

# FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

Dr. Deepa Rani\*

Assistant Prof. of English, DMM Kurukshetra, Haryana, India

Email ID: dmmkk2010@gmail.com

Accepted: 29.08.2022

Published: 01.09.2022

**Keywords:** Assertion, Empowerment, Patriarchal.

## Abstract

Twentieth century Indian English writing is replete with writings by women writers who have made the world realise that Indian women writers have in themselves an immense potential and they have raised and discussed a variety of issues through their writings. Indian women writers are gaining grounds and winning critical appraisal and international recognition as they are endowed with gift of delving deep into the workings of human mind and heart with sympathy sensitivity and understanding. Among the prolific women novelists like Kamla Markandya, Nayantare Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande etc. Manju Kapur is also a distinguished figure. In all her novels male characters are dominating but they do not come in the definition as a hero. They are affecting the psyche of women characters whether they are *Virmati (Difficult Daughters)* *Astha (A Married Woman)*, *Nisha (Home)* or *Nina (The Immigrant)*, are all on the verge of secluding themselves from the company of man. They are searching a place for themselves in the male-dominated patriarchal society. Society, morality, values are like bondage to them, so all of them are leading forward in an ambiguous manner in the midst of relentless urbanization and far-reaching western influences.

## Paper Identification



\*Corresponding Author

*Man for the field, women for the hearth.*

*Man for the sword, for the needle she.*

*Man to command and woman to obey.*

The famous poet Tennyson had written this in his work *The Princess*.

But it is time to tell Mr. Tennyson... females are no more dumb now. It is a truth universally acknowledged that women who are physically and mentally equipped to perform at par with men are not treated as their equal despite innumerable evolutions and revolutions. She has not only been denied existence as complete human being but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish.. As Sushila Singh puts it: "Human experience for centuries has been synonyms with the masculine experience, with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely as an entity that concerns man either

in real life or his fantasy life .In such conditions the question of searching her identity is justified. This is the time for women to rise in revolt and to get rightful and meaningful place in the society. A Feminist writer writes, "Women are one half of the sky". Indeed feminist theories cut across a greater cross- section of cultures than any other critical school. Feminist theory begins with the eighteenth century and continues until the present.They tried to bring about a revolution among readers and texts.It was in 1928 that Virginia Woolf , in her famous lecture called A Room of One Own gave rise to a new thinking on issues related to the status and role of women. Simon De Beauvoir in her treatise,The Second Sex(1949-50) nurtured the idea of feminist ideology.The core idea of feminism is that women should have same rights, power and opportunity that men have. Since then women have actually been struggling to achieve a racial, social and economic equality with men.To achieve this equality women today are stepping out of rigid sex roles assigned to them in tradition bound patriarchal society.Contemporary women are not ready to accept the separation of roles on gender basis. The feminist essentially promotes the idea of a society in which men and women are equal and idea of male domination is discarded. Chaman Nahal defines feminism very precisely in his article"Feminism in Indian English Fiction" and says: " I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the women are free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome, whether it is religious group or ethnic group, when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes."(Nahal,30)As far as the content of Manju Kapur's novels is concerned she is primarily a writer of women. She says: "I am interested in the lives of women, whether in political arena or in domestic spaces. In their lives....What sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning-One of the main preoccupation in all my books is how women

manage to negotiate both the private and public spaces in their lives... what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning....and at what cost to their lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home. They have to do many things, they have to play so many roles, there's a lot of stuff to say about women. And it is also what I know." This statement provides the summary of almost everything she sought to express. The struggle for control over one's destiny is the key theme of 'Difficult Daughters' the first novel written by Manju Kapoor. The novel portrays contemporary women's yearning for their right to expression and freedom of choice. The novel is the story of three generations of women- Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. Virmati the protagonist, is the eldest of the long chain of children born to an ever- pregnant mother Kasturi. She "seeks human relations that will allow her to be herself and to exercise the degree of control over her life which, as an educated woman, she knows, she deserves." Virmati always aspires for a freedom which is condemned and ridiculed in tradition bound Indian society. "Adjust, compromise, adapt" that has been the demand from the women by such a male chauvinist society. Kapur highlights the polluted environment degrading human values and the Satanism of male against the weaker sex in her novels. Since time immemorial, Indian women have unsuccessfully tried to create their own space in a patriarchal society. Kasturi enjoys her fecundity and every year she gives birth to a child. Most of the time she either remain sick or pregnant as a result of which Virmati's childhood is lost in being a young mother to her siblings, yet her desire to study further never diminishes . After her matriculation she is further trained into stitching, embroidery and other domestic chores which are considered to be essential pre-requisite of an Indian marriageable girl in traditional Indian households .For her mother ,her education is over and now she should be married off. But there was something else in virmati's mind .She wants to have a choice to study

