

Exploring Female Identity and Societal Expectations in Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters": A Secondary Source Analysis

Muskan Ghotra*, Dr. Kumar Gaurav**

School of Liberal and Creative Arts (School of Social Sciences and Languages)

Lovely Professional University, Punjab India

Abstract: Manju Kapur's first book, "Difficult Daughters," tells a captivating story about three generations of women - Kasturi, Virmati, and Ida - during India's partition in the 1940s. The novel explores the struggles these women go through as they balance tradition, modern ideas, and their own dreams of freedom (Anbu). The main character, Virmati, is a young woman from Amritsar who dreams of getting an education and having a life beyond just getting married. When she decides to marry a married professor as his second wife, it shocks her family and causes a lot of problems. Throughout the story, Virmati deals with the rules of society, her own hopes, and the results of her decisions. Kapur shows how Indian women's fight for freedom changes over time through the lives of these three characters. Kasturi represents the time before India's independence, when patriarchy had a tight hold on women's lives. Virmati stands for India's struggle for independence and her refusal to follow society's rules. Ida, Virmati's daughter, grows up in a time after independence and becomes an independent woman herself (Zagade).

"Difficult Daughters" is more than just a story about partition; it's also a feminist tale of love, showing the lives of women who helped India gain independence while dealing with their own struggles. Kapur's writing is personal and keeps you interested with hints about what's to come and changes in focus. The book talks about tough topics like the pain passed down through generations, how strong women can be, and how education helps women stand up for themselves (Margareth)." To understand how Manju Kapur portrays women and society in her book "Difficult Daughters" using other people's writings, we can look at different analyses. These analyses help explain the complicated roles and difficulties women face in Indian society, as shown in the book (Lizy).

Key words: - Manju Kapur, Difficult Daughters, Feminist, Partition, Society and Independence.

I. Introduction

Virmati, the daughter in the story, changes into a 'new woman' in a society where men hold power. It contrasts her journey with her mother Kasturi's unintentional support of traditional male dominance. This paper shows how women's roles are changing and the challenges they face as they try to be equal and free (Sathyarani).

A research paper English explores the idea of being an individual versus fitting into society in Kapur's novel. It looks at how characters deal with life, cultural values, and finding who they are. The paper talks about how women's roles are changing from being just traditional to being more confident and ambitious, showing how women are changing in Indian society (Vishnoi).

A critical study "Difficult Daughters" and focuses on how educated women fight against social problems. It talks about the difficulties women face, their fight for freedom, and how traditional and modern ideas clash in Kapur's stories. By combining ideas from these sources, we can create a strong thesis statement that looks at how Kapur talks about women's identity, what society expects from them, and how women's roles are changing in India. This helps us understand better the challenges women face and how they try to overcome them in a society that favors men (Bălănescu).

II. Historical Context of Women in India

Brief overview of women's status in pre and post-independence India

The historical account of women in India is complex and varied, spanning many centuries. Throughout history, the roles and status of women in Indian society have experienced significant transformations, influenced by a range of social, cultural, and political factors.

Ancient Times

In ancient India, women enjoyed a relatively high status and were afforded rights and opportunities comparable to men. They were seen as equal partners in marriage, had access to education and property ownership, and were even revered as goddesses in Hindu mythology. Notably, the Vedic period showcased women actively participating in spiritual and intellectual pursuits, with female sages contributing to Hindu scriptures (Bălănescu).

Medieval Period

However, with the onset of foreign invasions and the rise of patriarchal norms, the status of women began to decline. During the medieval era, women faced restrictions on their rights, including limitations on education, property ownership, and participation in public life. Practices like sati, where widows were expected to self-immolate on their husband's funeral pyre, became prevalent, further marginalizing women and confining them to domestic roles (Silverio).

British Colonial Rule and Reform

The British colonial period brought about significant changes in the status of Indian women. While Western-style education and social reforms were introduced, patriarchal attitudes persisted, reinforcing gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, Indian reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule advocated for women's rights, leading to the abolition of sati and the promotion of widow remarriage (Silverio).

