A Study on Cultural Feminism in Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughter

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Abstract

The present paper studies the ideology of Cultural Feminism in Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughter novel. Cultural Feminism is characterised as one of the kinds of feminism. This paper mainly focuses on how the women characters in this novel signify Cultural Feminism. Cultural Feminism discusses the study of women’s natures and qualities. An understanding of women’s characters and excellences, the theory of Cultural Feminism proves undeniably. Its consequences denote that without studying women’s natures and qualities, there is no Cultural Feminism instigated. Hence, the study reveals the exactness in which traditional women had lost their freedom due to male-controlled society. Female always wants their freedom by their own will. Therefore, in this novel, some female characters expect to lead their lifestyle by their wish, but just about female characters cannot contact the lifestyle by their own will due to traditional and custom. Collectively, this paper essentials about what is Cultural Feminism. It takes the comparative study of women characteristics, and it results that which woman character responds to the Cultural Feminism in the novel. The evaluation has taken for women characters of this novel to identify who reacted to the ideology of Culture Feminism. In conclusion, this paper accomplishes with the feminism ideas and thoughts by inspecting the doctrine of Cultural Feminism. A study of Manju Kapur’s novel “Difficult Daughter” is hugely meant for the concept of Cultural Feminism.

Keywords: Cultural Feminism, ideology, Manju Kapur, natures, ideas, thoughts

Introduction

In the final period of the twentieth century, many women novelists complimented the Indian English literature. Among them, a distinguished writer is Manju Kapur. She is a post-colonial writer who spontaneously observes women’s position in a patriarchal society and deals with women’s problems. Her novels present the long
struggle of women to build an identity. She has attempted to create a space that women give birth to occupy in familial relationships. Her first novel, Difficult Daughters (1998) awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book in 1999. In the novel, Difficult Daughters, she explores her women characters, some of them who are modern in their mindset. Those characters are struggled a lot to find out their identities in the male-controlled society. Their natures and qualities are not appreciated by traditional women and men in this novel.

The concept feminism is a development and a movement which began in the late 1960s as a force. It started as an effort to identify and understand the experience of women life and problem highlighted in the literature, especially in the course of a novel. It also started as an attack towards male ideas about women as seen in the research. It turns down the views of men close to women. Thus, feminism is an effort to transfer women’s small space presented by the guild’s male writers.

Women were not made-up to raise voices for their rights, protest against injustice or question the already existing beliefs, customs, rituals and superstitions. They have to live subject to the patriarchal system merely. Women are to be dutiful, silent, obedient, and inactive, not demanding any of their privileges neither as females nor as humanoid. Even the previous Indian females’ novelists have been depicting female as the silent victims, the mainstay of old values and ethics, a strict observer of social taboos, an essence of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their successors, a being with no space for herself, a woman without an identity a worshipper of their counterparts, unfortunate and ignorant about their rights as human and so on.

Later on, in feminist theory, there is originated Cultural Feminism theory. Dissimilar radical feminism or socialist feminism; cultural feminism is not an ideology widely claimed by advocates but is more commonly a pejorative label ascribed by its adversaries. In 1975, Brooke Williams was the primary to identify the “depoliticisation of radical women’s liberation movement” as “cultural feminism” (Brooke Williams, 1975). All the same, the term had textured as initial as 1971, when Tor Bay, in a letter published in Off Our Backs, condemned the literary magazine Aphra as having assisted the reason of cultural feminism. Socialist feminist Elizabeth Diggs, in 1972, hand-me-down the label “cultural feminism” to apply to all of the radical women’s liberation movement. Remarkably, Manju Kapur brought Cultural Feminism theory without preoccupying thoughts
while writing this novel. She composed this novel where she did not deliberately write the interpretation of Cultural Feminism thought to her characters, but undoubtedly, she brought Cultural feminist thoughts to her characters. On the whole, this paper illustrates the perspective of Cultural Feminism in Difficult Daughters novel.

