

Bondage and Quest for Liberation: The Voice of Revolt in *Difficult Daughters*

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Abstract

*Manju Kapur's literary novels explore cultural conflict. She is concerned with women's issues and has an innate understanding of women's roles in patriarchal societies and strongly argues that tradition is essential for the growth of human society. Kapur analyses the nuances of married life and portrays the deeper aspects of the interaction between women and society in general and males in particular in a vivid manner. It is generally acknowledged that culture reflects how people interact with one another and adapt to change. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur discusses various difficulties affecting women in the middle class. Throughout her novels, she emphasises feminism. The Second World War, the struggle for Indian Independence, and the division of India and Pakistan serve as the setting for the novel. The protagonist struggles due to oppression and revolts to establish her self-identity. The conflict between the Virmati's desire to become independent through education and the traditional role of women in society is explored in-depth in *Difficult Daughters*. The man-woman bond in marriage, political challenges, and household situations are all examined in Kapur's works. It tries to show how the protagonist, Virmati, struggles to define her identity in a culture that is dominated by men while dealing with the influence of tradition and modernity.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Identity, Culture, Conflict, Patriarchy*

Introduction

Manju Kapur is a prominent and versatile Indian women writer. Her novels explore the psyche of middle-class Indian women. With rare sensitivity and intensity, she reveals the dilemma of Indian women trapped between their aspirations to be independent women and the forces of patriarchy that marginalise them. Kapur's novels centre on the domestic scenario, politics, and the man-woman relationship within marriage. Kapur's characters occupy an essential role in her novels. The characters are sensitive, self-conscious and creative. They rise in opposition to the traditional patriarchal system and try to escape from the suffocating atmosphere of the narrow-minded society.

The women in the Manju Kapur novels are the personification of the new women who carry the burden of inhibition and who want to break that conventional way of life of silence. In the traditional social milieu of her novels, she suggests the actual state existence of mothers and daughters in the patriarchal society where marriage has

appeared as the ultimate goal and destiny, from which these women cannot escape. Manju Kapur's women folk long to be free from the stale social customs and traditions which never allowed them to explore their potential.

Literature Survey

In the article *Violence Against Women in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters**, Kapur investigates how men prey on women to satisfy their sensual needs and how this imposed sex on women has a disturbing and scarring effect on women's minds. Kapur's novels also serve another purpose: to expose and educate women about sexual exploitation. Violence against women can only be eliminated if men and women address the issue.

*Narrating Sexualities: A Reading of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters**, by Baskaran Kapur addresses the harsh reality that the male-dominated society does not take women's issues seriously. Even her mother, let alone her brother and in-laws, show complete neglect and

inherent indifference. The tragic aspect of the problem is that even women undermine their self-esteem, resulting in Nisha becoming lost in the midst of difficulties. This sense of defeat, however, does not permanently disable her.

Breaking the shackles of tradition by Sangeetha demonstrates the suffocation in traditional marriage, family, and society. Women must speak out against the mental torture they endured by forging their identities. Virmati's fate is that of a typical Indian woman. We cannot dismiss Virmati's struggle simply because she failed; through her brave attempt, she breaks the patriarchal mould in the 1940s.

Problem Definition

The women characters in Manju Kapur's novel reflect modern women who have been limited by inhibition for a while and are now prepared to abandon the traditional method of living in silence. She indicates that mothers and daughters exist in the conventional social setting of her novels. In the same society, marriage has been portrayed as women's ultimate desire and unavoidable fate. In Manju Kapur's community, women yearn to be freed from old traditions and customs, but this is never allowed.

Material and Methods

The word socialist feminist may imply that socialism and feminism are intimately intertwined. Cultural feminism is frequently contrasted with socialist feminism. Socialist feminism and cultural feminism are entirely different movements, despite certain similarities. In contrast to men, the distinctive traits and accomplishments of women are highly emphasised by cultural feminism. One of the main topics is division, which socialist feminism opposes. By working together, socialist feminism seeks to level the playing field for all genders. Socialist feminists have denounced cultural feminism as snobbish. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, a famous socialist feminist, "Feminism is still essentially a middle-class movement and ideology despite all-out efforts" (In These Times).

