CHAPTER III

REMAPPING THE FEMALE MAP IN DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS

Indian society has mainly been patriarchal in which women have been subjected to various kinds of physical, social and psychological harassment. They are pictured as sex symbols, as a pleasure giving commodity to man. A woman is expected to play the role of a mother, wife, daughter and so on. Apart from this she is not supposed to have an identity of her own. Against this conventional archetypal background there has been a shift in the Indian women’s sensibility mainly owing to the revolutionary processes taking place in the west in order to release women from the shackles of conventional taboos and customs.

The emancipation of women had started in the west. The pioneering works have been *The Second Sex* and *Sexual Politics*. Following them many novels have been written by women writers. Making fiction the medium of expression, they have protested against the wrong done to women and have fought for equality and identity of women. Defining a feminist writer, Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes:

> The feminist writers are those who write as women – they are self-conscious producing women’s literature, writing about women, their rights, their dreams, their problems, their sufferings. (92)

Feminist theory started since eighteenth century. So far they tried to bring a revolution between the readers and the texts. Virginia Woolf, the famous Victorian feminist gave a speech on female problems, our status and the role of women in A
Room of One’s Own. As a man, Woman should have the same rights and opportunity but it is denied to them in patriarchal society.

In modern society the women are not ready to accept the views of duty separation, said by A.L. Tennyson in his poem, ‘The Princess’: “Men for the field and women for the hearth/Man for the sword and for the needle her” (427). Since the eighteenth century, the female society has been struggling to achieve social, racial and economic equality with men. This concept briefly defines as “Quest for Identity”. It becomes the major theme to many feminist writers.

It is an accepted fact that the women writers have added a new dimension to Indian-English fiction with their exquisite perception of men and matters. Their fiction constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. They have dealt with the place and position of women in Indian society and their problems and plights from time to time. While doing so, they have to analyze the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women, their role and image along with their efforts to achieve a harmonious relationship with their surroundings. In due course, they aimed at portraying realistically Indian women’s sense of frustration and their alienation.

Women now refuse to be silent. The kinds of protagonists depicted in the modern Indian English novels are educated intellectuals. They analyze their lives and through a process of introspection reach self-realization. The attempt made by women novelists now is to develop a female selfhood free of guilt and social stigma.
At the dawn on the twenty first century Indian English novelists have been acclaimed as Avant – grade in the world of creativity. Most of the literary stars and stalwarts have consolidated their position and contributed immensely to Indian English literature and learning in the recent past. In the post-colonial era partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for the creative writers. There are a lot of books designed and devoted to articulating and analyzing the partition text and context. A number of novels were written on the theme of partition, the destruction it brought and the plight of the refugees. They faithfully record the reign of violence that characterized the period and provide a sad, telling commentary on the breakdown of human values. A strain of despair and disillusionment is predominant in these novels.

Manju Kapur, a noteworthy story teller who without linguistic jugglery and gimmickry presents the post-modern novels in a traditional narrative thread. *Difficult Daughters* manifests autobiographical data and dimension in its syntactic norms and nuances. The novelist herself asserts that conflicts between daughters and mother is inevitable. *Difficult Daughters* is a story woven from the fabric of the partition era. Manju Kapur narrates the story of Virmati, who enters a shocking relationship with a married man, Professor Harish Chandra. The novel presents the realistic picture of the pre-partition era, the communal riots and the freedom. The story is partially based on the life of Kapur’s own mother, Virmati. Manju Kapur reintroduces it gradually, but effectively, before it evaporates from her memory. The novel reveals a saga of Indian woman’s innocent aspirations, her rebellion against the tradition-bound society, self-doubt, resolution and acceptance.
Manju Kapur successfully portrayed a middle class Punjabi family of pre-independence era covering three generations of women. The novel also depicts the story of a courageous lady who is beautifully portrayed by the novelist. Ida, who is the daughter of Virmati and the narrator of the novel, states in the beginning:

The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I started at the fire that roses from her shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept. (DD 01)