**Literature Review**

Many writers have exemplified about Cultural Feminism ideas and thoughts. One among them was Margaret Fuller, the nineteenth-century journalist, critic and women’s rights activists. She contributed to Cultural Feminism on the title “Woman in the Nineteenth Century”. She introduced Cultural Feminism in woman in the Nineteenth Century. She emphasises that “the emotional, intuitive side of knowledge and shows an organic world view that is somewhat different from the mechanical aspect of Enlightenment rationalists” (Margaret Fuller, 1845). In her words, she stated that people adopt their cultural and behavioural changes because of the mechanical aspect of Enlightenment. Women need to replace their natures and qualities in the enlightenment world.

Alcoff Linda was a feminist writer who has brought dissimilar considerations in the direction of Cultural Feminism. She made the point that “the feminist cultural reappraisal construes women’s passivity as her peacefulness, her sentimentality as her proclivity to nurture, her subjective as she advanced self-awareness.” (Alcoff Linda 1988). She pinpointed that women in society lead their natures and qualities according to the culture’s state and circumstances. They tend to aware their self-awareness in the modern culture. This self-awareness is a good sign for their efficiency and identity.

Historian Alice Echols was one of the writers who argued that men in her writing sexually oppress women. Women enforce themselves to withstand their sexual respect from men. She proclaimed that “cultural feminists believe in ordination to fight male prurience; women should claim respect by suppressing their sexualities and recommending a conservative female standard of sexuality. She critiques this concept for trying to control women’s sexual expression to hold women responsible for perceived problems with the male gender” (Alice Echols 1975).
Cultural feminism mainly describes about the female nature or female essence. It attempts to revalue and redefine the feminine character. It likewise means to distinguish theories that acclaim distinctive differences between adult females and men. But it reflects the variation of culturally created rather than biologically innate. The man has said that woman can be defined, delineated, captured, understood, explained, and diagnosed. Motherhood and childbearing are another popular subject in feminist cultural theory. To understand the cultural feminism theory, many cultural feminist theorists brought up numerous thoughts and understandings, which are discussed in the sentences accordingly:

- Brooke Williams specified that the depoliticisation of radical feminism as cultural feminism.

- Mary Daly connected about cultural feminism in which female energy or her term Gyn/Ecology to the female life-supporting, life-creating a biological term that is mistreated by male violence as a consequence of male barrenness.

- Adrienne Rich announces that female biology has radical potential that has been strangled by its reduction by human beings. Some cultural feminists anticipated the separation of women-only, women ran centres and spaces to challenge negative gendered constructions. This kind of separatism within cultural feminism criticised, ignoring structural patriarchy instead of blaming men as individuals for women’s oppression. In increase to physical separation, cultural feminists named for departure from male values.

- Alice Echol stated that Cultural Feminism: Feminist Capitalism and the Anti-Pornography Movement contributed to the extensive acceptance of the term to describe contemporary feminists, not their historical ancestors.

- Alcoff entitlements cultural feminism places women in a position overdetermined by patriarchal systems.

- Taylor and Rupp have argued that criticisms of cultural feminism are often an attack on lesbian feminist movement.
Suzanne Staggenbourg’s case study of Bloomington, Indiana led her to conclude that engage in activities labelled as cultural feminist provides little evidence that cultural feminism led to a decay in political activity in the women’s movement.

Adrienne Rich theorises that “on the institution, motherhood constructed to manipulate women, which is dissimilar from real motherhood. Cultural feminists announce the relationship between mother and daughter, and therefore, it has destroyed by patriarchy and has fixed”.

Cultural feminists identify women as the most essential and most downgraded groups. Another arrest is that cultural feminists have not challenged the definition of woman, but merely the description presented by humans. This biological determinism is the subject of multiple criticisms. When cultural feminists claim issues like patriarchy and rape are natural products of male biology and behaviour, the opportunity to critique and challenge could result in these subjects’ structures to wipe away.