Every human community shows some gender inequality. Let us broadly view human societies throughout history and across continents. One can observe that they have frequently been characterised by the following: the

objectification of women as a form of property, a sexual labour division in which women are restricted to tasks like child rearing and providing good services to men in the domestic sphere, the subjugation of women to male authority, both within the family and in the larger community.

Socialist feminism is conscious that only by remodelling the societal roles might women pursue the feminisation of particular virtues, such as nurturing their potential, pursuing a career, and attaining female autonomy. When race, ethnicity, disability, and economic condition are established and considered, these opportunities are further narrowed. The holistic method of research study on gender acknowledges the inherent gender differences. After all, in many cases, women are survivors of various forms of state violence, social injustice, and state-inflicted violence. The diversity of the feminist movement is demonstrated by the fact that socialist feminism exists. The feminist movement is about this diversity. There are continuous debates regarding what sex depression is and where it comes from; these debates show that not all women experience the same problems. Everyone must accept this reality while they work to create a better society. Socialist feminists work to combat sexism in all forms, as well as concerns related to class, ethnicity, gender, and other identifying characteristics. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, socialism is not about self-described socialists being smart enough to have a plan. We can all comprehend the concept of society.

Indian women are stuck between two cultures, doubly alienated, and lead marginal lives that take them nowhere. The battle between their loyalty to a dominant tradition and their compelling need to break through the traditional barrier has left Indian women in a double framework of thoughts in which feelings of doubt are predominant. Modern women wish to live meaningfully, according to their dreams, by exploring the world and entering realms beyond social sanction. Their journey to self-hood follows the strains of their evolution as a person. These women represent a new consciousness. They refuse to live within the traditional limited spaces and are no happier with the position of being a meek housewife. The change in the

mindset itself seems unorthodox and questions male supremacy. To them, self-satisfaction is an attainable dream. These women maintain the integrity and fulfil their need to exist as individuals in a society that operates on patriarchal conventions. The image of women in Indian novels has changed within the last three decades. Throughout this period, women writers have moved far from conventional roles. The perception of women writers has brought changes in Indian society in a positive manner.

Examining the complex bond between mother and daughter in Kapur's novel conveys that mothers fulfil their daughter's needs. Women must be educated and free to have a caring and healthy relationships. *Difficult Daughters* captures the complex and ambivalent connection between mothers and daughters over three generations. This novel is set in pre-independence India; it portrays the radical criss crosses between Amritsar and Lahore. It unfolds the story of Virmati, a daughter and a mother, and through her, the tale of generational dialectics that underscores every daughter's relationship with her mother. Manju Kapur presents the psyche of three generations of women and highlights the parities and disparities lurking in between. It is an incredibly realistic novel about a daughter's reconstruction of her past, hinging on her mother's story describing how she was a daughter. It is a primary tale of three generations, partly analytical, partially historical, and partly a travelogue.

Interpretation and Discussion

In *Difficult Daughters*, women are depicted as though they do not prefer motherhood and do not prefer the image of Savitri, who represents sublime wifely devotion. They do not trust in the fact that husbands are Gods and they cannot do anything wrong. In her novels, Kapur has effectively presented the role of culture and values to emphasise the quest for liberty in the knowledgeable middle-class Indian women in the current situation. She believes cultural values imposed through religion, society, and culture shackle women's improvement and evolution as a 'free spirit'. Culture is indeed the continuation of the past; however, it has the idea of dwelling present. For

instance, women are primarily assigned the leading role in childrearing; it is considered a tradition.

The first generation is represented through Kasturi, Lala Samaj Diwan Chand's second daughter-in-law and Suraj Prakash's wife and mother of the protagonist, Virmati. The second generation is represented through the younger girl Virmati, whereas the third generation is represented by the narrator, Ida, the young daughter of Viramati. The novel reflects the life journey of these three daughters through problems and various circumstances. At the same time, they also emerge as predicaments of others. However, the focus is broadly on Virmati, the elder daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash.

