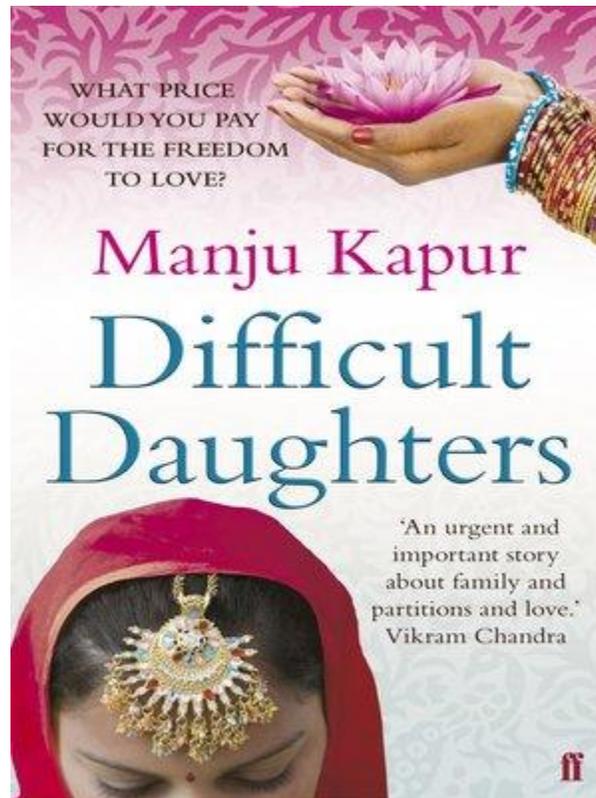


## Identity Crisis in Women's Perspective in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

T. Anbu, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed.

---



### Abstract

The concept of women's thinking is nothing but the development of a movement which began in the late 1960s as a force, which began as an attempt to describe and interpret the experiences of women's lives. And we see their problems highlighted in literature especially in the form of novel. It also began as an attack towards male ideas about women as seen in literature. It rejects the ideas of men about women. It denounces the patriarchal society's control over women. Therefore, feminism is an attempt at removing the small space, and insignificant positions women were given by the male members of society, including male writers.

**Keywords:** Feminism, women's predicament, freedom and Socio-Cultural prejudice, male dominance.

### **Freedom for Women's Expression of Their Thoughts**

Feminism had its inception as early as 1869 when Mary Wollstone Craft wrote **A Vindication of the Rights of Women** and later came Virginia Woolf who wrote *A Room of one's own* in 1929. The most powerful book that brought into focus the gender bias was Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex* in 1949. In the 1970s Elaine Showalter's essay towards feminist poetics distinguishes literature written by women for women, about woman, as they really are, by calling it Gynocriticism. However, feminism is also considered as a cultural, economic and political movement that thought about the freedom, security and complete equality of women. In Indian writings in English, feminism has been used for evaluating the real picture of the woman.

### **The Role of Women's Perspective in Indian English Literature**

Considering the concept of feminism, Indian Women novelists have played an important role in Indian writing in English. They have given a new dimension to the Indian Literature. In the galaxy of Indian English Literature, the women novelists who have occupied the most important place are Kamala Markandaya, ShashiDeshpande and Anita Desai who have chosen as their main theme of writing the topic of feminism. For examples, in some of the novels of Anita Desai like *Voices in the city* she has focused on the complexities in the relationship between a man and a woman. She has tried to depict the psychological aspect of the protagonists. So by writing about women's problems, the women writers try to create awareness among women. In fact, more authors like Gita Mehta, ShamaFutehally and Nisha Da Cunha work on feministic themes and the emotional crises of women. In addition to the above writers, we have many other names such as Shobha de, NargisDalal, ShashiDeshpande, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, BharatiMukharjee, NamitaGokhale, GauriDeshpande and Manju Kapur and so on. Most of these female novelists are famous for their bold views that are highlighted in their novels.

## **Identify Crisis in Women's Perspective**

Kapur also deals with the role of woman as daughter, wife and mother; she is a trend settler and she has brought the women protagonists from the shackled suffering women to daring and amazing women. She has given woman a new image of boldness. Kapur's heroines negotiate for their independence and find a respectable place in society. The heroine is mentally advanced in the real sense of the word, whether she is Virmati(DD)Astha (A married Woman), Nisha(Home), Nina(the Immigrant), or Shagun(Custodian). The female protagonists are the new women who hail from the middle class, but challenge the existing socio-cultural patriarchal system. In the social milieu, they are educated, modern, intelligent, bold and assertive. Even though they try to transcend the social hierarchy by demolishing it, they often undergo serious psychological traumas in the absence of an alternative, planned feminist ideology that may give them freedom, security and peace of mind.