what and where .She has to face different twists and turns due to her desire of higher education. As she belongs to a typical traditional family ,which follow the old tradition of marrying off their daughters after receiving the basic education of housekeeping. But she makes up her mind that” she too had to go to Lahore even if she had to fight her own mother who was... so sure that her education was practically over “(17) Virmati wants to have to her own space, her own identity and wants to taste the wine of freedom like her cousin Shakuntala .Shakuntala’s visits to their house inspires her a lot and changes the life style of Virmati and she starts thinking that it is possible to be something other than a wife .The novelist writes about her mentality at this stage . “Shakuntala’s visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. It was possible to be something other than a wife.Image of Shakuntala pehnji kept floating through her head. Shakuntala pehnji who having done her MSc in chemistry, had gone about testing the wine of freedom... She too had to go to Lahore ,even if she had to fight her own mother who was so sure that are education was practically over .”As a result she completes her FA and with the support and encouragement of her father and grandfather succeeds in getting admission to A.S. college ...the bestian of male learning to do B.A.”Fruits of knowledge are charming but deadly. Here she becomes the target of the attraction of the professor who taught her English literature .He is a married man and lives in Virmati’s house as a tenant. For Virmati professor’s love was more stimulant than Inderjeet, an irrigation engineer with whom she was engaged. He appreciates her intelligence and capability to understand the things in their right perspective .Like Raju in ‘The Guide’ he appreciates her potentials and it was he who for the first time acquaints her with romance in English literature. This is the transition face of her life and professor sows the seed of love in her fertile but virgin heart. She was getting herself tangled in the web of professor’s love and rejects to marry

Inderjeet . She suggests her mother ,”Let Indumati marry .Give her the khase you are making I don’t want any beddings, pots and pans nothing .”Not only she refuses to marry but even attempts to commit suicide by downing in the canal. She becomes an object of disgrace to the family and is confined to the godown but when she comes to know about the pregnancy of Ganga she rusque this the hopelessness of her illicit passion .Very rusquely and decisively . And she determines to close this chapter of life and decides to start her studies once again .Thus the journey of a new woman starts. She no longer wants to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed.”(DD85)she starts a meaningful life in Lahore with her roommate SwarnaLata. But professor’s thought keeps circling around her mind. Professor comes to meet her .They meet and enjoy their life .As a result Virmati gets pregnant .The irony of situation is that he is not with her at the crucial moments of the termination of her pregnancy. Another mode of life opens before Virmati when she joins as the principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya in Himachal Pradesh. Virmati enjoys a free life here and her quest of identity was satisfying .It was the stage, she has her own place to live and yet she falls. But the professor’s furtive night stay with her spoils her career and she is compelled to resign. On the other hand he has always been evading the question of marriage. Ultimately she decides to go to Shantiniketan and forget him for good. But something else was designed by destiny .Unfortunately during her journey she has to change the train in Delhi and she contacts a friend of Harish and her dreams of a spiritual awakening, of a renewed autonomy faded. The friend on knowing everything not only call Harish but compels him to marry her .Instead of going to Shantiniketan, Virmati comes to Amritsar as the second wife of Harish.Virmati’s married life with the Professor in Amritsar turns out to be a disaster .She wilts under the implacable and hostile gaze of Ganga, Professor’s first wife .She loses all sense of



independence/ identity though continuation of her education feeds no more dreams of independence. Harish's patronizing and domineering attitude to her has completely enmeshed Virmati. After completing her MA when she returns, she comes to know that all the members of the family have gone out because of communal tension. After sometime Virmati was pregnant again. And they were blessed with a girl child who is the narrator, Ida. Virmati never correspond to age old family tradition but paradoxically she persuades Ida to make herself fit into the channel of family. In her futile attempt she tries to keep her under control but Ida is a girl who refuses to submit to the dictates of society and believes in personal freedom. She is not ready to follow the traditions and rituals of society. When Virmati says her: "you are disappointing your father." She protests and says: "Why is it so important to please h?" At last we can say that the novel evokes some concern over the problems of women in a male dominated society where laws are for women, are made by man in its social matrix and a husband stands as 'a sheltering tree' under which a woman proves her strength through her sufferings.

Kapur dwells on various feministic issues in this novel like- female education and their empowerment, financial independence, eradication of child marriages, search for identity etc. Kapoor's message is clear and loud that "society would be better off if it's females were effective and capable." (163)

#### Work Cited

- [http://rollason.Seikilos.com.ar/rollason Writings.html](http://rollason.Seikilos.com.ar/rollason%20Writings.html).  
 Kapur, Manju *Difficult Daughters*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998.  
 Nahal, Chaman "Feminism in Indian English Fiction" *Indian Women Novelists*, ed. By R.K. Dhawan Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1991.  
 Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One Own*. Harcourt Brace and world, New York 1987.

Jindal Gurpyari, *Evoiving a 'Feminist Tradition...'* in *Atlantic Review*, Delhi 2003.