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# Women as the Harbingers of the New Revolution in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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## Abstract

*Difficult Daughters* was written by ManjuKapur, which won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize, the best first book in Europe and South Asia. The plot is knotted around the societal system that divides women from their basic rights. The three-generation aperture is met by wed locks that drift the very living of women. Manju Kapur often touches on the theme of a male-dominated community that doesn't let women thrive on their needs and wants after marriage. This study gazes at the societal regimes which outcast women and the hardships they go through if they take the high road of educating themselves.

**Keywords:** Women, Marriage, Society, Male dominated community

The plot revolves around three women Virmati, Shakuntala, and Swarna who continuously struggle to place their identity above the standards of society. The setting of the novel depicts the level of broadness in the minds of people. It is during the time of the pre-independence era. The protagonist Virmati longs to be a progressive independent woman. Shakuntala supports this view and encourages her to pursue what she desires to be. The freedom women get to act on these days is a hard struggle of many women who have sacrificed their reputation, family, and their own identity amidst the male-dominated society.

The power of women was neither understood nor accepted by many, because they were forced to act upon pre-destined work. The work does include constant labor, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and brutal treatment when it comes to bearing a child and looking after the family. In cases like this, they were not allowed to do certain things only by other women.

More than men, women of older generations taught their daughters to be submissive. We can see multiple themes intertwined in this plot. The first one can be seen as the real perception behind the marriage. Virmati was a middle-class Punjabigirl whose only dream in life was to look after her family and get married. She finds a different meaning for the word freedom. She evolves within the story and becomes a different person many times. She constantly feels she is not the old person anymore.

We can find Harish's character weakling. He fails to perform what he talks. Despite being such a personality, society does not stand against men. The ideologies they follow, the mean character they have within themselves becomes the pillar stone to the opinions that travel in the form of rules in the community.

Each person has their own opinions over how a woman should behave. The responsibilities she should take up in her lifetime. This varies from generation to generation. Women of the medieval period never knew a word nor did they educate themselves. This was for one reason, males wanted to dominate them in every way possible.

The ideologies that varied from generation to generation led to the trauma and question one's existence. Virmati gets pregnant before marriage and because of the constant judgment she would undergo, she keeps the news for herself. She was even scared to share it with another woman, as she was not ready to undergo mental suffering.

Virmati was ashamed of herself and chose to suffer alone. The question Virmati constantly asks herself becomes the foundation on how society's opinions have an impact on every individual.

The women's movement in India began in the nineteenth century as a social reform movement. Idea like liberty, equality, and fraternity was being imbibed by Western education. There was awareness created on the status of women and their wellbeing.

The tradition of women's struggles and movements against patriarchal institutions of gender injustice has been weak in India when compared to the women's movements in Western and European societies. Women's fight against the oppression of patriarchy has been very slow.

The times were hard for women as they didn't know how to process what was happening to other women. They were in a continuous dilemma on what to believe and what not to believe. They looked up to other woman revolutionaries who kept spreading the words of coming out of the cocoon, there is more behind the life of the kitchen and every woman needs to have a voice.

These were the constant ideologies she went through in her mind and traveled to different realms interrogating the same. There were feelings of

deprivation and anger against the injustices women were facing, though. But there were no real solutions to it. However the ideology and need to voice outspread rapidly that today feminist movement has gained popular appreciation all over the globe.

As the novel highlights it is the oppression that women were continuously tormented about. This tolls on their mental health as well. The worst is, it is being taught to the next generations. Barely do women understand what their needs are mentally, financially, and emotionally.

All these existed over the years because they got imbibed with the culture of Indian society. The way we define culture depends on our perception. It is a man-made part of the environment. Culture depicts the quality of life, mind, and civilization. Indian history has the stories of many people who were deprived and discriminated against by the Indian society whose majority were the upper-class people. The difficulties faced by common people based on the class system further divided culture drastically. It deteriorated the values and ethics that were followed in every household.

The British rule was the turning point in the lives of Indians. They gave different perceptions in terms of language, culture, and liberty of women. Despite the adverse effects of colonization, women retrieved the real meaning of liberty on their terms. That was when they looked beyond the cultural boundaries.

In this novel, the women of different generations portray how they were interconnected with culture and their perception of its meaning. They were taught by elders in a certain way and they continue to believe it so and forget to interrogate whether it is right or wrong. They forget to unlearn and relearn culture in context with their belief and lifestyle.

Kasthuri, the mother of Virmati, delivers baby year after year, Virmati takes charge of the family and sacrifices her life to bring up her siblings. Virmati does not have time for her and forgets to live her life. The old tradition of getting married is ignored completely by Virmati as everything around her is overwhelming. She develops an immense interest in education.

Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin is a symbol of the modern age, from whom Virmati gets inspiration and ideas to lead a life different than normal. Shakuntala

is portrayed as an independent girl. This is seen when she says, “These people don’t understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else”

Virmati marries Harish, a professor she falls in love with at Lahore. Experiencing a position of a co-wife, the real purpose of marriage for Virmati is lost. She gives birth to a girl baby and names her baby Bharati, to represent freedom. The novel highlights the struggle and search for her identity. It shows the reader what is worth fighting for and women are more than what one thinks.

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