Then, there is Virmati, the chief protagonist of the novel, who dares to defy convention and falls in love with a much-married man and marries him. During those days women were not allowed for higher education. Anyhow Virmati rebelled for postponing her marriage and got permission from her parents to continue her studies after school and then refused to marry the person with whom she was engaged. In the meanwhile she fell in love with professor Harish and to give legitimacy to her love she strived for her marriage with him in spite of family opposition and became “…the black sheep of the family” (DD 104). To provide contrast Manju Kapur has portrayed the character of Kasturi, a mother of eleven siblings, who produce children like any “…dog or cat in season” (DD 24) at the cost of her own health, Kasturi always feels tired and her feet and legs ache all the time;

“she could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet
and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying her children was a strain, even when they are young.

(DD 07)

The reason for being sick all the time is very much clear by the remarks of Kasturi’s sister-in-law. “Breeding like cats and dogs”, “Harvest time again” (DD 07). Including Virmati,

There had been eleven of them. The girls: Virmati, Indumati, Gunvati, Hemavati, Vidyavati, and Parvati. The boys: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishanath, Prakashnath and Hiranath. (DD 04)

Indumati is like second mother to Kasturi’s siblings. Kasturi has become very weak due to repeated childbirths. She has filled the house as her in-laws have wanted, but she looks faint day by day. She expresses her helplessness to her aunt-in-law:

I am going to die, Maji, this time. I know it. Don’t talk such rubbish, Beti, reported the older woman sharply. ‘God has favoured you’…

From her bones to her mind she felt dull and heavy. (DD 08)

On the other hand Kasturi does not approve the dress of Shakuntala, Virmati’s glamorous cousin. According to Kasturi,

Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me. (DD 17)
Virmati wishes to follow ideals of Shakuntala who invites Virmati to move out of the house as times are changing. Virmati is full of admiration and love for Shakuntala, her elder cousin who reads in Lahore. Virmati thinks that a day will come when she will study in Lahore. The novelist writes about her mentality at this stage:

Shakuntala’s visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. It was possible to be something other than a wife. Image of Shakuntala Pehnji kept floating through her head, Shakuntala Pehnji who having done her M.Sc., in chemistry, had gone about testing the wine of freedom… she too had to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight her mother who was sure that her education was practically over. (DD 19)

The characters Shakuntala and Swarnalata, who have paved path of their independence against their parents’ will, have their own voice. At the core of the book remain Virmati’s conflicts in a politically surcharged and convention-ridden society.

The story begins with Ida’s going on a quest to understand her mother, Virmati, she decides that, “…I must go to our birthplace, hers and mine, overrun with aunts and uncles still living in the ancestral home” (DD 02). She looks “…for ways to connect” (DD 04) herself with her mother.

Virmati was the eldest child of Kasturi’s eleven kids, who had to run the house and look after her younger brothers and sisters. She was only their sister but
she acted very bossy and the other children were scared of her. She was constantly busy with her household duties. Her brothers and sisters are demanding something or the other all the time. Someone needs sugar and flour. The other one asks about the medicine. The girl complains that her book is taken by her sister. Another sister is crying. There is a complaint that Gopi, her brother has not done his homework and so there is complaint from the school. Out of these tensions Virmati fails in her F.A exams.

Virmati tried her best to protect herself from the comments of her aunt Lajwanti, who lived next door. So she carefully looked after her younger brothers and sisters. The reader is made struck at the question of Kasturi to her ten year old daughter asking “Having you seen to their food-milk-clothes-studies?” (DD 6). Sometimes Virmati yearned for her mother’s affection, for some sign that she was special but she never got it and drew out comfort from her school books. She is always seen tired and harassed due to her weary work. Torn between her household responsibilities and her love for studies, she turned into a brisk and bad tempered girl. She accompanied her mother to Dalhousie to take care of her mother with a new born baby. But there also she became restless when she came to know that her mother did not need her. Without understanding Virmati’s mental state, after their debates, Kasturi used to wonder, “Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster” (DD 12).