Post-Independence Era

The independence, India has made strides in women's empowerment, with the Constitution guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women. Despite legal protections, women continue to face discrimination, violence, and social disparities. The women's movement in India has been instrumental in raising awareness about these issues and advocating for greater gender equality (Joshi).

In conclusion the historical journey of women in India is marked by periods of progress and setbacks. Understanding this history is crucial for addressing the ongoing challenges faced by women in Indian society and working towards a more equitable and inclusive future.

Societal expectations regarding women's roles and marriage

The sources give us important insights into what society expects from women in terms of their roles and marriages. They look closely at how gender roles work, what people expect when it comes to marriage, and how society's rules affect women's lives.

The first source talks about how marriage is seen as a mix of what you want personally and what society expects from you, affecting how people feel mentally. It talks about how men are usually seen as the ones who work and women as the ones who take care of the home, even though things are changing at work (Joshi).

The second source looks at what people expect husbands and wives to do within marriage. It tries to see if these roles are fair between both partners.

The third source talks about what young women between 19 and 24 think about marriage. It shows how changes in society affect what they want when it comes to getting married, like their family, job goals, and what society says is okay (K. Bakyalakshmi).

The fourth source looks at what young women expect when it comes to marriage and their careers. It talks about how society puts pressure on them and how hard it is to balance their job dreams with what society expects from them, especially in schools (Km. Hasruba, Dr. Anil Kumar Sirohi).

The fifth source is more personal. It talks about how society puts a lot of pressure on women, especially when it comes to jobs, marriage, and family. It shows the difficulties women face in trying to meet what society wants while also trying to be happy, saying we need to challenge what society expects and set better examples for the future (KP).

In short, these sources together show how complicated it is for women to deal with what society expects from them, especially in marriage and their roles in society. They help us understand the ongoing struggle women face in trying to follow society's rules while also trying to be independent, treated fairly, and happy in their lives.

III. Literature Review

Analysis of sources discussing themes of gender roles, marriage, and societal norms in "Difficult Daughters"

Dr. Mamta (2018)

"Difficult Daughters" is a story about the struggles faced by daughters, showing their challenges and the difficulties of being seen as 'difficult,' as the title suggests. It also explores themes of freedom and division, both on a national scale and within individual lives, as hinted by its original title, "The Partitions." The comparison between the hardships of India's independence and the personal journeys of the female characters is strong and noticeable. While India gained independence in 1947 amidst violence and division, the book also talks about women fighting for education, freedom, and fairness, even though they still face many problems.

Despite some progress, the book paints a bleak picture of reality where crimes like rape, abduction, and honor killings still happen, showing a tough view of the world today. In the end, Harish worries about what the future holds for his newborn daughter, talking to Virmati about his fears of hatred and violence. He thinks things are getting worse, comparing it to a time of darkness with fights over religion, saying, "This is madness, not freedom." These thoughts show the book's serious look at society today (Mamta).

Dr. Nang Wishakha Namchoom (2023)

The paper will study how women are shown as patriots in Manju Kapur's books "Difficult Daughters" and "A Married Woman." It will look at the problems faced in India before and after it gained independence, focusing on how women are represented in Indian patriotism. This study will talk about how actively involved women are, what they believe in, and how they solve problems, all showing their love for their country.

In "A Married Woman," the story promotes harmony between different groups of people, going against the idea of dividing people based on their religion within the idea of nationalism. In contrast, "Difficult Daughters" shows women as important leaders in the fight for independence, breaking traditional rules about how women should act and showing them as equal to men. The book also talks about Sakuntala, a single woman who chooses her own way to help her country, not following what society expects of her (Namchoom).

Dr. Archana (2018)

Narrative technique serves as a vehicle through which a writer unveils the characters, settings, and actions of the story. By crafting a narrative technique, the writer aims to cultivate a connection with the reader, fostering both intellectual engagement and emotional resonance by evoking specific psychological states. The reader's comprehension of the literary text is shaped by their perception of various elements. Different readers may perceive distinct connections between time and space, leading to diverse interpretations. A novelist, dedicated to exploring her imagination and experiences, may present fabricated accounts and observations in a balanced manner to satisfy the reader. By adopting narrative techniques suited to her purpose, she offers an authentic portrayal through her fictional writing (Dr. Archana).

