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SELP Journal of Social Science - A Blind Review & Refereed Quarterly Journal  
ISSN: 0975-9999 (P) 2349-1655 (O)  
Impact Factor: 3.655 (CIF), 2.78(IRJIF), 2.5(JIF), 2.77(NAAS)  
Volume XV, Issue 58, July-September 2024  
Formally UGC Approved Journal (46622), © Author

## **EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RESISTANCE: A FEMINIST STANDPOINT ANALYSIS OF MANJUKAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS***

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### ***Abstract***

*This article explores the application of Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism to Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, focusing on how the lived experiences of women, particularly the protagonist Virmati, challenge the patriarchal structures that govern pre-independence Indian society. Through an analysis of Virmati's struggle for education, personal autonomy, and resistance to societal expectations, the article demonstrates how her marginalized position provides critical insights into the limitations and inequalities of the dominant social order. Drawing on Smith's theory, the article examines how Virmati's standpoint as a woman navigating oppressive institutions offers a deeper understanding of the gendered power dynamics embedded in marriage, family, and education. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how resistance to these structures becomes a form of empowerment, enabling Virmati and other female characters to challenge patriarchal norms and envision new possibilities for agency and self-definition. This application of Standpoint Feminism reveals the transformative potential of marginalized perspectives in exposing and resisting societal inequalities, contributing to a broader understanding of feminist literary criticism.*

**Keywords:** *Standpoint Feminism, Patriarchal Power Structures, Women's Resistance Gender and Empowerment, Feminist Literary Criticism.*

### **Introduction**

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* presents a nuanced exploration of a woman's struggle for autonomy in pre-independence India. The novel's protagonist, Virmati, finds herself caught between her aspirations for higher education and the demands of her traditional family. Her desire to pursue education and an illicit relationship with a

married professor brings her into direct conflict with societal expectations. The novel masterfully intertwines themes of gender, tradition, and social change, highlighting the tension between a woman's personal desires and the rigid norms that seek to confine her. Kapur uses Virmati's experiences to critique the patriarchal values that continue to dominate Indian society, examining how

women's lives are shaped by the institutional structures of marriage, family, and education. Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism provides an ideal framework for analyzing the feminist dimensions of Kapur's work. Smith argues that knowledge is socially situated and that marginalized groups, particularly women, offer unique perspectives that challenge dominant power structures. Smith's theory focuses on how women's everyday experiences within institutional contexts—such as family and education—reveal critical insights into the workings of power and oppression. By centering women's experiences as valid sources of knowledge, Standpoint Feminism exposes how patriarchal systems operate to marginalize women's voices while privileging the perspectives of those in dominant positions. Applying this framework to *Difficult Daughters* reveals how Virmati's experiences as a woman striving for personal and intellectual independence offer a critical standpoint from which to critique patriarchal structures.

This article applies Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism to Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, examining how Virmati's lived experiences as a woman navigating patriarchal expectations provide critical insights into the limitations and inequalities of the societal structures that seek to confine her. Through an analysis of Virmati's struggles with education, domesticity, and personal freedom, the article demonstrates how her resistance to these norms serves as a valuable critique of patriarchal power and offers a deeper understanding of gendered oppression and the possibilities for women's empowerment.

Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* provides a critique of patriarchal structures that limit women's autonomy, particularly in the realms of education, marriage, and family. Virmati's quest for education represents a significant challenge to the expectations imposed upon her by her family, who believe her primary duty is to marry and manage a household. The novel portrays Virmati's family, particularly her mother Kasturi, as enforcers of these patriarchal norms, pressuring her to conform to traditional roles. Virmati's desire to pursue higher education and later her involvement with a married professor alienates her from her family and community, demonstrating the social consequences of defying gender norms.

The family functions as a microcosm of broader patriarchal society, wherein a woman's worth is determined by her ability to adhere to gendered expectations.

Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism critiques the role of institutions in reinforcing the interests of dominant groups, particularly men. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's lived experiences as a woman within the family structure provide a critical standpoint from which to critique the patriarchal norms that govern her life. Her resistance to the family's insistence on marriage as her primary function reflects her awareness of the limitations imposed on her by patriarchal systems. Smith's theory helps to illuminate how Virmati's pursuit of education serves as a direct challenge to these structures, offering her a means of empowerment and intellectual growth that is otherwise denied to her.

The novel portrays how the everyday lives of women are shaped by societal expectations, revealing the ways in which patriarchal power is embedded in daily interactions. Virmati's interactions with her mother, who constantly reminds her of her duties as a daughter, exemplify how gendered norms are internalized and reinforced within the family. These expectations are not abstract but lived and experienced in the mundane aspects of women's lives—through marriage arrangements, family obligations, and personal sacrifices.

Dorothy Smith emphasizes the importance of the embodied, everyday experiences of women as sources of knowledge. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's struggle to balance her personal ambitions with her family's expectations highlights the embodied nature of her experience as a woman. Her interactions with her family and society provide insights into how patriarchal institutions control women's lives, often by regulating their bodies and choices. By focusing on Virmati's everyday reality, the novel critiques the ways in which patriarchal norms are perpetuated through everyday practices.

Throughout *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati and other female characters resist the societal structures that confine them to traditional roles. Virmati's pursuit of education is a form of resistance against her family's and society's expectations, as is her relationship with a married man, which defies the norms of

arranged marriage. Despite facing ostracism, Virmati asserts her desire for personal autonomy, challenging the notion that women's primary role is to serve their families.

Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism argues that marginalized perspectives, such as those of women in patriarchal societies, offer critical insights into the ways in which power operates. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's experiences as a woman navigating oppressive social structures provide her with a unique standpoint from which she is able to critique and challenge the societal norms that seek to control her. Her resistance to these norms is not merely an act of rebellion but also a form of empowerment, as it allows her to exercise agency and assert her right to define her own life. Virmati's marginalized standpoint offers her a perspective on the limitations of patriarchal knowledge systems, enabling her to critique and ultimately resist the societal forces that seek to confine her.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* aligns with Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Feminism by illustrating how the lived experiences of women, particularly those marginalized by patriarchal norms, offer critical perspectives on the social order. Virmati's resistance to familial and societal expectations, as well as her pursuit of education and personal autonomy, demonstrates how women's everyday experiences challenge the dominant knowledge systems that seek to confine them to traditional roles. Kapur's portrayal of Virmati's struggles highlights the gaps in patriarchal systems of knowledge, exposing how gendered oppression is normalized through institutions like marriage and family.

The application of Standpoint Feminism to *Difficult Daughters* offers a deeper understanding of the complexities of gender, power, and resistance in Kapur's work. By centering the experiences of marginalized women, Standpoint Feminism provides a framework for analyzing how patriarchal structures operate in literature and in society. Kapur's portrayal of female characters who resist these structures enriches feminist literary criticism by illustrating how women's lived experiences offer valuable critiques of patriarchal systems and open up

possibilities for empowerment and transformation.

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