Shakuntala’s visit to Dalhousie planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. In the case of Shakuntala, who tenaciously clings to her single, unmarried state, in the face of violent opposition from her mother, Lajwanti who tries to put a brave
face on it by saying, “with all this reading-writing, girls are getting married late” (DD 18). Shakuntala is her own woman, dresses as she pleases, is confident, glamorous, leads an independent, interesting life in Lahore and never seems to entertain doubts about herself. Her mother tells her she should have been a man for all her qualities and attitude as seen as appropriate only to the male of the species. Virmati admires her for she appears to be, “one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children.” (DD 14)

After meeting with a spirited, defiant cousin sister she also wanted to be like Shakuntala Phenji. She started thinking:

It was useless looking for answers inside the home.

One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges… she watched her ride horses, smoke, play cards and bad-minton, act without her mother’s advice, buy anything she wanted without thinking it a waste of money, casually drop in on all the people the family knew. Above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything. (DD 17)

She understood that it was possible to be something other than wife. Her determination shows her assertive nature and the reader’s starts assuming that she will be successful in carving a niche for herself.

In the meantime England returned married Professor, Harish Chandra, came to live next to Virmati’s house. Having nothing much in common with his homely, illiterate wife Ganga, the Professor started an intellectual dalliance with
the fresh, inquisitive Virmati and soon found him falling in love with her. By the
time Virmati had passed her B.A exams and wanted to study further. In the eyes of
her parents she had done enough studies and her fiancé’s parents also thought,

… She was already well qualified to be the wife of their son, the
canal engineer. They did not want too much education in their
daughter-in-law, even though times were changing. (DD 45)

Due to the death of canal engineer’s father their marriage was postponed
and Virmati found an opportunity to get her admission in AS College. Classroom
was the only place where Professor saw her in college. Falling in love happened
because one day he noticed her intensely staring. But the real reason for which
was her myopia. He took her to the eye doctor and she started putting on glasses:

Yes, she needed glasses. Not strong ones, just a mild prescription.
With them she looked more studious, less flower like and appealing.
But by then, the Professor’s desire to possess had extended to her
heart and mind. (DD 47)

By introducing Virmati to the canons of English Literature, the great
western civilizations, and the nuances of cultured living, the Professor succeeded
in providing her a false feeling of woman’s emancipation. After finishing her B.A
with the resolution for further studies she grappled with her mother for not
marrying at that time. Kasturi wondered thinking,

What had come over the girl? She has always been so good and
sensible. How could she not see that her happiness lay in marrying a
decent boy, who had waited patiently all these years, to whom the family had given their word?

What kind of learning was this that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education, it had got her husband, and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading. In her times, going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one’s parent. How had girls changed so much in just a generation? (DD 60)

After meeting the Professor and getting no suggestions from him, it became clear that to her that,

It was clear to her that she could not depend upon the Professor to sort out any domestic situation. It was up to her. At home, everybody assumed that her listlessness had to do with bridal nerves, and treated her with a tact rare in her family. Even Paro and Vidya, wild with excitement, were subdued before their sister’s absent-mindedness. (DD 68)

Finally she attempted to commit suicide by drowning herself into the canal at Tarsikka but failed as she was rescued by her grandfather’s servants. In her explanation Virmati told her family that she wanted to study further and did not want to marry Inderjit as she did not like the boy. At this they locked her in the godown to save her from herself and the Professor and they arranged Indu to marry Inderjit who would “… preserve the family integrity” (DD 90). Kasturi
blamed her saying that she had given “… a setback to the Arya Samaj’s effort to educate girls” (DD 93). She kept on saying that all her education had achieved was the destination of her family. According to Virmati’s parents the Professor was:

A man who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never give happiness to any woman. He is a worldly person caught in his own desires. Nothing solid. (DD 93)

But as Virmati had become blind in love of Professor she did not understand it. With her acceptance of Professor’s love she shows her emotional weak self. It fails to justify the expectations of the readers to look for an assertive self in Virmati.

