



## Mapping Women Stereotypes: A Reading of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

**Dr Harnam Singh**

Assistant Professor Department of English, HPURC Dharamshala HP

[harnambharmopuri99@gmail.com](mailto:harnambharmopuri99@gmail.com)

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18213786>

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 15-12-2025

**Published:** 10-01-2026

### Keywords:

*Women, Stereotypes, Exploitation, Resistance, Culture, Convention*

### ABSTRACT

The life of women have been full of misery and sufferings since the dawn of civilization. They are forced to live under certain confines of patriarchy and are rendered to be submissive and deprived of their rights to articulate their individuality. However, with the passage of time women are rebelling against conventionally defined rules and asserting their right to progress and equality. They are resisting against the exploitation and discrimination prevalent in the society. Many authors also come forward to raise the issue of equality and equity.

### Introduction:

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman . . . which is described as feminine" (16)

These famous words were written by the great French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir to make clear that women and men are acclimatized into gender roles by cultural settlements. She precisely defines that women were forced into silence and stereotyped into a certain role in the family and society as well. She says that women were rendered submissive and deprived of their rights to articulate their individuality and passion.

However, the situation is undergoing a change in the contemporary times. Women are raising voice and rejecting the traditional systems of patriarchy. They are rebelling against their conventionally defined rules and asserting their right to progress and equality.

Similarly in Indian English writings, many women novelist have come forward to raise voice against certain kind of discrimination and demand equality, which includes some famous names such as



Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan, Nayantara Sehgal, Shoba De and others. They express the aspirations of Indian women with boldly and candidly.

Their story lines and characters challenge the traditional system of discrimination against women. Manju is also one of them. She has given a solicitous understanding of women inner chaos to find a place, an individuality and identity of her own. The novel is set during the times of independence. As the nation struggles to achieve freedom, so does Virmati, the protagonist. However, her life is full of sorrows and sufferings. The major obstacle in front of her is her own mother Kasturi, who is stereotypical Indian woman. Her life explicitly epitomizes subjugation and inferiority in old-fashioned Indian society. She is victim of the hegemonic control of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, she loves and cares for her children. Kasturi is portrayed as an embodiment of motherhood, who bears pains and sufferings as “Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache” (7). However, patriarchy had a strong hold over her and did not allow her to educate her daughter Virmati. She gave birth to eleven children and her ideology is in conformity to the norms of patriarchy. She considers of marriage as the obligation of every girl rather than achieving education. She reiterates “Hai re, beti! What is the need to do a job? A woman's shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough” (16).

According to Kasturi, education is the means of getting a suitable groom. She firmly believes that man is allowed to do a job because it requires to go outside the walls of the house. Whereas, girl has to live her life according to the norms laid down by society. Hence, Kasturi says about Virmati “All the time in lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should have been a man” (16). She believes that only man can move freely and not a woman. Virmati’s cousin, Shakuntala is unmarried and studies at Lahore University. She considers Shakuntala as a role model, who creates her own niche. She encourages Viramati to create her own space individuality in society.

Later on her attempts to acquire higher education are loaded with many problems. She fails in her FA (final arts) exam. Her mother decided to discontinue her education and ordered her "leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first" (21) and fixed her marriage with a canal engineer Inderjeet. Virmati was annoyed and frustrated because she was not ready to be married. Her struggle to create an individual space was filled with many obstacles. She was forced to sacrifice her studies as her mother was of the firm opinion that higher studies are only for boys and not for girls.



However, Virmati did not give up hope. She joined Kanya Maha Vidyalaya in Amritsar.

Virmati continued her struggle for creating an individual identity in patriarchal dominated society. She met Professor Harish, who teaches her English. Soon they fell in love. Virmati was attentive in his subject and “Always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the professor's class and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male student” (46). Professor Harish got fascinated towards Virmati’s flower-like structure. However, this relationship created difficulties in her life. She is torn between choices like “Early marriage and no education? No professor or no love? Her soul revolted and suffering increased” (54). Subsequently, Virmati finished her BA and her mother fixed her marriage. She refuses to get married to and her mother Kasturi pleaded “You are the eldest, Viru your duty is greater. You know how much the younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you; otherwise, would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. Now what will they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it?”(58-59).

Viramati is in love with Professor Harish but is being forced to marry someone else. Society does not allow a woman to take any decisions regarding her life. Her mother rejected that relationship. She grabbed her hair and banged her head against the wall. Virmati was locked in godown for a week as punishment for her affair with the professor so that “Maybe this will knock some sense into you. . . .What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?”(59). Communication between Harish and Virmati continues with the help of letters but they do not receive permission to get married from Virmati’s family.