María Elena Martos Hueso (2008)

Since the release of Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children," Indian Literature in English has undergone a transformation, opting to retell India's history from a perspective that diverges significantly from official historical accounts. Taking cues from Foucault's idea of Nietzschean genealogy, which prioritizes intricate historical narratives and challenges the linear storytelling found in traditional historiography, this research delves into two similar Indian English novels centered on the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent: Amitav Ghosh's "The Shadow Lines" and Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters." The primary focus of this analysis lies in deconstructing the nationalist narrative, particularly concerning the roles of women and motherhood in shaping the emergence of the new nation (Hueso).

Dr. Suchita Marathe (2019)

Regional literature, like stories and poems, focuses on a specific place, highlighting its people, language, traditions, and landscape. It comes from writers deeply committed to showing the unique qualities of a certain area. For instance, Thomas Hardy wrote about a place called Wessex in England, and William Wordsworth wrote poems about the Lake District.

Manju Kapur's book "Difficult Daughter" fits into this category. She's from North India and sets all her stories there, even though they sometimes take place in cities like Amritsar or Lahore, or even in other countries like Canada. But no matter where the story is set, Kapur always brings in elements of North Indian culture, like describing the food, clothes, and the way people talk. In her first book, "Difficult Daughter," she does a great job of showing Punjabi culture. This paper is about how Kapur does this, showing us what Punjabi life is like through her writing. It helps us understand more about Punjabi traditions, clothes, food, and more. Kapur is really good at capturing the details of this specific part of India in her stories (Dr Suchita Marathe).

Exploration of scholarly perspectives on Kapur's portrayal of female characters

IV. Female Identity and Societal Expectations in "Difficult Daughters"

Analyzing how women and society are depicted in Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters" shows how tradition, modern ideas, and individual choices mix in Indian society.

- **Understanding the Characters:** Virmati is the main character, showing the conflict between what she wants and what society expects. She challenges the idea that women should just be wives and mothers by pursuing education and independence. Kasturi, Virmati's mom, represents the traditional role of a wife and mother, following society's expectations of women staying at home and obeying their husbands (Rekha S.).
 - **Marriage and Gender Roles:** The book talks about marriage and how it affects women. Virmati marrying a married man goes against what society thinks is right, showing the clash between what she wants and what society says. It looks at the roles husbands and wives have in marriage. Virmati's husband expects to be in charge, while Virmati wants to make her own choices (Bhat et al.).
 - **What Society Expects:** Kapur shows how society puts pressure on women to act a certain way. Virmati's rebellion against these expectations shows how hard it can be for women to be themselves in Indian society. The book criticizes how society limits women's growth and freedom by telling them what they should do and be (Manju and Lissy).
 - **Impact of Modern Ideas:** "Difficult Daughters" looks at how modern ideas affect women in India. Virmati wanting education and independence shows how things are changing. But it also shows that women who challenge tradition can face backlash, showing that old ideas still have power (Kumari and Dang).
- Conclusion:** In short, "Difficult Daughters" explores how women and society interact in India. Through Virmati and Kasturi, Kapur shows how tradition and modern ideas clash, and how women struggle to be themselves in a society that tells them who they should be.

The protagonist Virmati's struggle with societal expectations and desire for independence

In "Difficult Daughters," Virmati embodies the challenges of women in post-colonial India striving for autonomy amid societal norms and patriarchal traditions. Motivated by a thirst for education and freedom from gender roles, she clashes with her family's views on marriage and domesticity. Virmati's journey reflects broader

struggles faced by women, highlighting the feminist movement's quest for autonomy. Despite obstacles, her pursuit of education challenges societal norms, though she grapples with tradition versus modernity. Through *Virmati*, Kapur illuminates women's struggles against patriarchal constraints, showcasing their resilience in redefining societal roles (Bălănescu).