As a result of Virmati’s desires to study and her involvement with the professor she suffered ostracism. She accepted it as a part of her lot when she said:

This long period is the first time in my life I have been left completely to myself. Away from my brothers and sisters, away from household activities, I feel strange, one pea alone in a whole long pod, no use to anybody. I have to get used to it, for this is my fate. (DD 100)

The Professor is seen quite selfish and is seen sailing on two boats. He tried to maintain his relationship with his wife as well as with Virmati. When Virmati came to know about the pregnancy of his wife she decided that she should not come between the professor and his wife and she had to keep up her family’s traditions. She resolved to forget the Professor and burned all of his letters sent to her and started trying to live within the moral code. She went to Lahore to do her
B.T as she wanted to be a teacher like Shakuntala Pehnji and the Professor. She said:

It is small, attached to a school in the same compound, and away from the fashionable part of the city… All I want is a change from my old life and the chance to do something useful. I do not mean ever to marry. (DD 110)

Pursuing her, Professor went to Lahore and also made her the target of his sexual desires. Inspite of her frequent requests he was reluctant to marry her and wished to keep her as his co-wife which was a part of social traditions. He was a hypocrite who at his own convenience has moulded his opinions about social traditions and sexually exploited Virmati. He seems just another chauvinist steeped in patriarchal traditions. Virmati does not appear as an assertive person now because her stay at Lahore was not only for the fulfillment of her love for studies but also for the fulfillment of her desires to be with Harish without any interference.

Showing the lollipop of love to Virmati for a long time Harish kept on exploiting her. At last after not getting any firm reply from Harish about their marriage Virmati thought that it would be “… better to be like Swarna involved in other people, and waiting for no man” (DD 150). But one day she discovered that she became pregnant. After waiting long for Harish she got it aborted with the help of Swarna and Miss Datta. Like a typical Indian woman bound in traditions she thought
Thought that now he hardly needed letters to attach her to him. She was his for life, whether he ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice. (DD 177)

Ultimately their marriage took place in the house of Harish’s Friend. After marrying him, Virmati knew rather than felt, “that the burden of the past five years had lifted” (DD 202) and “she was pleased to finally detect a recognizable pattern in her life” (DD 206). On the other hand she was sure that neither her parents nor grandparents would ever forgive her. The process of rejection that had started with Tarsikka would be completed. On reaching home, by the remarks of the family members and sometimes introduced as “gaudy lady” (DD 208) also, Virmati was to realize “I should never have married you… and it’s too late now. I’ve never seen it so clearly. It’s not fair” (DD 212).

On the very first day of her married life she understood the adjustment with others had become a part of her life and “she would walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had carved out for her” (DD 212). Thus Virmati’s marriage with the Professor does not change her position in the family nor does it provide her sufficient space in the family.

Virmati’s each and every movement was restricted by the resistant Ganga and Kishori Devi. She found herself as a pariah in the family and wonder drearily “…whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life” (DD 215). It was made clear to her that not an inch of that territory was going to be yield. “If Virmati had the bed, Ganga was going to have the house” (DD 230). Thus was
born the idea of sending Virmati off to Lahore to do an M.A. Harish chose philosophy for her subject. Ganga became happy of Virmati going away.

With this Virmati got freedom and independence which she didn’t have in Harish’s house. Though she was free there, she did not join Swarna to demonstrate against the Draft Hindu Code Bill, as she was married to Harish who would not like that path. This shows weakness in her character. After a year Harish started requesting her to go back home as he could not bear their separation any longer and he had gone on keeping two households long enough. Suddenly he became quite insensitive to the problems she had faced in his house. He talked to her in favour of Ganga. By then, she had enough time to adjust. Listening to these words, distress enveloped her heart.

So she became adamant in her desire to repeat her M.A again to improve the result and decided that she would not go to Amritsar in the coming summer. Thus she would go in for non-cooperation movement by not agreeing to Harish. However this state was short lived and due to the unrest all over the country, Harish’s family members left Amritsar for Kanpur leaving him alone in Amritsar. As it was the need of time Virmati left Lahore to start her life as a housewife. Leaving Lahore she was hopeful that perhaps things would be different later and she would go back the following March, would do her exams and would see about a job.

