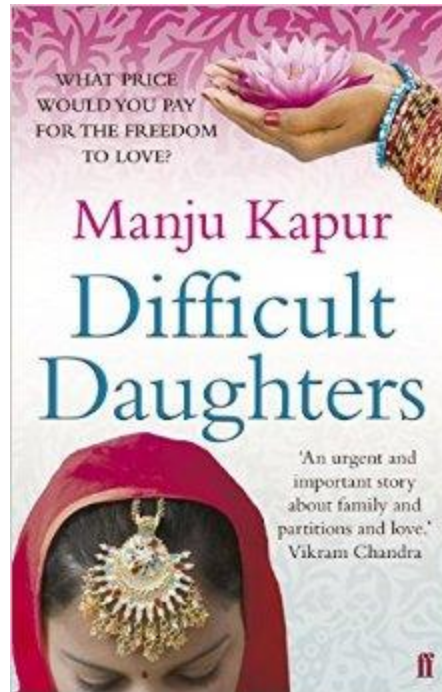


Portrayal of Matriarchal Perception in Manju Kapur's
Difficult Daughters

V. M. Manju, M.A., Dr. C. Govindaraj and R. Lissy, M.A., M.Phil., M.Ed.



Abstract

Indian Society is bound by duties and responsibilities which are a part and parcel of the country's culture. As India is a place of different cultures, there are certain traditions which are followed by Indians in an astute manner. Manju Kapur, in her novel *Difficult Daughters*, has portrayed the traditional women of India. Here, she has presented women belonging to three generations. Kasturi follows the tradition by marrying and bearing eleven children and she expects the same from her first daughter Virmati. But Virmati prefers the road which is less traveled. She begins to value education and higher things in life against her parent's wish. The novel is also successful in presenting clearly the abuse that the women face at the hands of society. She wishes to pursue education for herself for which she pays a high price by falling in love with the professor. She finds no meaning in following the tradition or culture that she was

born in. She struggles to get what she wants. Though she breaks Indian values in her time, she also follows tradition with her daughter Ida's arrival. She follows the same interfering in Ida's life just as her mother Kasturi had insisted she must do certain things in her life. But Ida goes a step further. She divorces her husband and is determined to remain single. Thus, in the novel all the women characters want to change their daughters' lives by asking them to follow age old traditions.

Key Words: Manju Kapur's novels, Traditional Women, *Difficult Daughters*

Tradition and Culture

Tradition and culture are the expressions of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including beliefs, customs, practices, and values. In Indian culture and tradition, and concepts of rituals, there have been often alien ideas as far as women are concerned. Indian women are considered as the moral nucleus of the family, and yet one can see how the traditions also contrived to demean the women, making them the downtrodden ones, abused by the patriarchal society.

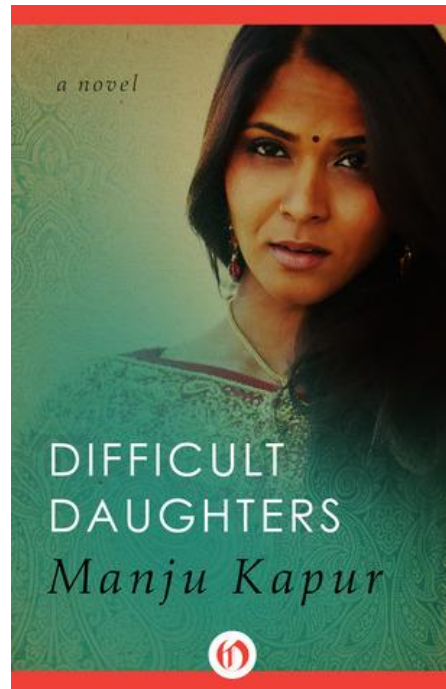
Manju Kapur's Depiction of Indian Thoughts and Traditions

Indian English creative writers describe the Indian traditional values in their works. Among them Manju Kapur is excellent in her special depiction of Indian thoughts and traditions. The people of the present century also follow most of the conventions and customs. The real impact of Indian social-cultural traditions is echoed in the religious spiritual ideas that are portrayed as part and parcel of the life of Indian women. The novel *Difficult Daughters* explores the dark reality of tradition, prevailing customs particularly close to the Indian women who follow the age-old rotten ideas and traditions in their day to day lives.

Manju Kapur is the author of five novels. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, won the Commonwealth prize for best novels (Eurasia section), her second novel is *Married Women*, and the third is *Home*. The fourth novel *The Immigrant* has been long listed for DSC prize for South Asian literature and her fifth novel is *Custody*. She is a prolific writer who, in her novels,

describes in detail the society of the period and the places in which she lives, thus contextualizing her age.

Characters in *Difficult Daughters*



In the novel Manju Kapur presents Ganga, Kasturi and Kishori Devi who are apt to follow the traditional way of living. They follow the customs of those days when women were not supposed to raise their voices for their rights, to protest against injustices or to question the already existing beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. Indian women novelists have been portraying women in various circumstances. But recently, the remarkable range of India's most accomplished women writers has brought about a tremendous change in the way of depicting women characters.