Cultural feminism has also criticised for engaging in capitalism. A practice feminist considers contradictory to feminist values and counterproductive to the feminist cause. To boot, it pinpoints the flaws in cultural feminists, which attempts to counter oppression through membership in an oppressive economic system. It also focuses on bootstrap theory, which explains turning feminism into both a trade good and market, which ultimately serves male capitalism.

**Cultural Feminism in Manju Kapur’s ‘Difficult Daughter’**

In the novel “Difficult Daughter”, women characters are described with different natures and qualities. Among many women characters, some women characters’ innate natures and their qualities justify the hypothesis of cultural feminism—those cultural feminism views of justifications are regarded as in the following table:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>s.no</th>
<th>Women Characters</th>
<th>Consequence of Cultural Feminism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Virmati is the main protagonist of this novel, who is a traditional woman.</td>
<td>Virmati loves her parents, family, education and romantic professor. As a modern woman,</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Shakuntala is M.Sc. in Chemistry working at Lahore. She is Virmati’s cousin. She is a brainy independent modern and a sophisticated girl who does not trust in the concept of marriage and counters strongly to this traditional idea.</td>
<td>She thinks that study means developing the idea for the family’s welfare because of a girl’s spirit. She evokes the voice against male chauvinism to claim the rights of economic independence. She has expressed herself that women stand shoulder to shoulder to man and have disclosed all the chains that block their freedom and evolution. She is looking for a position for themselves in the male-dominated club. Society, ethics, values are like servitude to them. Shakuntala appears from the outset as the example of the modern or liberated women. She teaches and takes part in the Political-Gandhian movement. She speaks to Virmati with the following language, but women are nevertheless supposed to marry and do nothing else. She advises her to be like a free bird and says that times are changing and women are moving out of the home, then why not you? This reaction of Shakuntala shows her attitude towards</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Swarnalata is the only female character who grows out of life what she desires, without compromising too much. She is Virmati’s roommate in Lahore.</td>
<td>In one wintertime in Lahore, conferences take place fast and furious in the metropolis. Essential people make speeches and their pictures printed in the papers. Voices charge the atmosphere echo with self-consciousness. On a freezing Saturday in January 1941, the Punjab Women’s Student Conference is being restrained. However, it was a rainy day; Swarna moves out to the group discussion. Site Rallia, Noor Ahmed, Mary Singh and Mohini Datta arrive for the conference. Each one breaks their perspectives concerning the liberty fight. In Punjab Women’s Student Meeting, she polishes as an orator.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Ida is the daughter of Virmati. The relation amid Virmati and Ida is not cordial. Ida never enjoys happy moments with her mother. She gets educated, married and also get</td>
<td>Ida, who grew up stressed to be the model daughter, does not suffer the nerve to reject Virmati. Thither is a lack of love as well as understanding between them. But Ida’s refusal of Virmati is not as a mother, but as a woman.</td>
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divorced, but her mother does not neglect her.

She hates her mother and feels irritated whenever she visits her mother.

Ida turns out to be the typical daughter of a ‘difficult daughter’ Virmati. She should not get an intellect with her mother in her lifetime, and after Virmati’s death, this realisation engulfs her with guilt.

Formats difficult daughter Ida is the authentic look of a modern woman. She had ruined her relationship with her hubby.

Prabhakar for he had forced her to travel for an abortion. She possesses the vital point which Virmati absences. Ida by severance the marriage bonds free herself from conventional social structures which hold women.

Virmati, the developing new women who are conscious, educated, wants to carve a life for herself. Virmati defies societal expectation to maintain her individuality and desires to reach self-fulfilment. She is a loser. She fails to generate a space for herself, for which she had been stirring all alone. Maybe this inability of Virmati to strike independent roots and grow makes the Ida remark “that one affair I had wanted was not to be like my mother”.

Ganga, Harish’s first wife, is viewed as the victim of the traditional order. Her mother was never transported to school during her childhood, but she had schooled her in good housekeeping. When Ganga was twelve years old, she was illiterate. Harish tries to teach her, but she never attempted to amend herself.

