

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

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**Abstract**— *Manju Kapur (born in Amritsar, India) is an Indian novelist. Her first novel, Difficult Daughters, won the 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, best first book, Europe and South Asia.*

*She teaches English at Delhi University under the name Manjul Kapur Dalmia. Difficult Daughters is a charming novel about educating daughters, and facing the consequences when they learn to think for themselves and begin to question the basic values of society. It is the old conflict again between the demands of modernity and tradition, enacted this time in an upright, high-minded, middle-class Punjabi Lalaji family in the 1930s and '40s.*

**Keywords**— *Manju Kapur, Women Identity, novel.*

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The drama unfolds with intelligence and absorbing sympathy in Lala Diwan Chand's Arya Samaj family in conservative Amritsar. At the centre of the storm is Virmati, who yearns for something beyond marriage. Having seen the deadening child-bearing existence of her frail mother, Virmati wants a life of her own. She wants to be like her cousin, Shakuntala, who is educated, sophisticated and, most important, lives in Lahore.

It is difficult to imagine Lahore's mesmerizing pull in those pre-Independence, pre-Partition days. It was the Mecca of Punjabi youth, who confidently strutted on the Mall, spent leisurely afternoons in Lawrence Gardens, thronged Anarkali Bazaar, embraced the politics of IPTA and the left, and set and followed trends in art, literature and music.

Virmati falls in love with her romantic neighbour, a married professor, England returned. She marries him eventually and comes into his home, alongside his furious first wife. Her family is disgraced; and the Arya Samaj movement for the education of women suffers a real setback in Amritsar.

It is a wonderfully gripping story by Manju Kapur, who was born in Amritsar and now teaches at a Delhi college. It took her five years to research and write *Difficult Daughters*. She has ably captured Virmati's conflict between her duty to her family, her desire for education and independence and her illicit love for a married man.

Unfortunately, the other characters are dead and wooden - especially the professor. Like many Indian males, he is an irritating coward who talks big and does little. Occasionally, Kapur manages to bring alive the sad situation of his first wife. Even so, she has missed an opportunity by not building up two warm and sensitive men - Virmati's father and grandfather - who would have lifted this book to a new level. As it stands, it is a competent, intimate woman's novel - which, mind you, is not a small accomplishment.

Manju Kapur has realistically depicted the female consciousness in *Difficult Daughters* and tried to show the struggle a woman has to do in order to prove her identity in the male dominated society. Virmati, the protagonist in *Difficult Daughters* struggles hard for her existential identity in adverse circumstances.

Virmati's relationship with the Professor brought all the turbulences in her life. It was because of her relationship with Professor she had to undergo an abortion before marriage, expelled from Nahan School and even after marrying the Professor her life became all the more problematic. As a wife of Professor, Virmati gets a bed to share with her husband but not his house whereas his first wife remained a dominating figure with everything belonged to her. Her hearth, house members of the family, children, belongings of husband and even her husband whom she continues to serve and never allows Virmati's to do anything for him. All this made her restless and made her feel in a sense of incomplete womanhood.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters: A Saga of Woman's Struggle* it is an accepted fact that the women writers have added a new dimension to Indian-English fiction with their exquisite perception of men and matters. Their fiction constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers' eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. They have dealt with the place and position of women in Indian society and their problems and plights from time to time. While doing so, they have analyzed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women their role and image along with their efforts to achieve a harmonious relationship with their surroundings. In due course, they aimed at portraying realistically Indian women's sense of frustration and their alienation. Time and again we see the Indian women as displaced, alienated figures, ground in the mill of convention, domestic injustice and institutionalized tyranny, the victims of their time, of their society, of their own romantic illusions. When the woman awakens, she awakens to the absurdity of life which follows the disintegration of familiar reality.

Amritsar born Manju Kapur who also authored *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), writer and Professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi University, insists that the world she creates in her novels is not because of any personal analysis of the world in front of her. All her novels deal with the state of middle class women in Indian society. While *Difficult Daughters* (1998) depicts against the backdrop of India's partition.

The story has many feminist figures like Shakuntala and Swarnlata, while the protagonist feels inspired by them, she never quite embodies feminist values which feel uncomfortable. Besides, the uncontested acceptance of Harish, Virmati's husband and Professor throughout the book is upsetting.

The best thing about Manju Kapu's writing is that the story moves fluidly through time periods and places- Amritsar, Lahore, and finally Delhi. It is so beautifully done that one actually learns a great deal about the cities and its lifestyle prevailing post partition. The literary life of Lahore and vibrancy of Amritsar is captured very vividly, while Delhi because it appears briefly is given just passing mention.

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