Women writers such as Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Saghel, Anita Desai, Sashi Despande, Bharati Mukerjee, Manju Kapur, Gita Hariharan and others have intuitively perceived the grip of traditional thought and present these Indian women as individuals who seem to automatically follow the ancient beliefs. Here Kapur brings out the concept that Simon De Beauvoir points out, "In actuality... for man represents the both positive and the neutral... whereas women represents only negative, defined by limiting criteria".

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015
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Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is the novel published in 1998 is a standing example to prove the traditional concept. The novel is written with the pre-independence background of Indian society that was facing the long violent confrontation for freedom as well as the assault and onrush of modernity in the form of the 'new education' or the loud voice of women, who since in middle ages have been the victims of oppression.

A Story of Women

Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* is the story of women torn between different forces that affect their lives deeply. The heroine's duty towards her family, her desire to be academically well equipped, her illicit love affair with a married man and her attempts to formulate her own fate, stand as the central part of the novel. Her relationship with the professor doesn't receive social, legal, or moral acceptance. Kapur presents a long tale which successfully walks us through the difficult family situations, society and relationship between people.

Kasturi and Virmati

The central part of the novel circles around Kasturi and her mother, Virmati; Ida on the outer plot, where Shaguntala, Ganga, Swarnalata are also portrayed. The outer plot supports the main plot. The novelist brings out the traditional women concept through instances such as this one: Kasturi's mother's insistence that her daughter should be married soon, while she panics that her daughter might bring some disgrace or shame to the family in future. Here the writer exposes the age old traditional concept of Kasturi's mother, who denies Kasturi her right to education and tries to make her get trained well in household things, for making her relationship with her mother-in-law smooth and less problematic. Christopher Rollason has states that, "the psychological annihilation of Virmati, at the hands of her own family and her husband, should not be read as a fatality. What happens to Virmati is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian Women"(184).

Kasturi's mother is an excellent example of women hanging on to outdated notions or ancient customs. In those early days women were restricted from pursuing their education. So, Kasturi also tries to force the same thing on her daughter Virmati. Kasturi rejects the idea of Virmati's further studies. She wants to make her daughter walk the same path which her mother

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had forced her to follow. The role of Kasturi is supposed to be a model for Virmati, but she goes beyond the wishes of her traditional mother, always aspiring for freedom which is condemned in a tradition bound Indian society. Virmati is a prototype of post- colonial Indian women, as she succeeds to break her mother's pressure upon her way of life. Thus Virmati perplexes her mother Kasturi, who had at this age already gotten married. She fails to comprehend Virmati's disinterest in marriage: "How had girls changed so much in a generation" (60). She holds the concept that education means denial of tradition and culture. Though she has been educated, Virmati pressures her daughter Ida do the same things her mother had forced her to do. Virmati also tightens her reigns and does not give her daughter the freedom she wants.

Traditional Values Generation after Generation

The view of tradition, culture and ritual continues for three generations of Kasturi, Virmati's mother and Virmati, and Ida - Virmati's daughter. A traditional value revered by one generation may become nothing but a burden for the next. Because of the traditional notions, women face all kinds of difficulties and they are the victim of male domination. Virmati realizes that life was really not worth all the struggles and things are not always as they appear or seem to be. As Vandita Mishra has comments, "Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power of freedom. Because even as she breaks free from the old prison, she is locked into the newer ones." Virmati's similar traits are exhibited in the statement of Ida- " I grew up struggling to be the model daughter" (279).

In the novel, Manju Kapur reflects upon the traditional notions which were followed, for example, the extreme importance of motherhood and the superior status of the mother who gives birth to a son. Virmati marries the professor and Kasturi feels she has spoilt the honourable name of her family, and she says that she will surely face insults in the future.

Classical Model - Ganga

Manju Kapur develops the characters through the environment aspects and also depicts the life to a typical classical modeling at one's home. Then the novelist brings out the character of Ganga who also follows the same Indian traditions in her life, while her husband takes a second wife. Most of the Indian women compromise and adjust throughout their lives though

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they suffer a lot, since tradition says they must do so. Ganga mother-in-law Kishori Devi follows the traditional ideas; when her son married second time she accepts it. Since she has belief in the horoscope, she approaches the astrologer who says that her son was supposed to have two wives. So she follows the superstitious belief and agrees to his second marriage. She is an apt example of traditional notions that force people to behave in such strange ways. Here Clara makes a similar note that, “ In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of the patriarchal system” (271).

Symbolic Setting

The novel is set in the backdrop of Indian independence. As the country emerges independent, the traditional women seem to emerge into independent women, the independent women into free women. Thus we see a gradual evolution silently taking place from one generation to the other though they are hemmed in at all sides by the traditional family rules and regulations. The approach towards culture and tradition seem to get changed as the next generation comes and a new transformation is born. But this is not a general transformation taking place all over India. Certain areas like villages and towns and even in many cities, there is no real change among the women as far as freedom of thought and behaviour is concerned. Thus, Manju Kapur tries to deal with the grip of culture, tradition and ritual on the psyche of Indian women in her novel.

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