

ISSN: 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

**Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



**Vol. 2 Issue 4 August 2016**

Impact Factor 1.854

*Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh*

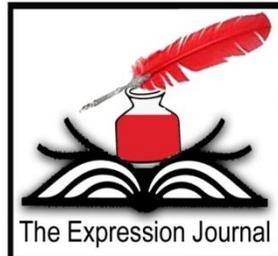
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(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 1.854)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

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## **THE CHANGING FACETS OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AS PICTURIZED IN MANJU KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS* AND ANITA DESAI'S *FASTING, FEASTING: AN APPRAISAL***

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### **Abstract**

Family is the centre of all kinds of actions for any person and the relationships play an important role in the family but with the age of modernization, people have changed their mentalities and they have become selfish and introvert which has lead to family disputes. Indian women novelists have dealt with gender discrimination, family discords and disharmony in the family relationships in their novels because they belong to that gender which is always put at the periphery and men hold the string of family. Manju Kapur has depicted very pitiable plights of women in her novels and the present trend of their education and job has made Indian women much liberated. Indian Women writers involved themselves in protest to retain their identity rights as writers and they attempt to expound the cause of women's sufferings, changing facets of family relationships and also tried to affirm the position of women and family with respect to the Indian content. A careful study of Anita Desai's and Manju Kapur's novels reveals that they had focused much upon the theme of disharmony and discord confirmed to the family. With the consummate craftsmanship they carved a niche for themselves in the realm of Indian English Literature.

### **Key-Words**

Family Relationships, Changes,  
Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, Anita Desai, *Fasting Feasting*.

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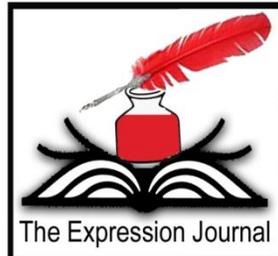
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Indo-Anglican literature is nothing but the literature created and written by Indians using the English language. No doubt, the English language has remained the most palpable evidence of India's colonial history ever since her independence. Truly speaking, English, being an international and universal language, is said to have inspired Indo-Anglican writers to communicate their cultural heritage, spiritual wisdom, Indian philosophy and social and political realities at all levels, both national and international. Indian writing in English has today reached the height of maturity by attaining worldwide recognition and fame especially through the novel. The writers of Indian fiction have put India on the literary map of the world opening for foreigners a window through which they can see India, as Indians themselves would like to see her.

In the thirties, the three major Indian novelists in English of the 'Trinity' as they are called, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayanan and Raja Rao wrote on such significant themes as emancipation from foreign rule, east-west relationship, communal issues, the plight of the untouchables and the landless poor and the economically exploited people. Among the post-modern writers, the most notable are Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor and Arvind Adiga. Indian woman novelists also have established a sort of great tradition of novel writing not only showing extraordinary caliber but also leaving immutable imprint in the realm of Indian fiction in English. Even though the history of Indian women novelists in English began with Toru Dutt who wrote at the early age of twenty-one, only after the Second World War, Indian women novelists were on

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a new track with a new vision. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai are considered the chief exponents of the Indian novel in English. Some other names of new novelists included in the list of woman novelists are Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Maheswata Devi, Sudha Murthy, Kiran Desai, Manjula Padmanabhan and Manju Kapur. These women have no doubt, created flesh and blood protagonists who strike in us in their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their man, their children, their families, their mental make-up and themselves, of these women writers, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur are taken up for a brief analysis with a focus on family relationship.

Being an academician turned writer, Manju Kapur established her name as a novelist with her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) winning the Best book Commonwealth writer's prize in 1999. She has to her credit publication of such other literary contributions as *A Married Woman* (2002) and *Home* (2006). Generally, Manju Kapur focuses on women's servitude, gender discrimination, east-west encounter, alienation, identity crisis, women's empowerment and the right to liberty. Here the focus is on familial ties. The story of *Difficult Daughters* revolves around Virmati, a young woman born in Amritsar into an austere joint family, high-minded house hold. She falls in love with a neighbour, Harish, a Professor and men who is already married. Virmati is hooked on to this Professor who comes to stay in her aunt's house as a tenant. The married professor is not happy with his illiterate wife. He feels attracted towards Virmati and gradually comes closer to her, their affair leads to Virmati's refusal to marry Inderjit, an engineer arranged by her family and then to abortion, while she is still in the college. The whole family turns against her and she goes through harming experiences. Finally the professor takes her as his second wife. The novel almost comes to an end, except the epilogue. In the epilogue, the reader is told about Ida, daughter of Virmati, who like her mother has made a disastrous marriage and is divorced. She is left husbandless and childless. Both Harish and Virmati pass away. The novel begins with the death of Virmati and her cremation and the story is unfolded to us by Ida, her daughter who learns all about her mother's past from her aunt. The importance of familial relationships and one's adherence to one's own tradition, culture and ideals are exemplified in this novel *Difficult Daughters*.