Due to Ganga’s illiteracy, he brought home her rival Virmati. She kept on with domestic
went into her husband’s home and attempted to establish herself every bit a good homemaker. Still, she could never become an intellectual companion to her hubby. Her ill-feeling for Virmati is routine and her part as a wife, a mother and a daughter in law. Her ill-feeling for Virmati is quite natural because no wife would like interference in her marital life. She wished for Virmati’s death. After Virmati’s pregnancy, she wanted for the birth of a baby girl. Kapur records Ganga’s outlook in the next words: Ganga’s leaving home, in the pressures and tensions of the moment, was meant to be a temporary thing. However, she could never revert. She cried, prayed, and stormed indirectly through her female parent-in-law, but circumstances did not prefer her. Her husband continued to be Ganga’s public statement of selfhood. Her Bindi and her bangles, her toe rings and her Mangalsutra, all managed to indicate that he was still her god.

Cultural Feminism: Evaluation on the Women Characters

The study on women characters in the novel “Difficult Daughter” is done to evaluate cultural feminism. From this evaluation, the reader can perceive that the ideology of cultural feminism is deliberated through women characters by Manju Kapur. Consequently, the impact of cultural feminism measures through the bar chart. The evaluation chart explains that 100% percentage is given to select women characters in the novel. It also results in which woman character is influenced out of 100% by cultural feminism. Fixing on percentage to women characters is wholly based on their natures and qualities in which it is justified the ideology of cultural feminism.
The bar chart indicates that five women characters have taken for the evaluation. Among five characters, Shakuntala is Virmati’s cousin who has scored 90% out of 100%. Illustration of her natures and qualities in the novel firmly realises the understanding of cultural feminism. She is a brainy independent modern and a sophisticated girl who does not believe in marriage. She counters strongly against to traditional idea.

The character Ida is the daughter of Virmati. According to evaluation, she has scored 85% out of 100%. Depiction of her natures and qualities in the story is fulfilled the understanding of cultural feminism. For instance: Ida is the authentic look of a modern woman. Ida by severing the marriage bonds free herself from conventional social structures which hold women.

Swarnalata is Virmati’s roommate in Lahore in this novel who has scored 80% out of 100%. Picturisation of her natures and qualities in the story considerably justifies the understanding of cultural feminism. For instance: She is the only female character who grows out of life what she desires, without compromising too much. Swarnalata talks on the women qualities of generous appreciates her’s quality.
In this novel, the protagonist Virmati plays vital role who is a traditional woman. According to evaluation, she has scored 60% out of 100%. Explanation of her natures and qualities in the story is accomplished minimum understanding of cultural feminism. For instance: She loves her parents, family, education and romantic professor. As a modern woman, she thinks that study means developing the idea for the family’s welfare because of a girl’s spirit. She has not succeeded in her life even though she has succeeded in her education.

Finally, Ganga, Harish’s first wife, resembles the traditional society victim who has scored 30% out of 100%. Classification of her natures and qualities in the novel results in the minimum understanding of cultural feminism. For instance: Ganga’s leaving home, in the pressures and tensions of the moment, was meant to be a temporary thing. However, she could never revert. She cried, prayed, and stormed indirectly through her female parent-in-law, but circumstances did not prefer her.

The result shows that expect Ganga character, other characters in the novel, equate support for the hypothesis of cultural feminism. Ganga herself feels to have the equality of the humankind, but system and culture do not allow her to continue.

Conclusion

In Difficult Daughters, Kapur shows the concept of the feminist movement through her heroines. From her thoughts of the feminist movement, this theme extends to discussing about the Cultural Feminism. A study analyses of women characteristics in the novel. Through analysing women characteristics, nature and qualities in this novel, the author summarises that Kapur’s women characteristics reacted over by Cultural Feminism theory. Overall, this novel is shown clearly through the tabular array and the evaluation chart in which the doctrine of Cultural Feminism identifies in the novel “Difficult Daughters”.

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