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Dr. R. Anuja, MBA, M.Phil., Ph.D., Editor

**Aspects of Gender Conflict in English Literature**

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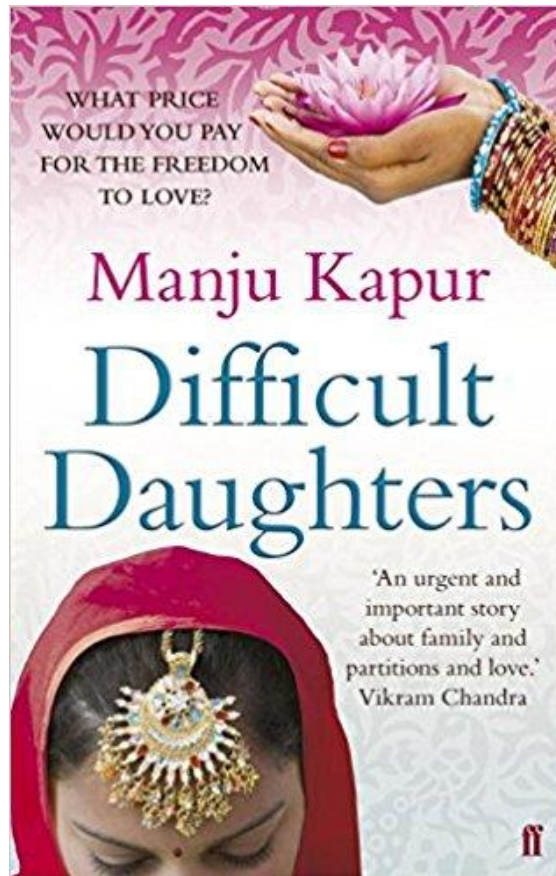
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**Subordination of Feminine Gender in Indian English Literature –  
A Case Study of *Difficult Daughters***

P. Suganya, M.A., M.Phil., (Ph.D.)

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**Abstract**

The topic dealt with in this paper is about the Subordination of feminine gender in Indian English Literature which is highly focused in the fiction *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur. Manju Kapur is one of the best known writers of Indian English Literature, who presents the sociological and psychological problems in her novels. She is the author of four Novels and her

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first novel *Difficult Daughters*, won the commonwealth prize it is also a bestseller in India. *Difficult Daughters* is the story of woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. It is a story of three generations of women: Ida, the narrator, who is a divorcee. Virmati, her mother, who marries an already married professor for love, and Kasthuri, her grandmother, who come to terms with a difficult daughter, Virmati. It is the story which also tells about the subordination of feminine gender and the difficulties, problems faced by women in the various situations.

**Key words:** subordination, feminine gender, Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*

### **Women Writers in Indian English Literature**

Women writers in Indian English Literature have played an important role in feminism and portraying subordination. Some of the writers in Indian English Literature opposed subordination and they have given boldness to their female characters. They have also focused on how the women characters are subordinated and how they overcome it through their boldness. They have given new pathways to the Indian Literature. The female writers like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur all focus on feminism, complexities between a man and woman relationship, psychological aspect of the protagonist, emotional sufferings of women, etc. So, by writing about these problems in their novels they try to create awareness across the society.

### **Manju Kapur and Her Novels**

In the last decade of the twentieth century in Indian English Literature, some women writers published valuable works. Among them a notable writer is Manju Kapur. Manju Kapur is a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi where she did her graduation. She completed her M.A. in English at Dalhousie University, Canada and M.Phil. in Delhi University. Her novels are acclaimed for their feministic vision. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* won the Commonwealth Award and it was marked as a bestseller of the year. It is a beautifully written novel with family concepts.

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## ***Difficult Daughters***

This novel is about educating daughters and through education they come to know the basic values of society and they start raising questions related to the values. It's a conflict between the life style of the present and the old days or traditional and modern societies. Kapur also brings out the problems of the Indian women in joint families in a male-dominated society and also highlights a new vision of Indian women in her fiction.

The novel *Difficult Daughters* tells us the story of three generations: daughter, mother and grandmother and it is mainly focused on the women characters' problems and their boldness. It is focused on the main characters or protagonist Virmati and her transition from the status of a traditional girl into new woman. It tells us about the needs for women's self-fulfillment, self-sufficiency, self-realisation, independence and personal identity. Manju Kapur stated that,

“I am interested.....In the lives of women, whether in the political arena or in domestic spaces. One of the main pre occupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiates both inner and outer spaces in their lives-what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home.”

(Kapur)

## **Virmati**

Virmati was born in Amritsar and she is the elder daughter of her mother Kasturi. Since she is an elder daughter of the family, she is fully engaged in household works. She has the desire for education and wants love. She runs towards education but her mother doesn't give importance for her education. Her grandfather thinks that education is important for girls to lead their life successfully. But he too opposes higher education for girls. But she argues with both to go for higher education, ““My mother, my masi, all studied. It is the ‘rivaz’ in our family,’ said Virmati proudly. ‘Even now my father keeps getting my mother books and magazines to read.’” (DD 39). This proves that Kapur has given boldness to her female characters to argue with their family members to come out from subordination.

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Virmati argued and struggled throughout her life for all her desires not only for education but also for her marriage. She falls in love with a married professor Harish who is their tenant. He pulls her by showing deep love towards her. At the beginning she hesitates to love him and she tries to commit suicide but she is rescued by the servant. Then he makes her to love him by pretending like giving liberty to the ladies. Here it proves the male chauvinism and subordination of feminine gender. Then she becomes pregnant before the marriage. With the help of her roommate Swarnalata, she aborted the baby. This shows her situation and sufferings to make her life meaningful and to achieve in her life, so that she decided to abort the baby. She fights for her rights at every stage in her life and she successfully manages all the unstable situation of extreme danger and difficulties. Then she marries Harish and they were accepted by both the families but she was ill treated by Harish's first wife Ganga and his mother Kishori Devi. Then later on she realizes that "I should never have married you... and it's too late now. I've never seen it so clearly. It's not fair ... She wondered dreadingly whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life." (212). It shows the bitterness of her marriage life. She becomes pregnant after her marriage and she is under the care of her mother-in-law but her fetus aborted. Later on her husband makes her to join M.A. so that she will come out from the depression. Again it proves the male domination, while she was really interested to study or to do higher education there was no way for her but now without her consult she made to do that. Once again she becomes pregnant and she blessed with a girl baby. In that case she has an opinion to name the baby as Bharati but with the compulsion of her husband she named as Ida. In this also women doesn't have freedom, only male domination stands over there, where women should always be quite and they have to take care of all the works. At last Ida, daughter of Virmati also suffers a lot after her marriage like her mother and it turns out to divorce because of her husband's male domination.

### **A Narrative of the Sufferings and Problems Faced by Women**

This novel tells us about the sufferings and problems faced by women. It is also clearly brought out that the women are always subordinate to the male dominant people. Indian English writer Manju Kapur clearly shows how Virmati suffers for all the desires she has in her life from education till her marriage and after the marriage also, she acts like a puppet in her husband's

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hand. It also continues in the life of her daughter Ida but she tries to overcome it through proposing divorce from her husband. Through this novel *Difficult Daughters* we can come to know that, Women have been subdued by men and facing various types of mental and physical tortures throughout their life. We can also proudly say, the contemporary Indian English writers are redefining the role of women characters and bring out the modern thoughts and ideas in their novels. They tell that the inferior position accorded to them is not determined beforehand and trying to emancipate them from subordination. Women redefine themselves from the entire situation like questioning the sexual politics, through re-examination in the marriage and man-woman understanding for better relationship to lead their life without any obstacles.

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