Examination of how other female characters navigate traditional gender roles

In "Difficult Daughters," besides *Virmati*, there are other female characters who also deal with traditional gender roles. They find it hard to meet society's expectations while also trying to follow their own wishes and take care of their families. Their stories show the struggles many women faced in post-colonial India, trying to be independent in a society where men had more power. Even though they face challenges, these characters stand up for themselves, questioning norms and shaping that they are despite what society expects. Through their stories, Kapur helps us understand the many difficulties women faced in a society that was changing (Manju and Lissy).

V. Societal Norms and Marriage in the Novel

In "Difficult Daughters" by Manju Kapur, societal rules and marriage are big deals for the characters, especially *Virmati*. The story happens in post-colonial India and talks about the clash between old-fashioned ideas and new ways of thinking, especially about what women should do when they get married (Mosha et al.).

People expect women to get married for stability and approval. *Virmati* feels this pressure too. But she wants more than just marriage; she wants to learn and be free. This causes problems with her family and what society expects from her (Vishnoi).

Marriage becomes a battleground where *Virmati*'s independence fights against old ideas. She wants a partner who respects her and shares her interests, not just someone to help her fit in socially. Through *Virmati*'s journey and other women's struggles, the book shows how society's rules limit people, especially women, and how they try to break free and make their own choices (Maneeta Kahlon).

Analysis of the institution of marriage and its impact on female characters

Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters" dives into how marriage affects women. In the book, marriage is a big deal that often controls what women can do. Female characters feel pressure to follow marriage traditions and obey rules, which can make them feel stuck.

Kapur shows how marriage changes women. Some characters grow and learn about themselves, while others feel trapped and lose their freedom. The book also talks about arranged marriages in India. Women often feel like they have no say in who they marry, and their families decide for them (Bhat et al.).

Overall, Kapur's book explores how marriage shapes women's lives and how they struggle to be themselves.

Discussion of how societal norms shape relationships and interactions

In Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters," societal norms wield considerable influence over the relationships and interactions among characters. Kapur adeptly illustrates how societal expectations, traditions, and cultural standards shape the dynamics between individuals, particularly within the realms of family and marriage.

Throughout the narrative, Kapur portrays the weight of conforming to societal norms, especially concerning gender roles and familial obligations. Women are expected to adhere to traditional standards of obedience, modesty, and self-sacrifice, while men often assume authoritative roles within the family structure. These societal conventions govern the actions and decisions of the characters, significantly impacting their relationships and interactions with one another (Sethi).

The depiction of arranged marriages within the story underscores the sway of societal norms on romantic relationships. Characters frequently find themselves compelled to marry under family expectations rather than personal desires, resulting in conflicts and tensions within marital bonds. Moreover, societal taboos surrounding divorce and extramarital affairs further shape the characters' romantic pursuits and interactions.

Additionally, Kapur delves into how societal norms influence interactions between individuals from diverse social backgrounds (Dr. Archana).

The rigid hierarchy inherent in Indian society dictates the dynamics of power and privilege, shaping the behaviour and treatment of characters based on their social status. These disparities often give rise to friction and misunderstandings in relationships, highlighting the pervasive impact of societal norms on interpersonal dynamics.

In sum, Kapur's examination of societal norms in "Difficult Daughters" offers a nuanced perspective on the complexities of social expectations and their ramifications on interpersonal relationships. Through her portrayal of varied social dynamics, Kapur encourages readers to contemplate how societal norms mould human behaviour and relationships, both positively and negatively (Sethi).

VI. Female Agency and Rebellion

In Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters," the story focuses a lot on how women stand up for themselves and challenge the rules around them. Kapur talks about how these female characters deal with society's expectations and family pressures. They do things their way, even when it's risky.

Throughout the book, Kapur shows us times when female characters stand up against what's expected of them. They find ways to be themselves, even when it goes against the norm. They question rules, go against what's oppressive, and follow their hearts, even if it's tough (Geetha).

