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Chief Editor:

**Mr. Pramod P. Tandale**

Executive Editor

**Dr. Mangalkumar R. Patil**

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Dr. Ghali College, Gadhinglaj

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**Mr. Ashvin G. Godghate**

**Dr. Dattatray N. Waghmare**

**Dr. Nilesh. K. Shelake**



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## **Theme of Special Issue**

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## Self-Identity in Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters'

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### Abstract

*In post-colonial Indian English writing women issues have been the main concerns of the writers. They focused to write on women's identity and their life. The image of modern woman, her pursuit and struggle for a superb identity of her own are arising as trend in the Indian English literature. Woman has been subjugated to ill treatment and oppression since ages. They are discriminated on the basis of gender. Though living in modern world, women in India are yet caught between patriarchal values and style of life.*

*There are many emerging writers like Anita Desai,*

*Shashi Deshpande , Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Bharti Mukherjee who have dealt with female problems. Manju Kapur, a well-known novelist throws light on the woman's struggle for self in her novel Difficult Daughters. This paper focuses on the struggle and suffering of woman called Virmati to assert her identity. Virmati is the protagonist of the novel. She faces all oddities of life both in her maternal and husband's family. Her marriage with Harish gives her secondary status and remains entangled in patriarchal norms. In this novel Manju Kapur shows a woman who tries to assert her individuality, is branded as a difficult daughter both by family and society.*

**Key words:** Self-identity, patriarchal values, struggle, suffering, society

### Introduction

In post-colonial Indian English writing women issues have been the main concerns of the writers. They focused to write on women's identity and their life. The image of modern woman, her pursuit and struggle for a superb identity of her own are arising as trend in the Indian English literature. There are many Indian writers who are moving from tradition to modernity. Their writings reflect different phases from conventional women to that of the new progressive women. Since ages women have been subjected to ill treatment, inequality, discrimination and faced various agonies in their lives. It is seen that they have been discriminated on the basis of gender. The emancipation of women through Indian literature has undergone changes in keeping with the changing social image of women in India. The present-day literature reflects the image of women who is completely different from earlier literature. Gender equality is still a myth and persistent in one way or other in different spheres of women's life. But one must note that there is a shift in values and women have started recognising themselves as co-equals of men. Woman's search for an identity in India is still a question of survival whereas in west it is of equality and identity. Though living in modern progressive society, women in India are still caught between traditional values, patriarchal society and style of life. The fast approaching new life reflected in Indian literature is also projected women venturing into pre-marital and extra-marital affairs and even lesbianism. It is quite evident that the western influences are slowly creeping in Indian society too.

Indian society upholds the patriarchal system that is evident even today. The male domination in the life of woman is a natural phenomenon in Indian society, supports old traditional values and subsequently offers her with secondary status, good enough to influence the feminist writers. So the issues concerning women are discussed and debated at various platforms. The life of women lived and suffered under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society is reflected in the writings of numerous women writers of post-colonial India. The eminent feminist writers are Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur,

Kamala Markandya etc. Manju Kapur is a well-known writer in Indian writing, was a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi.

Her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, received the Common wealth award in 1999, her other novels are *A Married Woman*, *Home* and *the Immigrant*.

Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* published in 1998 is purely a feminist , post modern work of art. It focuses on the issue of gender discrimination and sufferings of the Indian women under the oppressed male dominated society. It shows the complex relationship between the mothers and their daughters over three generation. The novel, set in the background of partition revolves around the life of woman whose struggle for freedom and self identity engulfs her. The search for control over one's destiny is the main theme of the novel. It portrays a woman's need to be loved in family and society. The theme of partition operates at two levels in the novel. The novelists throws light on Indian partition and the family partition. It further refers to independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also freedom yearned by a woman of the same nation. Virmati, the heroine, like any educated woman searches for relations that asserts her individuality and starves to control her life. She is born in Amritsar in Punjab in 1940. Her father is progressive idealist and mother a traditionalist . She dreams of free life both in her own and husband's family but fails. Virmati is seventeen years old girl , the eldest daughter of jeweller among her eleven brothers and sisters, her mother was ever pregnant woman. At an early age, looked after the household chores and became a second mother to her siblings. She aspired for a free life at home. This aspiration is not fulfilled in her family and also in her married life. It is out of her own mistake and wrong choice of her partner. If she would have agreed to marry Inderjeet, her parents choice things would have been different in her life. Her inability to take right decision at right time creates problems for her. Virmati like any other Indian woman is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage. She insists to pursue higher education, manages to live home to study in Lahore. There she falls in love with the professor Harish Chandra, a married man with illiterate but gentle wife, a daughter and lives with his mother. The professor seeks an intellectual partner in Virmati and Virmati's self-identity is accepted by professor's passion for her. Both seek mutual satisfaction in each other. This relationship proved fruitful to professor as it gave him intellectual; physical and emotional satisfaction but to Virmati it turns out to be torturous .