However, Virmati’s was shocked one day to learn that Harish was married and his wife was pregnant. Virmati’s life was completely distraught. She was unable to decide whether she should get married or continue her education. She decided to end her relationship with Harish in order to solve this quandary and move on in life. She wrote a letter to him and proposed to end the affair between them, but Harish professed his love even more strongly for her. But Virmati questioned him as to how can a single man be faithful to two different women. She realized that the Professor does not want to leave Virmati and also his wife. Kasturi displayed her stereotypical ideology related to gender “This is what every man wants, even if he is educated” (104). Consequently, a girl is deserted and in our society.

Virmati decided to continue her education and moved to Lahore for her BT (Bachelor's of Teacher Training). She severed all ties with Harish and focused on her education alone. Her mother was



not in compliance with her decision to go to Lahore for further studies and cursed her “God has put you on earth to punish me,”(111). Virmati moved to Lahore in an attempt to acquire education and break free from this regressive society. In Lahore, she met Swaranlata, an ardent feminist and she took her to a meeting in Punjab Woman Student’s Conference. The speeches delivered there fired a storm within Virmati’s mind. She resolved not to give up in life and fight the challenges thrown by the patriarchal society. Virmati was deeply influenced by Swaranlata’s ideas to fight for her own space in society. Soon she completed her BT and her grandfather stood like a rock behind her and encouraged her to get a job. She started teaching in Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya, Nahan where she accidentally came across Harish. He is keen to continue his relationship with Virmati and proposes to marry her. Finally, Virmati mustered the courage to marry the man she loves. She returns to Amritsar and begins her life with him.

However, misfortune did not leave her here also. She had to contend with being the second wife of Harish. When she entered the house she came across Harish’s first wife Ganga standing in the front of the door with her two children. Ganga is an illiterate woman and resembles a middle-class housewife. She simply looked at Virmati and did not utter a word. Virmati’s mother-in-law also has nothing to say to Virmati and sarcastically asked her son, as to how he was able to trap this shameless young Punjabi woman. Her mother-in-law held Virmati solely answerable for ruining the wedding of her son and comments that “If she had not gone after him, he would not have strayed” (192).

Virmati’s life continued to be full of difficulties. A sense of guilt took over her. Virmati realized that she had taken a wrong decision in marrying an already married man “I should not, cannot, will not marry you. It will not be fair. And now she had married him, but the old words were still springing to her lips, so many futile noises in the air” (212). She felt guilty towards Ganga. One woman’s search for identity and fulfillment led to the loss of other woman’s identity.

Later she got the news of untimely demise of her and went to attend his funeral. Her mother abused and ridiculed her and told her never to come back again. She considered it all to be her fault. Virmati’s condition became wretched to the extent that “It was almost as though she had gone mad. Forgotten who she was, who she was married to, and all her obligations” (240). Virmati, who is the difficult daughter in the successful merchant family of Lala Diwan Chand, bore the brunt of taking independent decisions and pursuing her dreams. In the end, she decided to join Indian Independence movement and emphasized the need for women learning and liberation.

**Bibliography**

- Chopra, Radhika. "Partitioned Lives in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters*." *Indian Literature*, Vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 164-175. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/23349470](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23349470)
- Devi, Amara R. "Women Beyond Tradition: Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol.-1, Iss.-1, 2014.
- Grewal, Nitasha. "Manju Kapoor's Virmati in *Difficult Daughter: A New Woman*." *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, [www.iasir.net](http://www.iasir.net), pp. 57-60.
- John, Annie. "Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *Indian Stream Research Journal*, Vol.-1, Iss.-1, 2011.
- Joshi, Monali. "Theme of Alienation and Isolation in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *IJELLIT*, Vol.-3, Iss.-1, 2015.
- Kapoor, Manju. *Difficult Daughter*. Penguin Books, 1998.
- Mathini, A and Kumar, R. Latith. "The Predicament of Women in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol.-4, Iss.-2, 2016.
- Rawal, D. Tawn. "Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters: A Challenge to Patriarchy*." *Research Matrix*, Vol.-1, Iss.-4, 2013.
- Samuel, P and Hephizibah P. "Mother-Daughter Relationships in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *The Criterion*, Vol.-1, Iss.-12, 2013.
- Saymala, Ghantasala. "The Indian Woman in a Quandary in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughter*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol.-2, Iss.-1, 2014.