A good example of this is Virmati, the main character. She goes against her family's wishes by getting an education and falling in love with someone she shouldn't. Even with so much pressure to fit in, she sticks to her path.

Kapur also shows how women support each other in the story. Their friendships become a source of strength. They help each other fight against the things trying to hold them back. But going against the rules comes with consequences, and Kapur doesn't shy away from showing that. Women who challenge society's norms face punishment. Still, many of them keep fighting for what they believe in, refusing to let society dictate their lives (KP).

In the end, Kapur's book tells a powerful story about women's strength and determination. Through her characters, she challenges the idea that women should just follow the rules. Instead, she shows the importance of women being able to be themselves and stand up for what they believe in, even in a world where they're expected to follow along.

Exploration of instances of female rebellion and assertion of agency in the face of societal constraints

In Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters," we see many times when female characters go against what society expects and stand up for themselves. Kapur shows us how these women refuse to let society control them and insist on being their person. In the book, Kapur tells stories of women breaking the rules society sets for them. Whether it's Virmati choosing education over her family's wishes or Sita going after what makes her happy despite what others say, these moments show women taking charge of their lives (Curthoys).

One big example is Virmati's decision not to follow what society says she should do. Even though her family and others pressure her to fit in, she decides to get an education and falls in love, even though it's against the rules.

Kapur also shows us how these women handle the limits society puts on them while still staying true to themselves. They find ways to stand up for what they believe in, even when it's not easy. And even though there are risks, Kapur doesn't shy away from showing us the challenges these women face when they go against society's expectations. Despite the dangers, many of them keep fighting for what they want, refusing to let society dictate their lives (Putla Ananda Rao).

In the end, Kapur's book tells us a lot about the strength and courage of women who stand up for themselves. Through their stories, Kapur shows us that women shouldn't just accept what society tells them to do. Instead, she shows us how important it is for women to be able to make their own choices and be true to themselves.

Impact of education and economic independence on female characters

In "Difficult Daughters" by Manju Kapur, the importance of education and being able to support oneself financially is a big deal for the female characters. Kapur shows us how these things shape the lives of the women in her story, giving them the power to question society's rules and be independent.

In the book, Kapur tells us how education can change things for the better. Characters like Virmati and Sita, who go to school, are shown as strong and able to make smart choices. Education helps them understand the world and follow their dreams. Kapur also talks about how money of having their own makes a big difference for these women. Being able to support themselves means they don't have to rely on men in their families. It gives them a feeling of power and independence, letting them makes decisions based on what they want (Km. Hasruba, Dr. Anil Kumar Sirohi).

An example in the story is Virmati's decision to go to school even when her family doesn't like it. Even though people criticize her, she knows education is important for her future. She stays determined and works hard, showing how education can change someone's life for the better. Additionally, Kapur shows us how education and financial independence affect other parts of these women's lives, like their marriages and relationships. Women who are educated and have their own money are shown as better able to handle the ups and downs of relationships and stand up against unfair rules (Singh).

In the end, Kapur's book teaches us about the power of education and being financially independent for women. She shows us how these things help women fight against inequality and take control of their lives. Through different stories of women, Kapur shows us how education and being able to support her-self are key in helping women be strong and shape their futures (Dr Suchita Marathe).

VII. Conclusion

To sum up, in Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters," marriage is a big deal for women. Throughout the story, marriage has a strong effect on women's lives, making them follow rules and traditions set by society. Women feel like they have to obey these rules, which can make them feel trapped and limited (Singh).

Kapur shows us that marriage can lead to both personal growth and feeling stuck for women. While some characters find themselves and grow within marriage, others lose their freedom and independence. Also, the book talks about arranged marriages in India, where women often don't get to choose who they marry. Their families make the decisions for them (Km. Hasruba, Dr. Anil Kumar Sirohi).

Overall, Kapur's book tells us a lot about the struggles women face because of marriage and societal rules. Through different stories of women, Kapur makes us think about how marriage affects women's lives in various ways.

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