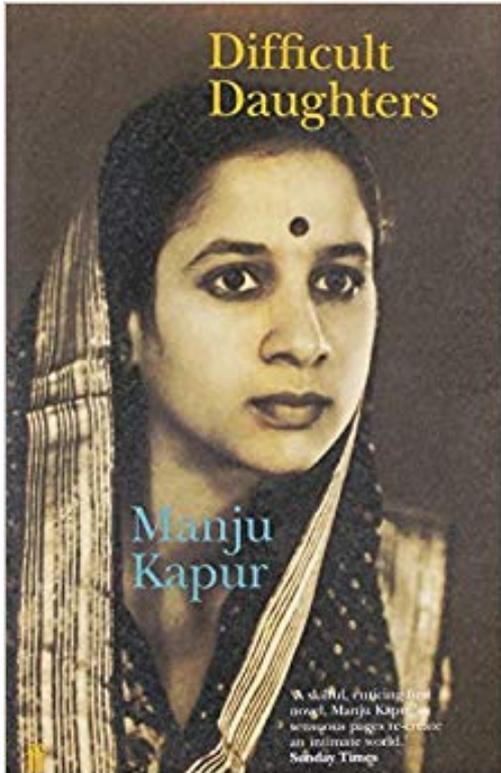


Difficult Daughters by Manju Kapur



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Set around the time of Partition and written with absorbing intelligence and sympathy, *Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. Virmati, a young woman born in Amritsar into an austere and high-minded household, falls in love with a neighbour, the Professor--a man who is already married. That the Professor eventually marries Virmati, installs her in his home (alongside his furious first wife) and helps her towards further studies in Lahore, is small consolation to her scandalised family. Or even to Virmati, who finds that the battle for her own independence has created irrevocable lines of partition and pain around her. *Difficult Daughters* was short-listed for the Crossword Book Award in India.



Reviews of the *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur

Arith

The book was quite well written. A look into the life of women in India was very interesting.

Uranneavo

Up to recently I only had read " The Immigrant " which I found quite exceptional, and all of a

sudden, I realised I love Manju Kapur's writing, so I ordered the 4 other novels she had written.(at Amazon of course) I'm now an unconditional fan of Manju's.

Globus

Just so so. Not very interesting, the story line did not flow well and I found myself making me finish the book.

Buridora

Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, is the powerful story of a young woman's search for independence in a time when the path of a woman's future was anyone's decision but her own. Virmati is a young Punjabi girl, born to a high-minded family in Amritsar; the oldest daughter of an ever-growing brood, Virmati spends much of her youth taking care of her siblings. With encouragement from her father and grandfather, Virmati's dream of pursuing an education becomes her greatest passion, much to the dismay of her mother. As far as Kasturi is concerned, a good marriage is a woman's destiny and Virmati is merely flirting with disaster. One of the first of the novel's distinctive qualities is the author's way of exposing elements of the plot out of order: we are first met with Virmati's daughter as she reflects on her mother's death, and we reconnect with her throughout the book as she researches in order to learn more about the life Virmati was loathe to share with her. Additionally, the narrative takes us back as early as the beginning of the 20th century where we briefly witness Virmati's mother, Kasturi, as a young girl. It's through these quiet, almost indecipherable shifts of focus that Kapur delivers a clever examination of how three generations of women rebelled against each other in much the same way. Her writing is beautiful and assured throughout, dispersing at will to connect the reader with all manner of information - intense descriptions of the history, nuances of the Indian lifestyle, introductions to innumerable interesting characters - while maintaining a steady focus on the heart of the story, the life of young, determined Virmati.

The narrative follows Virmati's life through World War II and Partition as her studies are interrupted by an illicit love affair with a neighboring professor - a married man - whose passion for her begins to take the shape of an obsession. Virmati finds herself torn between her love for the professor, her obligations to her family, and her unyielding desire for independence; her life is soon in upheaval as she's thrust about by the opinions and desires of those around her. With a striking command of language and a natural eloquence, Kapur weaves a story at once heartbreaking and impressively thought-provoking. Her female characters are all fiercely rendered, each fascinating in her own way - from the professor's disgraced first wife to Virmati's activist roommate - and each fascinating despite her flaws. No one is without shortcomings in the story, including Virmati, whose devotion to the professor readers may not be able to fully grasp. Virmati's father is perhaps the most progressively drawn of the male characters here, while the professor seems at first a starry-eyed intellectual evoking compassion before developing into a decidedly selfish, maudlin source of frustration. This, though, feels like quite the unconventional portrait of a romance that Kapur intended to draw, and as the novel progresses it makes Virmati's story all the more poignant.

First published in 1998, *Difficult Daughters* went on to win the 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in the Europe and South Asia region. Reading it, one is quick to forget that the novel was, in fact, Kapur's debut: her style of writing is risky but beautiful, her confidence steady, and her characters richly developed. Her inclusion of small, consistent details that color the daily life of her Indian women works to bring the authenticity of her India to larger life, even for a foreign reader who may not be familiar with the native terms Kapur is quick to utilize. This is one of the many charms of *Difficult Daughters*, the way it confidently offers its roots and the road to its present. In her examination of the search for female identity, Kapur puts forth an illuminating novel full of power, honesty, and grace.

(Review © Casee Marie, originally published on June 19, 2014 at LiteraryInklings.com. A copy of the

book was provided for the purpose of review.)

Kupidon

Difficult Daughters is a novel that sweeps you into a world where a young modern girl struggles against traditional values to forge a fulfilling life for herself. With strong dreams to be educated, Virmati falls in love with her new neighbor, an already married professor. Despite the struggles of her family to keep them apart, Virmati sacrifices everything so she can be with her beloved in their scandalous relationship. Her family turns against her and she finds herself alone, trying to hold her head high against societal normals.

The story takes place in 1947 during a tumultuous period in India's history. Poignantly written and absorbing, I could not help but become absorbed and enchanted with a heroine who will risk all to be true to herself and forge a better path for women in her country. The plight of women trapped in stringent cultural norms is a strong theme throughout this lush novel. It is no surprise that this novel has won the prestigious Commonwealth Writer's Prize. My only concern was there was an overabundance of Indian words describing clothing and various items for which no glossary was provided, and which pulled me out of the story. This was especially evident in the earlier chapters and faded gradually as the story progressed. Despite this, readers should persevere, for the story is truly engaging and worth reading. Definitely recommended.

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