Difficult Daughters is set in the background of partition and projects a new imagination and prescience of the Indian woman in fiction. The author describes the three generations of women. Kasturi, Lajwanti, and Ganga represent the first generation, who silently approve the male sovereignty. The second generation is represented by Virmati, Shakuntala, and Swarnalatha, who move all limits of patriarchal and sociocultural norms. The third generation is represented by Ida, Chhotti, and Giridhar, the consultant of the present generation, who inherits the rebellious attitude. Kapur reflects society through various characters in the novel.

Difficult Daughters focuses on the story of Virmati, the eldest of eleven children born in a reputed orthodox Arya Samaji family of Amritsar. Being the eldest, she has to look after all her brothers and sisters. She was seventeen and was studying for her examination. Education for women was not much important in those days; however, Virmati was further involved in her studies. When Virmati meets her cousin Shankutala, who lives in Lahore and breaks her family's customs by being unmarried to pursue higher education, her strong desire to pursue higher education strengthens. She establishes her identity because she is highly knowledgeable, independent, and has an attitude towards marriage and education.

The systematic oppressive systems of racism and patriarchy that result in structural gendered inequality for women and people are highlighted by socialist feminists. According to socialist feminism, the division of labour based on gender is unnatural and an oppressive norm.

The primary goal is to oppose social and economic structures that enforce gender roles. Virmati would take inspiration from Shankuntala and understand that her pleasure lies in education and freedom from familial obligations. Beyond getting married and becoming a wife, she thinks there might be more. Despite her best efforts, she could not persuade her mother to support her desire for higher education. Her mother believes that a woman's primary duties are caring for her family, husband, and children. All the other factors are not vital aside from these aspects, especially education. In order to continue her education, Virmati frequently struggles with her mother. Above all, Virmati has the backing of her grandfather, Lala Diwan Chand, who strongly supports women's education. She enters AS college to finish her B.A.

One of the prominent concerns of the novel is the perception of marriage. All the characters speak about marriage, even though their perceptions differ. Kasturi, the mother of Virmati, believes that marriage to a woman is a vital responsibility. To her, it is not a question of liking and mental preparedness. A woman's life is complete when she gets married to a person. Kasturi represents early generations of women who willingly accepted patriarchy because of the order of the day. Kasturi faces many struggles in her life. She is the perfect wife; she bears many children at the cost of her health. Kasturi introduced the traditional ideas of a patriarchal society where marriage becomes the ultimate destiny of a woman's life. Marriage implied that a woman had to work tirelessly to please her in-laws. She expects her daughter to be submissive. Virmati's father is comparatively a liberal-minded person. He believes in the education of women.

Despite all problems, Virmati succeeds in going to college for better education. Harish, the professor of English and teacher of Virmati, lives close to their house. Though she lives in a joint family of many women and men, brought up in a traditional family, she falls in love with a married man, Professor Harish Chandra. She does not hesitate to have a bad relationship with him. It creates a commotion in Virmati's life as she is pressured to marry someone called Inderjeet. Virmati struggles to take a decision. She is in a dilemma and cannot make the right decision in life. She even attempts suicide. She surrenders

her body and soul to a married man, The Professor, who expresses his love to Virmati as follows:

How difficult it is to teach while you are sitting before me! Your face is the fixed point to which my eyes keep returning. Let the world-the class-notice and remark I do not care. You are imprinted on my mind, heart, and soul so firmly that until we can be united more permanently, I live in a shadowy insubstantial land (56).

The generation of Virmati were victims of the distinct social acts and expectations from women that shape them into stereotypical roles wherein they are allowed to have only restricted rights. Opting for higher education and marriage through choice are not protected by those rights. Virmati, who does not want to stay as a "rubber doll for other to move as they willed, then I didn't want to live" (92), takes the initiative to challenge social expectations. Her family criticises and rebukes her for deciding on higher education and love marriage. Her mother, Kasturi, scolded her for leaving home for higher education by stating that "when I was your age, girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age..." (111). Kasturi does not support Virmati's boldness for higher education and love marriage.