## **Virmati the Second Protagonist in the *Difficult Daughter***

Virmati is a difficult daughter for her mother, Kasturi. Virmati has siblings, but only Virmati creates problems and becomes difficult to handle. It is her education and her modern outlook that is problematic. In the beginning Virmati is depicted as the governess of her brother and sisters. She is aware of "how indispensable she was to her mother and the whole family (DD7)." But she is attracted towards the modern thinking of Shakuntala and wants to study more. She too wants "to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight with her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over" (DD19). But Kasturi thinks on an entirely different line. So, the difference in their thinking and proprieties cause conflicts in their relationship. Mother thinks it is the mothers' duty to condition their daughters according to the norms of the patriarchal society. Kasturi thinks that only primary education is required for a woman. She feels proud that, "she came from a good family where girls were taught housekeeping from the time they could walk" (DD205). Kasturi wants her daughter Virmati to be like her. But Virmati never feels any oneness with her mother. The sense of belonging that is the essence of any good relationship is missing here. Since childhood Virmati keeps longing for love and understanding but the mother doesn't have time nor the inclination to give them to her.

## **Inborn Quality and the Quest for Own Identity**

Kapur was so moved by the love story of her parents, set in that era that she restored it bit by bit, before letting it sink into her memory; she pieced together the story through sepia photographs, talks with relatives, her own fragmented memory and sanded up with a journey to the locales of her mother's place to write *Difficult Daughters*. It is her quest for her own identify through reliving her mother's past. The Narrator, Ida, is a difficult daughter and she explores the life of her mother in the novel. As she admits in the end:

This book weaves a connection between my mother and me,  
each word a brick in a mansion i made with my head and my heart.  
Now live in it, mama, and leave me be.  
Do not haunt me anymore (DD 280)

## **Identity Crisis**

Yet, in the end she finds herself building a mansion for her mother. It is the identify crisis that results in a conflict in the relationship between them. A daughter's search for her identify begins when she finds similarities with her mother. And when she starts asserting herself, the conflict starts building up. Ida grows "struggling to be the model daughter"(DD 279) and under this pressure to perform better she is "Constantly looking for escape routes."(DD 279) and becomes a rebel and finally she is "nothing, husbandless, childless" (DD 279). She blames her mother for the "Melancholy depression and despair"(DD 279) in her life. As the mother is the culture bearer and passes on the legacy of the patriarchal system to her daughter who may either accept it implicitly or may question it, but no matter how diverse their views, the daughter is unable to reject her completely. Through her journey into the past of her mother, she finds, she is like her mother, although she hates her mother and the novel begins by saying as "the one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother".(DD 1)

## **Conclusion**

In the novel, we find Virmati's problems and conflicts are existential and her struggle for self-assertion leads to self-alienation. The protagonists in Kapur's novels therefore, endure physical, emotional and psychological sufferings, but finally are able to attain their long

cherished freedom to a great extent. Kapur's novels enable the readers to get an idea of the women's struggle against gender biases.

---

### Works Consulted

Agarwal, B.R. "Indian English Literature and crisis in value system: A study of *Difficult Daughters* by ManjuKapur." *Indian Writing in English: Tradition and modernity*, edited by Amar Nath Prasad, KanuPriya. Sarup & sons, n.p, 2006, pp. 239- 249.

Alex, Rani. "Dichotomy of character in ManjuKapur's *Virmati* and her Transit to Sisterhood". *Indian Journal of Post Colonial Literature*, vol no, 13. 1, Jun 2013, pp. 132- 143.

Bala, Sumanand Subash Chandra. "ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughter*: An Absorbing Tale of Fact and Fiction". *50 years of Indian Writing: Golden Jubilee Volume*, edited by R.K. Dhawan, Indian Association for English Studies, n.p, 1999, pp. 105- 110.

Choudhary, Mamta. *ManjuKapur's Difficult Daughters and their Difficult Daughter and their Difficult Pleasures*.

Devi, Meena, "Manju Kapur's Home: A Recapitulation of Indian Familial values." *Critical Responses to Indian Literature in English*, edited by Samuel Kirubahar., et.al., Virudhunagar Publishers, 2012, pp. 227.223.

Dwivedi, A.N. "ManjuKapur's *Home*: A Feminist Reading." *Novels of ManjuKapur: A Feminist Study*, edited by Ashok Kumar, Sarup, 2010, pp. 38- 45.

Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. Faber Publishers, 1999.

Shree.Subha. "Difficult Daughters: Travails in Self Identity". *Indian Fiction in English: Roots and Blossoms*, edited by Amar Nath Prasad and Nagendra Kumar. Sarup & sons, 2009. 147- 151.

Showalter, Elaine. The New feminist criticism: Essay on Women literature and Theory: New York. Pantheons Books, 1985.

Allen, Walter. The English Novel: A short history. London: Penguin book Ltd 1970.

=====  
T. Anbu, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed.,  
Department of English  
Assistant Professor  
Adhiyaman Arts and Science College for Women  
Uthangarai 635207  
Tamilnadu  
India  
[anbuanandhi@gmail.com](mailto:anbuanandhi@gmail.com)