Going back home the first thing Virmati did was that she shifted all the things related to Ganga to the dressing room and thus “…felt light-hearted, as though she had conquered and won” (DD 252). May be it was for this space only
she had fought for all along. She conceived and that time she had no fear that anything could happen to her. With the certainty of her existence in life, she felt strong. She gave birth to baby girl. Virmati suggested her be named Bharati with the thought of the birth of their country but Harish denied saying:

I don’t wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred? We have not been born. We have moved back into the dark ages. Fighting, killing over religion. Religion of all things. Even the educated.

This is madness, not freedom. And I never ever wish to be reminded of it.

Harish’s voice rose hysterically, and the girl was named Ida.

But what does it mean? Asked Virmati doubtfully. ‘People might think it is Persian name’

‘This is the very attitude that has led to Partition’ said Harish irritably.

‘Let anybody think what they like. For us it means a new state and a blank beginning’. (DD 276)

Throughout the novel another woman character Kasturi is seen an ill-tempered mother curing her daughter Virmati. During her childhood Kasturi used to go to the mission school. One day Kasturi’s mother found her praying the
picture of Christ and became upset and threatened to marry her off before she brought further disgrace to the family. But Kasturi belonged to a broad minded Arya Samaj family in which child-marriage was considered as an evil. Soon a separate school for the Hindu girls was built.

She (Kasturi) became the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by tentative assault on learning. (DD 62)

She learned reading, writing, balancing household accounts and sewing. Arya Samaj Havan, Sandhya and Meditation became a part of her life. After graduating at the age of twelve she was trained by her mother in household activities so that she could please her in-laws in future. Her parents praised her for gentleness, tranquility, beauty and modesty and were sure that she would be rewarded by a good husband. As she was fond of reading, to protect her from the comments of others she read at night and enjoyed it very much. She was married to Suraj Prakash who impregnated her every year and left her with “…the tiredness of seventeen years of relentless child-bearing wash over her”. (DD 09)

Due to her weakness a sense of rebellion filled in her and she had started thinking that why she should look after her body. Kasturi should not blame for her bad temper and frustration which she takes out on Virmati. On the other hand Virmati gets sympathy of the reader as she is seen crushed between the household responsibilities and her cravings for studies.
Ida is shown as a radical modern woman of contemporary India. She is an issueless divorcee, who succeeds in breaking out of an unsuccessful marriage and staying single, phenomenon unheard of in her grandmother Kasturi’s time. As she was not in good terms with her mother, after her death she delved into her mother’s past in order to understand their relationship. She went to Amritsar to their ancestral home to trace the history of her parents.

I know my relatives feel sorry for me. I am without husband, child or parents. I can see the ancient wheels of my divorce still grinding and clanking in their heads… Now I show curiosity about them. I wonder how they remember their past. (DD 04)

She discovered how her mother defied her own tradition-bound family for many years to which marriage was acceptable but not independence. Virmati never told Ida to assert her identity and in inheritance from her mother she got “Adjust, compromise, adopt” (DD 256). Ida grew up struggling to be the model daughter. She was not a good scholar like her mother and father.

Her father expected from her not only decently dressed up but also she had to satisfy him by doing well in school, learning classical music, taking dance lessons to convert her clumsiness into grace. As his wife Virmati took part in intellectual conversations among him and his friends similarly he wished his daughter Ida could exhibit her “… accomplishments graciously before his assembled guests at parties” (DD 279). As a result of Virmati’s restraints upon Ida she started looking for escape routes. She refused to show any signs of intellectual brightness considering other things in life better.
Later she tried to bridge the contradictions in her life by marrying Prabhakar who was “...a successful academician, a writer, a disseminator of knowledge” (DD 157) like her father. At the termination of Ida’s marriage Virmati grew very upset as she did not know that her daughter had “... compromised the higher things in life” (258). After getting Ida aborted, in denying that incipient little thing in her belly, Prabahakar had sown the seeds of their divorce as perhaps he meant to do. Now after discovering the life of her parents she realizes the truth in her mother’s statement that:

Like my father.

