


# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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## Chapter 4

# Portrayal of Women in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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## Abstract:

Women have done and are still doing extra ordinary things, History, literature, religion and politics abound with examples of women who have inspired others by their great deeds. The traditional role of woman was marginal, she was neglected, isolated, tortured, suffered, humiliated by the patriarchal rules but if we find the development, change in her position, we definitely come across to the uplifting graph of changing position. Every right was denied to the traditional woman and in this ultra- modern world she has got success in every corner of the society, from silent to speech, tradition to modern changes takes place, and development is rising upwards. In every religion, every society the position of woman remains same whether the matter of their exploitation or their progress. Thus, the present paper is going to focus on the portrayal of women in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters*.

**Keywords:** Identity Crisis, Self Identity and Image of Women

## Introduction:

Today's modern woman, after the hundreds of years of struggle are in a negotiating position and they do have choices even in literature as in any other art, the role of women is no longer only to inspire but also to create. In almost all the languages of the world expression of women's liberation, of feminist concern is noticeable, whether it is Indian, British, Nigerian, Canadian or South Asian. There are some eminent writers in English whose fiction reveals how the apportion or power by women could be conducted according to the principles or the principles of self-interest and self-definition, the very concept of self-realization and rebel against Patriarchal customs comes from the writing of some eminent feminist writer like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Nayantara Sahgal, Shobha De, Anita Rau Bandmi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, Bapsi Sidhwa and

It is fair to say that the silence female post- colonial writers manifest in their works is actually a sound" silence their pens make such a sound of silence resound in the world of letters. Thence "silence is no longer "silent" the colonial females seen in the "silence" in post- colonial texts are infact crying revolt against the mainstream society from the periphery where the subsist. (1)

When women break the tradition by denying the burden of patriarchal rules of society. She struggles for separate identity and her revolt create transition not only in her own life but in the entire society also, due course of time Indian woman writers affected by Western feminism and have explored the alternative ideal of self- assertion. The recent women writer from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh exemplify the issues of gendered self- representation and feminist concern. Their works realize and to experience to make new empowering image for women, instead of limiting the lives of women to one ideal, they push the ideal to wards, the full expression of each woman's potential and the women writes who writers about women's transition their changing roles are also accepted by the society.

Not long ago a woman who spoke about herself was considered a loose woman To voice a pain, to divulge a secret, was considered sacrilege, breach of family trust. Today voices are raised without fear, and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept a woman protected also isolated. Some of the women who speak have stepped out others who have not are beginning to be aware, eager to find expression, but let them speak for themselves. (2)

Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India to whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has a significant impact, she writes what she feels about her women proto-gonists and their lives in post- modern India. Her work can be read with a significant new meaning and this provides a valid introduction to the feminist perspective on family life, using concepts of conjugal roles, dual-burdens, equal-opportunities and various social policies as evidence to support the feminist viewpoint. Kapur stresses the change in her women protagonists, as the transitional period which is so important in woman's life which depicts the development of her



personality. Kapur portrayed the new woman who is inclined to take the road not taken, such a woman is independent, assertive and even defiant.

### Portrayal of Women: An Investigation

Manju Kapur's first novel 'Difficult Daughter's was published in 1998, located against the backdrop of India of 1940 presents the problems of an upper middle class urban Arya Samaj Punjabi family in Amritsar. Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* won her the Common wealth prize 1999 and was a number one best seller in India. In this novel Kapur speaks about the idea of independence – independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also independence yearned after by a woman. Virmati asserts her will to be educated, she manages to leave home to study in Lahore. Her dreams were influenced by her own regard, Virmati's quest for freedom and identity is the focus of the novel, her desperation for a space of her own to study, she is the eldest daughter of her ever-pregnant Mother Kasturi, being an elder daughter. She is burdened with the family duties and her mother's children's responsibilities; she looks after ten younger siblings. Virmati in her thoughts was very progressive she wants to take her further education and for that sake she has to go to Lahore and when she informed her mother that she wants to go to Lahore to pursue further education but Kasturi is worried about her daughter's marriage she tells to her daughter- "When I was your age, girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age..." (3)

Virmati's marriage is settled with Indeerjeet but she is in love with Oxford returned professor who lives next door to her and already married because of him she breaks her engagement with Indeerjeet. She rebelled against her mother's expectations and left to Lahore. Though she told to the world that she left to study in Lahore yet in reality it was an attempt to find a respite from the professor. The Professor wants to have Virmati not as his wife but as a woman to gratify the intellectual needs because his wife was an illiterate woman, whom he had tried to educate and had miserably failed. She is the woman whose life's mission was to cook for the feed her family and keep the house clean, so professor passionately falls in love with his student Virmati who is passionately interested in studies, however in an attempt to forget prof. Harish she went to Lahore, here she was fascinated by the independent life of her cousin Shakuntala as she had described her

liberated lifestyle in Lahore to her. "We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars." (4) Virmati gets attracted towards Shakuntala's liberated life in Lahore and wants to be like her. It is clear that now she wants to change her life wants independence and escape from household responsibilities. The words enthralled and inspired to her, she was fascinated and over excited as she exclaimed. "I want to be like you pehnji." (5) This statement is a big example of her changing attitude and rebellious nature, transition is there in her thoughts, so she desperately sought an escape from her meaningless life and thought that pursuing of higher education might enable her to do so.

In this complex pantheon of diversities the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time.