Being in the forefront of the second generation of Indian novelists in English, Anita Desai, a writer of nine novels, a good number of short stories and two books for children, published her debut novel in 1963 with her novel *Cry, the Peacock*. In the words of Seema Jeena, "Among the Indian writers in English, Anita Desai is perhaps the most self-conscious artist forging a unique world out of things of day-to-day existence of an Indian female" (Jeena 17). Anita Desai achieved great success as a novelist, that too, through her visionary perspectives, by out lining the higher values of human love, humanism, realism, mysticism and a unified code for universal vision of brotherhood and family relationship.

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The chosen novel for analysis is *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) which unfolds the story of a small family in which Mama and Papa are the central characters with three children, Uma, Aruna and Arun. The two daughters are shown as contrasting characters. Uma who is exploited at the home front is also cheated in her marriage and ultimately brought back home by her parents. Aruna on the other hand gets a good husband and moves to Bombay to lead a prosperous and happy life. The only son Arun, who is sent to USA for higher studies, comes back disappointed. Papa, a strict and stern character expects his family to run according to his tunes. Since Mama and Papa remain as one soul in decision – making, they are referred to as “Mamapapa”. Their attitude at times confuses even their own siblings. The plight of Uma is that she is isolated by her own family members. She is permanently appointed as a maid to look after the needs of the family and especially to take care of her fragile brother. Parental affection and guidance are expected enormously by children and when it is not given to them, the individuals like Uma have to fast, eventually failing to recover from the dark and bleak house hood which allows her to escape. According to Asha Kumar, “The hallmark of Anita Desai’s fiction to focus on the inner experience of life” (Kumar 71). This novel *Fasting, Feasting* depicts Anita Desai’s sensitive portrayal of the inner life of her female characters. It also explores the tensions between family members and the alienation of the middle class woman. In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur examines the working of the joint family system and consequences of its deterioration, while in *Fasting, Feasting*, Anita Desai explores the dynamics of the nuclear family structure.

No doubt, the ‘family’ is a fundamental unit in a social structure. Society is a web of relationships between individual members and also between individuals and social organizations and social institutions and family is one “which clarifies and facilitates easy acceptance of social norms, value, beliefs and helps members who have expected behaviour, attitudes, duties based on them” (Aruna 9). In brief, it may be said that the family is the unit, which binds one human being to another and forms a blood tie between two members within a family and the family structure is usually built on the relationship between children and parents, and between husband and wife. The working of the joint family system and its gradual disintegration due to economic realities is pictured by Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters* where Lala Diwan represents the lead of a joint family structure. However, he is not the typical patriarchal head. Being a senior person of the family and also senior members of the Arya Samraj Community Lala Diwan works equally for the welfare of his family and his community, he governs his family by the same strict principles of the Arya Samraj. He leads a life of austerity and charity. No festival is observed, not even Holi and Diwali in his household. In fact, “No fancy clothes were ever worn. Their lives were plain, simple and high-minded” (DD 21). However, as the patriarchal head, Lala Diwan does not dominate or compel the members to follow his tracks. At the same time, the family too respects and Leeds the words of Lala Diwan, looking after the

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needs of all his family members, he also takes up the responsibility of looking after his widowed sister. It is he who educates her and introduces her to the concepts of Dayanand Saraswathi. He also insists that his sister should stay with him forever, so that he receives dignity and respect from others.

Lala Diwan's magnanimous spirit is clearly seen when he extends his six-acre orchard with various fruits and vegetables for his grandchildren to relish and cherish in future. He even builds four shops selling cloth, vegetables, day goods and freshly made sweets and savouries, for serving the basic needs of his family. At the end of the garden, he builds an enclosure so that the daughters of the house can swim in privacy. Being the head of a joint family is a mighty task because one has to deal with for each member of the family who has a distinct personality, which occasionally clashes with the others. There are possibilities of conflicts, affectionate exchanges, emotional dependence rivalry, competitions and sentimental attachments, maturity of the members is a significant criteria which influences interactions, communication, handling of conflict and decision making. A matured head, Lala Diwan handles the family issues and impersonal issues in such a way that every individual's needs are taken care of and the whole family is satisfied. This is called as the functional solidarity of the joint family" (Chakraborty 17). When Kasturi steps into Lala Diwan's house as his daughter-in-law, the other women in Lala Diwan's household remark that she is fortunate enough to live in his family Lala Diwan expects his daughter-in-law also to carry out the tradition of his Samaj and advises her to understand her duties to the community. He is of the opinion that the daughter-in-law should be more responsible than the others in leading the entire family Kasturi, like her sister-in-law Lajwanti, functions well comprehending her role in the family. In Lala Diwan's household, the daughters-in-law act according to the wishes of the elders at home. Kasturi who comes from a joint family finds this easy because she knows that it is her responsibility to maintain the spirit of oneness amidst all members of the family.

When the family faces difficulties, it is Lala Diwan who takes the necessary steps and sacrifices the desire of his family members, be they children or adults. When he receives repeated complaints from Lajwanti, his elder daughter-in-law, about her continuous errands at home, he tells her to accompany Kasturi the next day for a brisk walk, "from tomorrow the tonge will drive both of you every morning to the company Bagh. One hour of brisk walking in the fresh air will benefit you greatly" (Kapur 23).

