic, social, political, intellectual perception and an analysis of that process.

Traumatic Experience

The finite dimension of the relationship between man and woman has been prescribed by man and not by woman. Her limits have been imposed on her by man who is ruled by the mastery motive. It is the male ego that has given the woman an inferior status through the ages. Since ages women is in negotiations with her male counterpart as well as our androcentric society. No society or country can ever progress without active participation of women in its overall development. Unfortunately, men have always looked down upon women as the weaker sex, as their property and object of pleasure. Man has relegated her to the level of a second-class citizen. But modern women prefer to exercise their choices and break away from their traumatic experiences. Some Indian women novelists like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women.

Tribulations of Women Echoed in Indian Women Writers – Special Place for Manju Kapur

The status of English as a global lingua franca has evoked attention from every corner of India. Indian writing in English has achieved a remarkable position through the works of writers like Amitav Ghosh, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, et al. However, Indian women writing in English is a relatively new phenomenon which is rapidly gaining relevance by the indelible imprints left by the works of writers such as Kamla Markandaya, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande et al. All these writers deal with the tribulations that a woman has to undergo primarily in the male-dominated Indian society, but the works of Manju Kapur do not simply voice the restrictions imposed upon a woman. She deals with a wide range of issues like identity crisis, personal fulfillment, inter and intrapersonal relationships. Manju Kapur is a critically

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acclaimed Indian novelist who has five novels to her credit, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*. She grapples with the intermingling of traditional and modern ethos. All women novelists base their fiction around the experiences that they have had in their personal lives and thus consciously or unconsciously delve into the realm of feminist assertions of one or the other kind. (Lapis Lazuli)



Difficult Daughters

Manju Kapur is an emerging figure among the women writers of Indian English Fiction. She is a world acclaimed writer for reflecting the feministic vision in her novels. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* received International acclaim and was awarded the Commonwealth prize for Eurasia Section. Her novels deal with the lives of middle class Indian women who fight to break the tradition of silence against male domination in Indian patriarchal society. A constant sufferer Virmati, protagonist in this novel, nurses a deep desire to become as independent, defiant and assertive as her cousin Shakuntala. Shakuntala sows the seeds of freedom in Virmati. She symbolizes modernity by not following the conventional norms which limit daughters to an early marriage and then home and family.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur has presented various choices for Virmati, but has shown her as emotionally dependent upon and exploited by Harish. In her life, one can find the

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constant conflict between self and family. At the one end Virmati breaks all ties, but on the other end she enters into new ones. Manju Kapur has shown through Virmati that obsession with physicality and marriage has ruined her life.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women, but because, as Jaidev puts it she has understood a woman both as a woman and as a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts. *Difficult Daughters* is a skillful, enticing first novel by an Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism. Manju Kapur's sensuous pages re-create an intimate world where family groups sleep in the open air on the roof and wash themselves in the yard in the dewy cool of morning, where love-making is furtive and urgent because another wife may be listening, and women's lives move to a complex choreography of cooking, washing, weaving and mending, growing, picking, chopping and blending. This novel offers a completely imagined, aromatic, complex world, a rare thing in a first novel.

Silent Victim Portrait

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. However, ManjuKapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, much remains to be done. We see the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspiring to achieve self-reliance through education. They nurture the desire to be independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action-oriented. All the women protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own. In spite of getting education and freedom the women protagonists of Manju Kapur's novels do not blossom into new woman in the real sense. Though they dare to cross one patriarchal threshold, they are

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caught in another, where their free spirits are curbed and all they do is adjust, compromise and adapt. (Lapis Lazuli –An International Literary Journal)

Yearning for Autonomy and Separate Identity

Manju Kapur presents the yearning for autonomy and separate identity in her women protagonists in this post-modern novel in a traditional thread. It is impossible for Virmati to accept a physical relationship. She is haunted by a deep sense of guilt. The formal marriage, a social and public statement, is a must for her. It is this which will establish her identity even if it is as the professor's second wife. Marriage thus for her means deliverance from the fear of being socially condemned, a possibility which will perhaps bring her back into the fold and relieve her from the sense of insecurity and uncertainty. The earlier generation, of which her mother is a representative, saw no reason to rebel. There was complete acceptance of life, even if it meant an oppressive, dreary, hapless one.

Male Characters

The male characters of Kapur's novels affect the psychology of women, but they do not fit into the mold of a hero. On the other hand, the women characters qualify as heroes because they directly or indirectly surpass the societal restrictions thrust upon them by the agents of patriarchy. Kapur's women characters are scrupulously conscious of their position in family and society which leads to their quest for individuality and freedom. They are characters of flesh and blood who prefer to terminate loveless relationships with men and are ready to bear the weight of their ethical uncertainties and decisions. Men in her novels are represented as chauvinistic and uncompromising, who are eternally bewildered by the rebellious attitude of the women. The concern of the women protagonists of Kapur's novels is not to seek equality with men, but to reflect upon their situation essentially as women. Apart from man-woman relationships, the writer also focuses on mother daughter relationships, children parent relationships, relationships between women of the same family. Thus, different aspects of relationships are one of the central concerns of the novels of Manju Kapur.

Conclusion

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Manju Kapur's portrayal of her protagonists, who are being placed rightly in the extroverted continuum, has displayed the ripened comprehension of the female psyche and the inner subtlety and rigidness of a woman's mind. Virmati's level of extroversion is disclosed through her stern outspoken nature, whereas in the case of Astha, her well determined and action oriented-deeds throw her out as an extrovert. Both of them appear to be the embodiment of extroverted nature, and raise their voices against the stale customs and prejudices of the society. Apart from these external factors, they seek a balance of their inner conflicts caused by both abstract and concrete entities.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur has presented a conventional family that gives importance to religion and rituals. Virmati's mother is cast in the traditional mold. Her father comes under the category of a benign patriarch. In this novel patriarchy operates in a different manner. The novelist has presented the conflict between traditional and modernity that creates fissures in the family. Virmati is a difficult daughter because unlike her mother who willingly surrenders to the preordained societal role, she is not ready to blindly submit herself to tradition. Kasturi holds patriarchal values as an ideal. As her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self. By suppressing Virmati's desire for freedom she becomes the voice of patriarchy.

A close psychological study of the protagonists of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* reveals the women's extroversion continuum, which has been a hidden agenda behind their incessant protests against the obstructs of the male chauvinistic and oppressing society. (New Perspectives on Indian English Writings, 39 – 42)

To conclude, Manju Kapur brilliantly illustrates that in Indian patriarchal society where tradition is so strong a woman fails to get out of such bondage and pines a separate identity of her own. Thus, the protagonist Virmati ultimately compromises and finds her own way, knowing that they cannot have a future jointly. Therefore, she embodies the image of new woman who longs to have her own space in the traditional patriarchal society.

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