

Domestic and Sociolegal Implications Against Indian Women in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

S. Manimekalai

Assistant Professor

PSNA College of Engineering & Technology

Dindigul.

Dr. V. Vimala

Assistant Professor

Cardamom Planter's College

Theni

Abstract

Indian writing in English has been reaching greater heights in all spheres of literature, more so, in fictional field. In the recent times. There has been a special emphasis on portraying the unsung plights of the traditional Indian women. Several women writers have focused in their novels the part played by women in establishing their identity in an unfavorable atmosphere.

Manju Kapur has been one of the prominent writers in Indian English writing. Difficult Daughter has been her maiden work and it got universally acclaimed and became a recipient of Commonwealth award. This novel enabled the readers to understand that she has been a chronicler of the urban middle class of India. This paper focuses on the domestic as well as the external challenges faced by the traditional Indian women in their quest for identity.

Text of Full Paper

In the current scenario, Indian literature has captured the attention of readers in India and abroad. It is understood that Indian literature occupies a big space in the world literature along with being an aspect of Commonwealth literature. Fiction is considered as an effective tool for making powerful literary expressions and it occupies a prominent position in Indian English literature. The fiction happens to be an apt literary form for exploring the experiences and ideas of the modern times. In this context, Prof M.K Naik opines that, "one of the most notable gifts of English education to India was probably a fountain head of story – telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West" (Mahmood-17).

In the Indian fictional arena, Manju Kapur happens to be one of the significant writers in it. She champions for the welfare of the middleclass and even “has earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp –eyed finely tuned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations. “She has set a bench mark in English novel writing and she gained immediate popularity in her first novel itself. She made her debut in English novel writing through *Difficult Daughters* and this novel gained instant prominence. Her style of writing has been lucid, and she delved into joint families in this novel. In the traditional Indian society, Manju Kapur makes an accurate observation about the capricious nature of people as well as their relationships. She talks about the intricacies of self deception in their society.

The novel *Difficult Daughters* exhibits the intelligence and sympathy of the author as it is set around the time of partition. The crux of the novel is about a woman who experiences hardships in balancing her family duty, her aspirations for education and illicit love affair. The novel has been wonderfully written with a story which interests everyone. The novel covers three generations and it focuses on a 20th century Punjabi woman. It gives a tell –tale account of an illicit affair and its broad implications at political and social level along with most neglected issues for a traditional Indian woman, of marriage versus education. Virmati, the protagonist of the novel, hails from a conservative Punjabi family in Amritsar. She nurtures an amorous relationship with a married professor, Harish. This relationship is purely illicit and devoid of any social, legal or moral sanctity. However, Virmati prefers to tread on the less frequented path and is cautioned for this at every opportunity. Because of these reprimands, she starts nurturing lofty concepts such as education and understands that there are several good things in life. Harish enters into wed lock with Virmati and makes her live along with him and his enraged first wife. He takes care of Virmati’s higher education at Lahore which proves to be very minor consolation to her scandalized family. Even Virmati feels that in her pursuit of identity, she has caused pain around her and drawn indelible lines of partition. The back drop setting of the novel happens to be a real world, not just a real place and time. The world shown here is real and it draws the attraction of the readers in many ways. It offers a fascinating insight into several things like history, into a distant culture, but very significantly into the hearts and minds of human beings.

This novel touches the tender spots of all human minds. Though, the setting of the novel is during Indian Partition, yet it is not a political novel. Though Virmati attains success in overcoming all boundaries created by men, she nurtures certain things in her mind which comes topmost in her priority. She is unable to get rid of those priorities. Her transformation from a native girl to a matured woman is attained through suffering and experience. She is in search of true love, freedom and self-realization. Her pursuit does not come to an end. The novel *Difficult Daughters* is based on the freedom struggle. When Indian fought for freedom, Virmati was seen fighting for freedom to lead a life. Quite akin to so many Indian women, she expected liberty in deciding on matters of life, studies, marriage... etc. In the climatic stage of the novel, she was

expected to achieve all these things in life, but all of them became irrelevant. She is found to be in a state of conflict, unable to decide which is right or wrong. This forces her to move towards the side which she was fighting against.

In the novel *Difficult Daughters*, the author gives a vivid description about a woman's longing for autonomy and independent identity. She does it in a diligent manner through her women protagonists in a traditional thread. Virmati is not able to compromise on an immoral physical relationship. She is a victim of deep guilty consciousness.

A marriage in a traditional manner is imperative for her. Marriage, according to her, is an opportunity for her to escape from the trouble of socially getting condemned and offer her security and certainty in life. Her mother who belonged to earlier generation accepted her lot without any protest. It was an abject surrender to her fate. All women belonging to the previous generation were content with serving food to their husbands, Virmati being a woman of the modern generation proved to be different. There has been a constant struggle between head and heart; the physical and moral aspect. Ida is the daughter of the female protagonist Virmati. She is a woman of post independence generation and she is mentally stronger and clear-headed. She comes out of her married life since her husband denied maternity to her. The married life gets ruined the moment she is forced to abort her child. Ida, by going away from her husband, proves that she will not stand male domination and power as well as traditional social structures binding women. Her struggle for attaining autonomy and independent identity remains as a pipe dream. All through the novel, the readers find Ida expressing that she will not be like her mother in exerting autonomy and independent identity. Even in the present times, there are thousands and thousands of Indian women who are confined to four walls of their houses wondering whether they have any rights in choosing their lives. They are not sure whether they will be given opportunities to become home makers or more. No doubt, they are all products of marriage as an institution. They are not content with the kind of freedom to go out for shopping with their friends. They crave for more. The author very tactfully presents women's emancipation and their efforts to find some space in a telling manner. The impact created is not only a verbal pleasure for readers, but it also touches their hearts. In the entire novel, the author ensures that Virmati is not given any opportunity to exert her freedom. Even when she breaks the shackles of an old prison, She is forced into newer prisons.

In the novel, Manju Kapur portrays the image of suffering through stoic women who are able to liberate themselves from the traditional shackles and lead their lives in their own terms and conditions. Women of the present times also suffer from patriarchal pressure and control. All these women are victims of the oppressive mechanism of a closed society.

The same women gain courage and strength in the hands of Manju Kapur and face life in the confident manner. They are able to break the barriers of the patriarchal notions and forcefully move towards domesticity. It apart, they exert their individuality and attain self reliance through education. All along, there is a deep desire in them to be independent.

In the novel, Virmati was successful in overcoming the traditional shackles of a country at a greater force. In the process, she had to undergo several mental tortures and the tag of being ‘other’. Even the women of post independent India suffer from some definite constraints, in spite of their education and career. There is always a tinge of fear looming large over their lives. The novel is a wonderful work of Manju Kapur. In it, she brings out the desires of human beings and their passion for leading a self designed life. She has not left any stone unturned in presenting this aspect in the novel. The readers could feel an irrevocable line of pain in the characters of the novel which even time cannot heal.

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