Lala Diwan's relationships with his sons are determinedly strong and very affectionate. He always hopes to live in joint family with his sons and their families. He cannot bear to hear any word spoken about separation or division in the family. He expects all of them to live in harmony. The grandchildren of Lala Diwan too understand the family unity and act according to his wishes.

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Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* deals with the story of the two families in two different worlds – a nuclear family in India that is extremely orthodox and patriarchal in its functioning and a nuclear family in America which surprisingly is patriarchal in its mechanism, in spite of living in a land of freedom, it is through Uma, the protagonist of the Indian family that Anita Desai exposes what actually happens in many nuclear families in India. She shows how Uma, the protagonist bears the brunt of many insults and abuses flung by her own parents. The very opening passage suggests the ensuing events and discriminating attitude of many parents to their daughters. Sitting on the sofa and dangling their legs back and forth, Uma's parents appear selfish and luxuriant characters doing nothing but ordering things to Uma. Though it is a nuclear family, Uma enjoys no freedom. She is brought up in highly conservative and traditional ways. The parents of Uma are busy enjoying themselves in the coffee houses and clubs. Their attitude worries their children and they rebel against the step motherly conduct of the family. Mama does not see any meaning in education and therefore ignores the little interest Uma shows in completing her high school education. However, they yield to all the whims and fancies of their second daughter Aruna, who is very dominating. However, both parents are more interested in nurturing their son Arun than their daughters. In this matter, they are like the typical Indian parents of the joint family system who believe in the importance of the male-child in a family. Recalling her own childhood days Mama says, "In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets and nuts, it was given to the boys in the family" (Desai 6).

When Mama becomes pregnant for the third time, Papa is highly exhilarated. His joy knows no bounds when he knows that he is blessed with a son at last. Describing the excitement of Papa, the author says, "Arriving home, however, he sprang out of the car, raced into the house and shouted to whoever was there to hear" (Desai 17). Bringing up a girl child leads to a lot of frustration, therefore, Mama prevents Uma from going to school and instead mercilessly uses her to take care of Arun. Mama justifies her act thus: "You know, you failed your exams again. You're not being moved up what's the use of back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother" (Desai 21).

All morning Mama Papa find things for Uma to do. Uma's work is charted out. Her only relaxation is admiring and arranging her bangles and handkerchiefs in the cupboard. Sometimes she writes letters to Mrs. Joshi who is her next-door neighbour. Neighbours regard Uma's behavior as Kiddish and feel sorry for her. They wonder thus, "That Uma, shaking her head a little, still like a child of six. Won't she ever grow up, poor thing" (Desai 74).

Her sister Aruna too pays no attention to her and Uma feels that she is left alone in solitary confinement. The poems she used to read during her leisure hours, is a reflection of her own life. "You are too bright to be hidden from sight. Come fly with me darling-fly"

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(Desai 135). When there is no one to share her emotions as well as her finding, Uma struggles to face all the hindrances that obstruct her ways. Her life seems to be a 'strong spectacle' in which nothing is appreciated Aruna's unsympathetic behavior shocks Uma on most occasions. She is pained by it. Papa with his strict disciplinary life, struggles to find a life partner for her, but in vain. Uma is constantly chastised by members by her own family. Seeing Uma's hysterical behavior at the time of Aruna's engagement, the latter shouts at Uma .Panic-stricken Uma screams "Lock me up mama, lock me up" (Desai 102). These lines show that Uma is alienated and estranged in her own home, it also reveals Mama Papa's lack of concern and their irresponsible behavior towards their unfortunate daughter. Unable to identify herself as a daughter to Mama Papa and as an elder sister to Aruna and Arun, Uma struggles in this quest for identity. Uma feels imprisoned all her life. Her thoughts often fly to Anamika, her beautiful and brilliant cousin, the daughter of Papa's brother, Bakul. Anamika's parents are extremely orthodox and they push her into a marriage which engulfs her life and happiness eventually. In the patriarchal society, it is common for men to execute their desires according to their whims. Uma's dream of a happy and successful marriage is thus shattered. It affects her psyche to such an extent that she is never able to recover her old self. She becomes still more alienated as she becomes aware of her disreputable status in her own family and in society. Uma is depicted here in this novel *Fasting, Feasting*, mainly with respect to the access to education and the free development of personality. She is constantly aware of her own hungers which are never appeased and her suffering increases because she is sensitive to other characters who are 'feasting' on education, power, freedom, joy, fulfillment. No one pays lead in her family to her feelings and she remains a non-entity who is taken for granted. Uma is the pathetic victim of patriarchal domination, parental especially maternal apathy, sibling rivalry, gender discrimination, domestic and social oppression. In the words of Meena Kelkar, "Freedom to know, act and enjoy is basic postulate of the socio-cultural world" (25) but Uma is never permitted to peep into this world and forced to live a life of her own.

To conclude, Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* make an interesting study of the changing facets of family relationships in Indian societies.

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