How many times had you declared that I would be lucky if I found a husband like my father.

My father was on a pedestal so high that to breathe that rarefied atmosphere was an honour. (DD157)

Ida tormented by the fact that she never understood her mother, tries to create the space that her mother had carved for all her life as a way to make peace with her.

Ganga is seen as another victim of the traditional society. During her childhood she was married to Harish. She was never sent to school by her mother but she had trained her in good housekeeping. When Ganga was 12 years old, she entered her in laws’ house and tried to prove herself as a good wife but she could never became an intellectual companion to her husband. As he felt lonely and desolate among his family members, he drew towards Virmati “Remember, it was through your desire to learn that we were first drawn to each other” (DD 103).
The reader finds Ganga also at fault for her plight because in spite of Professor’s attempts to teach her, she never tried to improve herself to become a literate woman and share intellectual companionship with her husband for which he aspired. Due to Ganga’s illiteracy, he bought home her rival Virmati. Distress enveloped her but she continued with domestic routine and her role as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. Her ill-feelings for Virmati are quite natural because no wife would like interference in her married life. She wished for Virmati’s death when she heard that she had gone to drown herself but at the very next moment she felt a sense of fear, thinking:

> Here she was wishing evil of others. Surely this would rebound on her just as Kekayi’s evil wishes had in the end destroyed her in the Ramayana. A person’s life or death was in God’s hands, and in an effort to collect herself. (DD 78)

After Virmati’s pregnancy she wished for the birth of a baby girl. At the resolution concerning Virmati’s further learning Ganga resented her studying the most. She thought,

> She couldn’t read, and Virmati was to do an M.A! If that much attention had been given to her, she would not be in the position she was in today. She had taken her duties as a wife seriously, looked after the house, children, in-laws, and husband’s salary, but she had got no recognition for her hard work and years of sacrifice. (DD 250)
She smiled at the short while Virmati has lasted in the house and thought “she herself would never clear the field for anyone” (DD 250). During the odd circumstance in Indiashe left her home with the hope that she would come back when things would become normal but that day did not arrive in her life.

Shakuntala and Swarnalata belonged to the type of advanced women in society. Shakuntala after doing her M.Sc. in chemistry had experienced the joy of independent life. Her decision of not getting married during those days shows her strong character. She became the mouthpiece of traditional society of contemporary India. At this Shakuntala responded by criticizing the social custom of marrying the daughters:

> These people don’t really 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. (DD 17)

Kasturi disapproved Shakuntala’s ways of living by saying:

> She’s become a men… study means developing the minds for the benefit of the family. I studied too but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me…thrilled to be her mother’s confidante, but drawn towards, to one whose responsibilities went beyond… (DD 17)

Shakuntala sowed the seeds for further studies in Virmati and invited her to Lahore saying “…times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so
why not you?” (DD 18). It was due to her inspiration only that Virmati could aspire to soar very high in the sky defying her traditional family and got herself educated, with the potential of being economically independent through her life- a rare accomplishment for the women of the times. Shakuntala became

… glad that her family was at least waking up to the fact that women had to take their place in the world, but must it always be when marriage hadn’t worked out? Work was not second best, though she didn’t expect anybody from Amritsar to understand that. (DD 103)

Swarnalata was Virmati’s roommate in Lahore who went to do her M.A by postponing her marriage as she had to continue her activities in Lahore. She wanted to do something besides getting married. She told her parents if they didn’t co-operate her,

I would be forced to offer Satyagraha along with other congress workers against the British. And go on offering it until taken to prison. Free food and lodging at the hands of the imperialists. (DD 107)

Later she became a teacher in her old college and got married. Her husband accepted all her conditions allowing,

