



NEGOTIATING GENDER ISSUES IN AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

*Gender roles in literature reflect the societal expectations and constraints placed on individuals based on their gender, influencing character behavior and plot development. This comparative paper examines the treatment of gender issues in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, highlighting both thematic similarities and differences across distinct socio-cultural landscapes. Austen is a British writer, while Kapur is an Indian-Anglo writer. Austen articulates themes of marriage, inheritance, and women's restricted agency within a patriarchal society. On the other hand, Kapur addresses challenges like communalism and women's sexuality, portrayed through characters such as Virmati who grapple with the intersection of tradition and modernity while seeking love and freedom. Both Austen and Kapur critique male-dominated structures, though Austen remains within the realm of domesticity, whereas Kapur adopts a socio-political perspective on systemic oppression and evolving gender norms. The mother-daughter relationships reflect generational struggles, with Austen's maternal figures advocating suitable marriages and Kapur's characters challenged by societal pressures. Findings of the paper display that both authors, Austen and Kapur assert the ongoing quest for identity and autonomy within patriarchal confines. Austen employs irony to subtly critique patriarchy, while Kapur's direct approach emphasizes the resilience of Indian women. Both author-s emphasize education's transformative potential, as a path to liberation.*

Keywords: Gender issues, Feminism, Marriage, Intergenerational Conflict. Male-dominated structures

Introduction

In a patriarchal society, men hold dominance across various spheres of life, resulting in the marginalization, subjugation, and exploitation of women, as well as their otherization. —The patriarchal system marginalizes and silences women, asserting male dominance and legitimizing itself by manipulating religious practices to align with its own norms (Jabeen and Afzal, 2024, p. 1923). Women are often considered as weak creatures and very vulnerable to being targets of various forms of violence. —Violence against women is currently a global problem that affects the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of women throughout the world (Setiawan, 2024, p. 100).

Patriarchy is a societal system, laying stress on the supremacy of males over females. It wreaks havoc on the lives of women, rendering them silenced, voiceless, and muted. It results in their suppression, oppression, and cruelty, as well as their exploitation socially, politically, emotionally, sexually, and physically. It hinders women's emancipation across various dimensions—socially, politically, and educationally. The society we live in is a patriarchal, where women face subjugation, oppression, and suppression of even their basic rights. They are treated as commodities or mere reproductive machines. Women are regarded as second-class citizens, objects, and puppets to be controlled, and are consistently marginalized as subalterns. Numerous restrictions and bans are imposed on them. (Jabeen and Afzal, 2024, p. 1923)

This paper examines, through comparative mode, portrayal of marriage, patriarchy, and women's societal roles in Austen and Kapur's selected novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult*

Daughters respectively. Jane Austen, a celebrated British novelist, is renowned for her sharp wit and keen social observations, dealing with themes of love, class, and societal expectations. She authored *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*. *Pride and Prejudice* is the most famous novel by Austen, dealing with gender issues. Austen's protagonists assert their self-respect within societal norms. Manju Kapur, the Indian-Anglo novelist, gained widespread recognition with her debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, depicting the complexities of a young woman's life as she navigates conflicting loyalties to her family, her education, and the allure of forbidden love. Both authors, Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) used marriage as a central theme and highlight the struggles of women within patriarchal systems. They depict gender inequality and women's dependence on men for security while advocating education as a means of empowerment. However, significant differences emerge in their approaches. Austen's (1813) characters, such as Elizabeth Bennet live in 18th-19th century England, where women have some freedom in choosing partners. In contrast, Kapur's (1998) protagonists, like Virmati, grapple with stricter societal controls and deeply entrenched traditions in contemporary India. Her characters actively resist traditional expectations, enduring significant emotional and psychological challenges. Austen (1813) subtly critiques patriarchy by portraying women's reliance on men for social status and economic security through marriage and inheritance laws. Kapur (1998), however, illustrates the harsher realities of patriarchy, including the constraints on women's lives before and after marriage. Social activities also mark a contrast: Austen's (1813) upper-middle-class heroines participate in gatherings and balls, enjoying limited freedoms, whereas Kapur's (1998) protagonists face stricter societal restrictions. Despite their differences, both authors, Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998), advocate for women's education as essential for emancipation. Austen's (1813) heroines seek respect within the existing social framework, while Kapur's (1998) characters struggle to reconcile tradition with modern aspirations, often symbolizing the —New Woman! who challenges patriarchal norms. Together, their works provide a profound exploration of the challenges and resilience of women in their respective societies—England and India.

Research Questions

- How do Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* depict the negotiation of gender roles and societal expectations by their female protagonists?
- In what ways do the cultural and historical contexts of 19th-century England and contemporary India shape the challenges and strategies of women in navigating patriarchal structures in the two novels?

