

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MANJUKAPUR'S DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS****Dr. B. Kathiresan***Associate Professor & Head i/c, Department of English  
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India has rich tradition of ancient tales and stories. The portrayal of women in Indian English Fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone tremendous changes. Women are no longer presented as passive character.

The terms Feminism has its origin from the Latin word femina which means 'women'. Thereby, it refers to the advocacy of women's right which establishes that women should have the same social, economical and political rights as men. The term became popular in the early twentieth century showing struggles for securing woman's suffrage in the western countries and the well organized socio-political movement for women's emancipated from the patriarchal oppression.

Seeking gender equality like the right to work for equal wages to have access to health and education as well as political rights are the prime expectation of Feminists. It is worth mentioning that feminists in India have also fought against cultural issues within the patriarchal society of India. The set of movements intending of define, establish and define equal social, economical, political rights and equal opportunities for Indian women are the typical elements of feminism in ManjuKapur's Difficult Daughters.

As a feminist writer, ManjuKapur's novels raise strong protest against the male dominated Indian society. ManjuKapur's novels portray the New Indian woman's voice. A "New Women" in search of self-identity, seeks liberation in all walks of life and replaces the traditional image of Indian women. In her first novel Difficult Daughters, it is very much evident that a stereotypical women character is transformed into "New Women" by replacing the tradition image of Indian Women.

ManjuKapur projects a new vision of Indian women in her novel, Difficult Daughters. She denounces the persistence of tradition idea that marriage is essential for women. She depicts deliberately the character of two girls of two different attitudes. In her novel Difficult Daughters, She portrays her women of traditional and new modern outlook. Virmati, protagonist of Difficult Daughters represents the former category and Shakuntala, her cousin is an example of the latter category. Kapur draws a strong contrast between these two women characters.

Women are considered as an oppressive people in this novel. Kasturi gives birth to eleven children. This makes her health weak and feeble. Her husband does not take care or

consider her health. She is denied of enjoying equal rights. So she is thrown in to a situation where she cannot reject giving multiple births. She does not get a chance to speak about equal rights to her husband. Virmati gets pregnant by Harish. She is the second wife of Harish. He compelled her to abort the child. She refers to abort the child in her pursuit of identity. She loses respect and position every stage but struggles to make space for herself on her own. Her rebellious attitudes fades whenever it has to be strong to refute the professor's sexual oppression.

Virmati, like her mother treats her daughter Ida with the strict patriarchal norms. She fails to be an understanding mother for Ida. This forces Ida to suffer from being independent.

Ida being daughter of Virmati, fights for her identity, dignity and self-confidence which Virmati also lacked. She rejects the family norms and male dominated society. Ida becomes a typical daughter of a 'Difficult Daughter', Virmati. Virmati life is under pressure of domestic duties and mother's restrictions.

Observation of social institutions like family and economy being characterized by male dominance in ManjuKapur's novel is evident through certain instances in the novel. Women like Kasturi were seen to be suffering from the economic and socio-cultural disadvantages in the male governed society. The society was patronized by patriarchy. People like Virmati were deprived of their basic rights and aspirations to ascertain their individuality and self-reliance.

The differential attitude between Harish and Ganga makes their match totally inharmonious. Harish is a progressive husband and wishes to have a good intellectual companion. Ganga is negligent in studies and suffers from lack of awareness whereas Virmati is an intellectual woman whom Harish wishes for and becomes Harish's second wife. Harish neglects his first wife Ganga as soon as he married Virmati. Virmati's passion of learning many things attracted Harish. At the same time, Harish warns Virmati that she will not be happy if she marries him as his second wife. Harish is represented of the patriarchal society. His dominant role oppresses Virmati. He compels her to abort their baby. The unequal and oppressed role of women can be observed in Virmati When she suffers loveless life through her mother and dominant life through her husband.

Virmati plays a prominent role in ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughters* by taking care of her family. Virmati becomes a second mother to her siblings. She discharges all the responsibilities and duties of what a male heir does. So, all the burden of the household work and raising younger sisters and brothers conditions Virmati's susceptible childhood. She divides her time between helping her anaemic mother with the househole chores and her studies. She yearns to lead a cheerful life and aspires to become an independent women in her life. Virmati is understood by the readers as a strong women who struggles to establish her identity. In the process of her realization of a "New Woman" her abilities to lead an independent life is questioned by dominant men power.

Shakuntala, a cousin of Virmati leads an independent life in “Lahore”. Her way of dressing, life style, and activities of Shakuntala disturbs Virmati and Virmati strongly decides to lead an independent life. Shakuntal’s visit plants the seed of independency in Virmati. She wants to live like Shakuntala. She learns many aspects of life from Shakuntala such as glamorous against restrictions. Virmati gets caught between traditional and modern way of life.

Shakuntala encourages Virmati to be independent and encourages her to demand equal rights for woman, thus, epitomizing the post colonial emancipated “New Woman”. New woman breaks the customs of traditional bound society. Since the establishment of the society, woman is empowered based on social security, political awareness and economic tradition. Shakuntala has leadership quality to lead her own life. ManjuKapur portrays Shakuntala as a rational character who imparts her feminist attitudes and ideology of life to Virmati. Whereas Virmati is defined as a New woman who wishes to become one such new women but Ida as the one who really becomes such.

Kasturi, mother of Virmati follows the ancient rules and accepts patriarchal dominance without retaliation compels. She to observe the family traditions. So, there is a long debate between Kasturi and Virmati regarding marriage and study.

Virmati and Shakuntala break the old customs and traditions of family. Virmati is impelled by the inner need to find loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. They want to be a modern woman.

The world is full of love, affection, selfless devotion and all that is soft and sweet and noble in human nature. All the time Virmati yearned for sign of affection which she would treasure ever. However when she put her head next to the youngest baby, fed in her mother’s arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. She is very ravenous for love, affection and wants her mother to love her and understand her thoroughly.

All the children yearn for affection from their parents. When such emotions are not shared their feelings, passions, enthusiasm will create a complex which lead them to search someone else. Virmati finds answer for all in Harish and falls in love with a married man.

ManjuKapur’s novel reveals the life of women, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival, through sensitive portrayal of three generations of women and their problems. In *Difficult Daughters* feminist leanings can be obscene at the outset through the portrayal of Shakuntala and Virmati who make their own choices in life. Only with Virmati’s death is the ghost laid to rest and Ida becomes free to lead her own life, no longer threatened by the shadow of her mother.

*Difficult Daughters*, portrays issues of a female protagonist whose private emotions struggles through domestically and academia so blatantly and mirrors the political tensions that surround her.

“By thus probing daughter - family relations, Virmati’s story refracts the divisions between mothers and daughters as correlations for the political position in the country at

large. In this novel daughters live do parallel national history, though negatively so. Virmati in her wrangling with tradition and authority reflects the turmoil in the public political world, though she is also positioned, paradoxically, as peripheral to national debates. Daughterhood signals “difficulty” therefore, not only in so far as it denotes rebelliousness, but do because daughterhood traditionally subordinate and dependent - itself represents a difficult or painful position. (2005 : 212)

Neither Virmati treads comfortably on the path of political struggle nor academic life. She is constantly blocked by Harish’s incessant interferences. It is nevertheless remarkable that ManjuKapur deliberately chooses two female figures - Shakuntala and Swarnalata involved in non-violent activism against British occupation and who will exert a definite influence on their development as an individual. Virmati is criticized by her in-laws and deeply hated by Ganga, her husband’s first wife, who bears a permanent grudge against her. Virmati’s prospective role as a wife, not allowing her to pursue her studies without hindrance becomes her additional burden.

#### References

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