He had accepted all her conditions. She was going to be continue her other activities, remain treasurer of the women’s conference, go
on working for the party. Everything to do with the house they
would share as much as possible. (DD 188)

Due to the help of her parents and husband she could carve a path for
herself in life. When the two friends met a few years after their marriages Virmati
found Swarnalata the same an activist as she used to be during her college days.
Shakuntala offered Virmati to join a demonstration against the Draft Hindu Code
Bill which satisfied men as they

… don’t want family wealth to be divided among women. Say their
sisters get dowry, that’s their share and the family structure will be
threatened, because sisters and wives will be seen as rivals, instead
of dependents who have to be nurtured and protected. As a result
women will lose their moral position in society. (DD 251-252)

The novel evokes few concerns over the problems of Indian women in a
male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social
matrix and under which a woman proves her strength through her suffering. Kapur
has defended this through her protagonist Virmati with an idea that:

The emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on
the understanding that, in all societies which divide the sexes into
differing cultural, economic or politics spheres, women are less
valued than men. Feminism also depends on the premise that
women can consciously and collectively change their social place.
(Greene 02)
In summing up, the novel Difficult Daughters is brilliant not only because it is about female desire and entrapment but also about compromise and compliance. Virmati is pained to see her daughter husbandless and childless. If tradition-bound women run the risk of losing their identity, nonconformists face personal and social conflicts. Culture establishes gender roles which condition men and women to behave differently, as Simon De Beauvoir pinpoints:

When a woman begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy, she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective. If the difficulties are more evident in the case of the independent woman, it is because she has chosen battle rather than resignation. (Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, 691, 695-696)

Through the life of Virmati, Kapur proves that breaking the walls of old prisons is not easy. Virmati breaks the shackles of an arranged marriage, only to fall into a troubled and fugitive relationship which holds her a slave for almost all her life. Also in this novel, the two factors which enable the modern woman to assert are education and economic independence. Therefore, Virmati as a modern woman being both educated and having a job before marriage, it could be argued that the whole novel is an answer to the narrator Ida’s unambiguous declaration at the beginning that she would not want to be like her mother.

Thus, in Virmati we can see the modern woman who is conscious, introspective, educated who wants to carve out a life for her and also has courage to fight against male chauvinism for her right of choosing her mate in life and
economic independence. Finally she remaps her own life by creating an identity of her own in such suffocating situation.

Kapur’s Virmati is a new woman of colonial India and stands as metaphor to explore the possibilities for modern women in education and economic independence who experience humiliation and disillusionment in their colonial matrix. The novelist has raised the ‘question of women’ during a political and social movement in colonial India for which:

…We may term a novel “feminist” for its analysis of gender of socially constructed- for its understanding that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it. Feminist fiction is the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction - revolutionary both in that it is formally innovation and in that it helped to make a social revolution. (Bassnett 01)

The novel *Difficult Daughters*, is a literary work distinctly in the existentialistic trend and it involves a creative interaction between the writer and the social milieu. Manju Kapur has given her feminist views as the Indian women novelists concentrated on women’s problems in their work and have given vent to a new approach to and consciousness of emerging phenomenon. Like her contemporary Sobha De and other feminist women writers,
Manju Kapur has presented the intimate understanding of women and their problems. The novel appears as a personal testament of young Indian women and her protagonist is the ‘creation of an Indian consciousness’. Thus *Difficult Daughters* focuses on some of the burning problems of womanhood in a forceful manner, and that is why it is called “an enticing first novel by an Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism”. (Sunday Times)

To conclude, the examination clearly shows that Manju Kapur registers her concern for Indian women in this novel *Difficult Daughters*. She dwells on the various feministic issues like female education, empowerment, financial independence etc. Through the characters like Virmati, Ida, Shakuntala and Swarnalata, it is clear that, with the spread of education, the whole scenario has changed. Nowadays, women are struggling hard to find their own self in the family and in the society. At the same time, they can also live according to their own will, and can have their liberty. Kapur’s message is clear and loud that “the society would be better off, if its females were effective and capable.”