Research Objectives

- To analyze the portrayal of gender roles and the negotiation of societal expectations by female protagonists in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*.
- To explore the influence of cultural and historical contexts on the depiction of women's struggles and resistance against patriarchal norms in the two texts.

Literature Review

Gender issues encompass a range of inequalities and societal challenges that affect individuals based on their gender. These issues manifest in various forms, including violence against women, discrimination in professional and educational settings, and the marginalization of women's roles in historical narratives. Women are often perceived as vulnerable, making those targets for various forms of violence. Educational outreach on gender equality can enhance awareness and prevention strategies among youth, although full implementation remains a

challenge (Setiawan, 2024). Gender issues involve deep-rooted stereotypes that limit women's potential in work, education, and social life. Societal norms and religious interpretations can further exacerbate discrimination, hindering women's rights and freedoms.

Gender issues are complex issues involving fundamental aspects of human life. When we discuss gender issues, we highlight the inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes that still exist in many societies. Women often face limitations that hinder their full potential in areas such as work, education and social life. (Sulistiani, 2024, p.1)

Pride and Prejudice is —a tool for representation of gender identity, social standing and power dynamics within the characters serves as a critique of the patriarchal structures that dictate women's roles (p. 80). The speech patterns of male and female characters reveal significant differences in how they navigate social expectations and assert power. Women often employ politeness strategies and indirect speech to conform to societal norms, while men use more assertive language to establish dominance (Prashanthi & Behera, 2024). Ritika (2023) claims that, in *Pride and Prejudice*, marriage is portrayed as a crucial determinant of a woman's social standing and happiness, with economic considerations often overshadowing love and personal choice. Women are depicted as needing to mold their identities to attract suitable husbands, reinforcing their dependence on male counterparts. The novel illustrates that unmarried women are viewed as burdens, further emphasizing the societal pressure to marry well for financial security. —The patriarchal civilization has always dominated the female counterparts through their authoritative voices... In the novel, there is not a single self-made woman. All women are tied to societal constraints (Ritika, 2023, p. 122). Lee (2024) asserts that despite the fact that socioeconomic factors are significant, Austen suggests that empathy and mutual understanding are essential for successful marriages. This perspective challenges the notion that financial stability is the sole determinant of a woman's future, advocating for emotional connections as equally important. —*Pride and Prejudice* makes clear that empathy should be a driving force for marriage, as it is the force that can most effectively overcome adversity in any relationship (Lee, 2024, p. 6).

Kapur's (1998) *Difficult Daughters* explores gender issues and highlights the struggles of women as they navigate traditional expectations and seek personal autonomy. Virmati's life reflects the societal pressures faced by women in mid-20th century India, where marriage and obedience are paramount (Kumar, 2024). The protagonist, Virmati, embodies the conflict between societal norms and individual desires, illustrating the broader theme of women's quest for identity amidst oppressive structures. The novel, *Difficult Daughters* illustrates the duality of women's experiences, where they confront societal constraints while striving for personal fulfillment. It —uncovers the dualities faced by the characters that are simultaneously constrained by ingrained gender norms and driven by their desire, for personal fulfillment (Pandey & Kaur, 2023, p. 44). Kapur's (1998) female characters challenge traditional norms, advocating for education and self-sufficiency as pathways to empowerment. —Kapur invites us to reflect on the intricate interplay of societal constructs and feminine agency (Sanap, 2024, p. 178). Virmati's relationship with Professor Harish Chandra exemplifies the emotional turmoil women endure when pursuing love against societal expectations (Mohan & Kasyap, 2024). *Difficult Daughters* critiques the patriarchal system that confines women to submissive roles, emphasizing their lack of agency (Vijayashanthi et al., 2023).

While both Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* have received substantial scholarly attention, particularly in terms of their exploration of gender roles, there remains a notable gap in comparative studies that specifically examine how these