The laws and practices that control the connections between the sexes in any culture usually disguise the reality of male violence. Feminist Barbara Ehrenreich believed that the threat of male violence is a constant barrier to revolting women and compels submissive women to support male domination. Being submissive earns you safety from random male violence and provides financial stability. Harish is the cause of the downfall of Virmati's life. She is too naive to understand that the professor enjoys manhood benefits with Ganga, his first wife and young with love Virmati. He finally gets his wish to touch Virmati's body. As a result, Virmati becomes pregnant and is forced to have an abortion because she has no other options. The occurrence causes Virmati's life to change. She was raised in a conventional family, so she believes that since the professor has touched her body, she should dedicate her life to him.

The mother in the family acts like a flag bearer of the way of life. She passes on the legacy of the patriarchal system to her daughter, who may additionally accept it,

query it, or rise against it. In this novel, Kasturi and Virmati are beneath their mother's watchful eyes imbibing all the right policies, etiquettes, and behaviour. A mother stresses the importance of marriage and respect for the patriarch within the woman's life. Kasturi is married customarily, whereas Virmati's marriage is unconventional and questioned by her family.

Kasturi's mother believes in her destiny. She cheerfully does her domestic chores and trains her daughter to qualify for her destiny as a homemaker. Kasturi emphasises the significance of motherhood by making Virmati a surrogate mom for her siblings at a very young age. She continually stresses to Virmati the obligations she has to do for the sake of her family. She says:

You are the eldest, Viru, your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you, otherwise, would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. Now, what will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it? (58-59)

Rights to contraception, abortion rights, and adequate health care are crucial to socialist feminists. Due to the fear of stigmatisation from society, she aborts her child. Even after marrying Harish, she is unhappy with her life and suffers from oppression. Ida, Virmati's daughter, admits to her after her mother's death that her mother's life journey was difficult. Ida understands the torment of abortion because she has gone through it when her husband, Prabhakar, forces her to undergo an abortion.

Kasturi cannot understand her daughter's emotions and thinks about how women have significantly changed in a generation. Virmati is more knowledgeable than her mother, a rebel at a young age; however, the past notions she has as a mother are passed on to her daughter, similar to the manner of her mother's training. Mother in the patriarchal Indian society teaches her daughter the values of home, relatives, and children and the reality that she cannot survive without an authoritative male figure. The significant similarity in all three women characters is that their mothers control them, Kasturi, Virmati, and Ida,

and cannot reject their mother entirely. Though the mother and daughter might be estranged, the mother always remains a person of concern for the daughter. In Lahore, she sticks to her decision of not communicating with the professor. She gets another roommate, Swarnalata, who participates in numerous social activities, especially implied for empowering women's interests. She amazes everyone with her speech when she takes Virmati to a Punjab Women's Student Conference meeting. Virmati witnesses a new world of confident, independent, and daring women. She is astounded to witness this world of women asserting their identities. "All my friends are here, all my activities. I had to stay here, and so I decided to do an M.A" (117).

Conclusion

According to socialist feminists, women are oppressed because of their financial reliance on men. Due to an unequal distribution of wealth, women are subject to male dominance in capitalism. Ganga, Harish's first wife, is a typical Indian woman who tries to do household chores while caring for her children, husband, and family. Women's subjugation is driven by economic dependence. Being a strong and brave woman in pre-independent India, Virmati rejects the custom of arranged marriage. She falls in love with a married professor named Harish even though her education gives her the prospect of living her life within the boundaries of her traditional limitations. She struggled between the old customs. She was torn between old and new traditions. Eventually, she realised it might be prudent to seek freedom without jeopardising her obligations and responsibilities and lose her identity. Ida emerges as an independent woman with a voice, creating a space and identity for herself.

The ideas of Barbara Ehrenreich about social feminism provide a crystal-clear view of the aspiration of women. The research gives a clear picture of the emergence of aspiring women from bondage. The quest for liberty and how the women characters voice out their revolt has been studied deeply through the social feminist lens.

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