"She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter wheel circling to create new forms unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration." (6)

Kapur stresses the struggle for existence and feminine aesthetics lends a female voice towards self-will and effacement. Despite Virmati's desperation to forget the professor she helplessly failed and became more engaged with him, being away from her home she succumbed to professor's passionate demands and after a number of vicissitudes she finally chooses to marry him but here her married life awaits her with a series of disappointments. She couldn't enjoy her married life with the professor, as professor refuses to leave his first wife and she couldn't withstand the ancor of Ganga towards herself. "When Ganga saw her, she would turn her face away or what was worse would stare intensely at her, her eyes moist, her lip trembling her big red bindi flashing accusingly." (7)

Even if she was not allowed to participate in either, the kitchen that was solely Ganga's territory or move about freely in the central living area of the house, whole day she left alone in to be confined to the dark, sullen dressing room with occasional visits to the main house to do her daily



nores. She restlessly waits for professor In the balance of power professor and herself she yields to the superior power. Here she becomes restless and futile, she awakens to the mistake she has committed on the very first day of her marriage. But now it is too late. Though Virmati wants to forget Harish but here she was greatly attracted to him and get married with him, but one by one incidents happens which gives her bitter experiences of her marriage she feels suffocated and forgets her own identity. Very soon she realized the very idea of her love as professor has drenched his educational thirst by marrying an educated girl, by this time she has read more books and gained more varied experiences than girls of her time and society were expected to, very soon she replies to Harish-"I should never have married you she said slowly, and its too late now, I have never soon it so clearly. It is not fair." (8) Virmati's first rebel against her Arya Samaj family consisting of her parents by denying marriage with Hemant chosen by her family members it consists a radical rebellious act and this step of transition proved her rebellious, it changed her mind, this act of her compels us to think that the two factors which enables to modern woman to assert are education and economic independence. Virmati belongs to the modern women being educated and having job before marriage helps her to break and unfold the patriarchal mode. On this situation Gur pyari jandial points out- "To break the patriarchal mould and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement." (9)

Manju Kapur's women wants to become different from a traditional woman and wants to walk into new paths, as in *Difficult Daughters*. The novel spans three generations of women and unveils their sense of disillusionment. The three generations of women (Kasturi, Virmati and Ida) symbolizes the three stages of women's independence. Kasturi the mother represents the pre independence period and is shown a victim of the offensive control of patriarchy, Virmati the daughter represents the country's struggle for independence as she too rebels against conventions of morality, Ida Virmati's daughter is the product of post-independence era establishes herself as an independent woman. Basically Virmati reveals her rebellious nature against deep rooted conventions Manju Kapur adeptly introduces Shakuntala Pehnji whose ultra-modern thoughts and ideas make Virmati bold and rebellious, she is impelled by her inner need to feel

self-sacrifice & devotion she believes- "One of the benefits of education is that it teaches us to think of ourselves." (10) by this time Virmati become the self-directed woman of new generation separating herself from the social taboos and testings.

Present research paper is an attempt to trace on Virmati's struggle for freedom and identity, the transition which takes place in her life is the central focus of point to discuss. From Nehan to her journey to Shantiniketan, to get greater freedom is again of alienation, to cut off from her dear ones until she is bound in a wedlock with Harish here she fights but fails every time she rebels to liberate herself and aspires to live a free life but she has condemned by her own orthodox family and the man whom she loves and married Kasturi her mother blames her for being educated and abuses her for bringing disgrace to the family. This encounter left her blank and dazed as she realized that the years of concern care, sacrifice and responsibility are lost just because she expressed her choice of living a life. Here Kapur has artfully drawn the character of Virmati as the incipient new woman, the woman who is conscious, assertive, introspective, educated wants to carve out a life for her conveying her personal vision of womanhood only to be left alienated. In this novel Kapur portrays Virmati as a new woman of colonial India and her urge to acquire education and freedom resembles the nation's quest for identity and self-hood but she fails to completely live up to her wishes although she dares to cross patriarchal threshold but she gets caught into another, where her free spirit is curbed and controlled, Kapur sets Virmati's story against the background of changing India, all are engaged in freedom struggle movement but Virmati has her own affairs.

However Virmati's daughter Ida the ultra-modern woman, who in her determination to live life despite all odds represents the real face of modern woman. She is a product of post-independence era and who establishes herself as an independent woman as the novel opens with the sincere declaration of the narrator Ida, a childless divorcee who undertakes a journey to know her mother's history. "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (11) Means here it is clear that when Ida throws light on her mother's life she feels that she will change her fate and not to repeat her mother's lifestyle. who suffered, rebelled but got nothing her



thoughts ideas and life style changes generation to generation it became more broader and improving. Ida breathed in the air of independence giving a full throated voice to woman. Independence with no compromises and no fetters. Ida could not accept her mothers decision to abort the fetus and terminate the life growing inside as she rejected the male autocracy when forced to abort by severing the marriage bond with Prabhakar-"I know mother what it was like to have an abortion. Prabhakar had insisted I have one, in denying that incipient little thing in my belly he sowed the seeds of break up." (12) Despite all odds of her life Ida in her determination presents the real face of modern woman. As in the novel we have another examples of new modern women Shakuntala, Swarnalata and Ida they are conscious, introspective educated, emancipated, driven by the zeal to assert their autonomy and separate identity and find a place for themselves in the society.

### Conclusion:

To sum up, this is the irony of Manju Kapurs woman there comes a transition phase in their life and they tend to become different from a traditionally woman and want to break out into new paths. However the change is more of theoretical in nature remarks Charlotte Perkins in an article on the new woman. As Susan Polis Schultz says, "The new woman arises full of confidence, she speaks eloquently, and links independently, full of strength, she organizes efficiently and directs proudly." (13)

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