The search of Virmati to assert her individuality makes her life miserable filled with lots of sufferings . In modern times, one talks of emancipation and empowerment of woman. Right to education is given to girls. In spite of this, patriarchal society considers her to be weak as compared to boys. Nowadays parents give best education to their girls, make them self dependent. At the sametime, they also wish her to be homely, loving and perfect Indian Naari. This dual expectation creates double mindedness in her. Though educated, self dependent , first she is accepted as domestic wife and remains always under the control of man. This dilemma of modernity and traditionalism is projected in this novel. It is this flux which gave rise to Virmati's quest for her self identity.

Virmati's cousin Shakuntala is the best example of modern woman. She is a successful teacher, she is respected for her independent attitude, takes part in Gandhian movement even after her marriage. She is able to exercise her freedom of action and thought. Naturally Virmati is influenced by her. In this context she says:

“She was so keen to study bapre! Freedom associated in travelling ,entertaining , reading , learning and attending to academic deliberations thrills the ignorant mind of Virmati.”

She says ‘ I want to be like you Pehanji (15). Though engaged, she was emotionally attached to professor. He dissuades her to marry Inderjeet. Initially she felt that the professor deceived his wife and even herself. Later on, convinced his was sad marriage. She was unknowingly trapped in

professor's love and lust. She did not even think of her insecure life. If she had ever given a second thought her life would have been different. At home, Kasturi wanted her daughter to be like herself, hardly realized her need for freedom and self existence. So Virmati rebelled and rejected everything that her mother stood for marriage, domesticity motherhood and opted for new world of education, knowledge and self dependence. Her rebel is the result of her mother's constant negligence towards her. She expresses like this:

"At times Virmati yearned for affection for some sign that she was special." (6)

Virmati in a confused mind, unable to choose between Inderjeet and professor, makes an attempt to commit suicide but is rescued. She is deeply in distress ; her mother did not show any compassion for her. This detached behaviour of her mother appeared to be oppressive. At Lahore, she was completely involved in her professor's love. When the whole nation was engaged in freedom movement. Her friend swarnlata made an attempt to make her to realise how she was wasting her time in mistrusted and unfruitful relationship. Though she realized the meaninglessness of her relationship , her emotional dependence on professor constantly invaded her from marriage and outside activity. In solitude , she desires to be Swarnlata she says:

"May be I could be like Swarnlata from inside secretly."(24)

The most pitiable thing in her life was that professor never stood by her at times of adversity caused by him. When she becomes pregnant , to avoid shame of her family she undergoes abortion with the help of Swarnlata. At Nahan she was fortunate to lead a life of her own. Here she got psychological and mental satisfaction. Her marriage to professor gave her secondary status. She has to adjust with Ganga and also fight for social status. Though she played a perfect role of her wife but she was never acknowledged for her intellectuality. This marriage gave her secondary status wife., brought her much agony and family estrangement.

This marriage had brought so much disaster that she had to bare family estrangements too. She was not allowed to attend her grandfather's and her father's funeral ceremony. She has to bare the insult like outcast in her family. Her mother could not understand her feelings and failed to support in her married life crisis. Looking at her daughter's despair, felt humiliated and insulted instead of showing compassion. She behaved in a most inhuman manner. Kasturi was left with no option but to disown her daughter for her misconduct.

### Conclusion:

The turning point of protagonist quest for self identity comes with birth of daughter. It is true that the *Difficult Daughters* reveals a message that woman urges to be independent, stresses for self identity is branded as difficult daughter to cope with the established norms of family and society. This novel represents the turmoil and agony of a woman who tries to overcome her social, cultural identity and assert for self identity an attempt desperately made by Virmati. This clearly shows that woman in India suffers at the hands of patriarchy be it father and husband. Virmati is no exception to it .Thus modern writings reflects oppression of woman on the basis of gender discrimination. They have to undergo rails of sufferings in a quest for self-identity.

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