texts engage with gender issues within their respective cultural contexts. Austen's novel, set in early 19th-century England, and Kapur's work, set in post-colonial India, offer contrasting perspectives on the societal expectations placed on women. However, existing research largely focuses on these texts separately, often analyzing them through the lens of their cultural and historical settings without directly comparing the strategies employed by both authors to critique patriarchal structures. A comparative analysis would contribute to understanding the broader implications of gender negotiation in different historical and cultural settings, revealing how these novels reflect and challenge the patriarchal norms of their time. This gap in literature provides an opportunity for a comprehensive study that connects these works through their treatment of gender, agency, and resistance within distinct social frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of gender, refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women and the unequal power relationships that result. Gender is considered as a social construct that is not determined and fixed by biology. Its terms of construct can change with time, among cultural groupings, age, race within economic and political structures, within and among sexes, and changes with circumstances including leadership. Ottesen et al. (2010) define gender relations as the ways in which a culture or society define rights, responsibilities and the identities of men and women in relation to one another. Harel-Shalev et al. (2019) add that gender relations is a resource drawn daily, within the household and community to reinforce or redefine the rules, norms and practices which govern social institutions. However, throughout history, women had been excluded from many institutional spheres and their participation circumscribed, making a patriarchal society. They often have less bargaining power to affect change on how institutions operate (Baden, 2000). As a result, the influence of gender dynamics (relationships and interactions between and among girls, boys, women and men) may not be differentiated between men and women in sports leadership, authority, force and control levels depending on one's bargaining power.

Feminism began with the concern for the status of women in the family and the right for women to vote. Modern feminist theory (1960's-1970) focused on reproductive rights, economic freedom. Diverse forms of feminism propose different ways of fighting for social injustice including liberal feminism, which champions personal autonomy and individual rights. It advocates for equal opportunity, sharing power and transforming institutions (Hartzell, 2003). Marxist feminist, on the other hand, views power in terms of capitalism and focuses on complete dismantling of oppressive structures. While radical feminism views patriarchy as contaminating the social structure and advocates for complete dismantling and rebuilding of all structures so as to establish some form of gender equality. Geisinger (2011) was largely responsible for the development of the critical feminist perspective, though she often received criticism for not paying enough attention to the intersections of women's identities (Coleman, 2015). Qasim et al., (2024) pin points

Feminism critiques the male-dominated structures that shape women's experiences, actively opposing their systematic exclusion from political, economic, educational, and social opportunities. It also promotes the achievement of equal rights for women in all spheres of life. As a social movement, feminism seeks to empower women by advocating for equal rights and opportunities alongside men. (pp. 175-176)

Beauvoir highlighted key issues in modern feminism by asserting that 'man' is considered the standard definition of humanity, not 'woman' (Guerin et al., 1999). Woman is

seen as the negative counterpart or ‘Other’ to man, who is regarded as the dominant ‘subject’ and assumed to represent all of humanity. In language, the term ‘he’ is often used inclusively to refer to both men and women. However, Beauvoir (1949) critiques this phallogocentric (combining both phallogocentric and logocentric) use of language as established by traditional grammar. She is opposed to idea of inequality between man and woman and thinks that women will arrive at —complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis (p.686). The patriarchal system confines women to finding fulfillment solely through subservience and prevents them from recognizing themselves as autonomous subjects. Consequently, women are assigned a secondary status and they face marginalization in all aspects of their lives. According to Beauvoir (1949), women have not yet fully asserted their own agency or made substantial, independent progress. Instead, their advancements have been symbolic, as they have only gained rights or privileges that men have allowed or granted to them, rather than actively claiming these rights for themselves. —They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received (Beauvoir, 2008, p. 213). Beauvoir (2008) argues that women are not inherently —feminine but are molded by various societal influences and external factors. She contends that if a woman lacks the opportunity for independent work or creative fulfillment, she is left to endure a life of dissatisfaction, defined by housework, childbearing, and subservience in sexual roles. This reflects the idea that societal expectations restrict women’s potential, limiting their freedom and opportunities for personal growth and self-expression.

In the context of Beauvoir’s feminist theory, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters* illustrate the complex negotiations women face within patriarchal frameworks that limit their agency and reinforce gendered expectations. Both novels expose how women’s roles are shaped by societal norms, with their progress often being symbolic rather than substantive. Beauvoir’s analysis of gender as a social construct provides a critical lens through which to examine the protagonists’ efforts toward autonomy and self-realization in cultures that restrict their freedom and potential.

Research Methodology

The research employs a comparative literary analysis to examine the negotiation of gender issues in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*. Drawing on feminist literary theory with special focus on feminist stance of Beauvoir, it explores the portrayal of women’s agency, societal constraints, and resistance within patriarchal frameworks. Primary texts are analyzed alongside relevant secondary sources to contextualize the gender dynamics in both historical and cultural settings.

Textual Analysis

Jane Austen is a celebrated British novelist famous for her sharp wit and keen social observations explore themes of love, class, and societal expectations. She penned down *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*. *Pride and Prejudice* is Austen’s most famous novel, dealing with gender issues. Austen’s protagonists assert their self-respect within societal norms. Manju Kapur is a renowned Indian-Anglo novelist. She has gained widespread recognition with her debut novel, *Difficult Daughters* which depicts the complexities of a young woman’s life as she navigates conflicting loyalties to her family, her education, and the allure of forbidden love. Austen is a British writer and Kapur is an Indian-Anglo writer. Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* highlight both thematic similarities and differences across distinct socio-cultural landscapes. Austen’s (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* and Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* highlight significant differences and overlaps in their thematic scope

and treatment of gender issues. Textual Analysis of the selected novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters* is given below in form of subheadings:

a). Negotiating Gender Issues in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Austen (1813) operates within a confined social framework, focusing on the landed gentry and middle-class life in England. Her narratives primarily explore themes such as romance, marriage, inheritance, education, class differences, and patriarchy. In her era, women were judged as weaker than men and dependent on men. This thought can be viewed in one of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet, who was portrayed as someone with a —weak understanding and illiberal mind (Austen, 1813, p. 3). On the other hand, her husband, Mr. Bennet has been characterized as a powerful and mordant man who felt great fun in laughing at her; it was happened many times without her knowing.

Elizabeth, protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice*, is one of the best example of woman's substandard. She is taken aback of what she feels about the qualities of a woman during a conversation with Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley. The definition of an accomplished woman according to them was —...a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, all the modern languages... (Austen, 1813, p. 36). Though Elizabeth did not personally appropriate in the structure of exemplary Regency woman, she was intelligent and clearheaded, she could not support them and think that a woman was unable to fit that accomplished view of Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley. —All this she must possess, added Darcy, and to all this she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading (Austen, 1813, p. 36). Mr. Darcy reveals the awkward 'accomplishments' that a woman must possess. A woman should also improve her mind through extensive reading.

In the societal context of Austen's time, a woman's primary role was within the family, with marriage being her ultimate destiny. Family life encompassed relationships with various relatives, not just her spouse. Austen (1813) explores these dynamics, briefly touching on the husband-wife relationship, where the man was expected to provide financial security and social status. Families eagerly sought ideal matches for their daughters, ensuring their care and love after their passing. Marriage was also a means to forge alliances with other families, securing social standing and financial stability. This tradition was crucial for a daughter's happiness and her family's well-being. —When a woman has five grown up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty (Austen, 1813, p. 2).

In Regency society, people often looked down on single women, calling them —old maids and finding amusement in their unmarried state. Some people would sympathize with them, but also make jokes about their single status. Many women felt pressure to get married, as it was seen as the key to freedom and financial stability. They wanted to escape their dependence on their parents and find a husband to support them. In family life, men were in charge, giving orders, while women were expected to obey them. —It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come since you will not visit them. (Austen, 1813, p. 3) Mrs. Bennet represented the typical woman of her time, following her husband's commands and unable to make decisions without him. She adhered to societal norms, seeking her husband's approval before visiting Mr. Bingley's house. This highlights the lack of respect for women without their husbands' support. When Mr. Bennet showed disinterest in Mr. Bingley's meeting with Jane, Mrs. Bennet avoided the topic and changed the subject, demonstrating her submissive nature. Women were generally considered inferior, while men were expected to take on household and family responsibilities, providing wealth and material comfort to their families. When Mrs. Bennet first time came to know about Mr. Bingley, she was fascinating because she perceived that he was —A single man

of large fortune; four or five thousand a year^l (Austen, 1813, p. 1). With this man she was expecting to form an alliance of one of her five daughters since they possessed qualities which were most essential in a wife in that society.

Women who had chance to work outside were not needed to do, but the men sometimes wanted it. Men were also expected to participate in domestic work though ladies were not going outside for working. In the age of Austen these were prominent obligations that men could not ignore. Elizabeth greatly respected her father, Mr. Bennet. When her mother insists her to marry Mr. Collins, and proclaims to her father to persuade Lizzy to prepare for marrying Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet tells to Elizabeth, —An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do^l (Austen, 1813, p. 109). If Mr. Bennet had ordered Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, she would have had no other option except marring to Mr. Collins for whom she has a strong aversion.

Among the familial responsibilities during the era, motherhood was the most important part of a woman's life. Besides this they ran the house systematically, took care of their children, instructed the house servants, looked after the unwell and older members, and did other domestic works. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet managed the house work. She took care that the servants did what was required for home, arranged banquets as is shown during the visit of Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy in Longbourn, and stimulated her daughters for early marriages. When Jane was to go to Mr. Bingley's house on an invitation given to her, Mrs. Bennet suggests —...you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain, and then you must stay all night^l (Austen, 1813, p. 27). Her mother was not being harsh to Jane; rather, Mrs. Bennet wanted Jane to halt at Mr. Bingley's residence for some extra period of time so that he would develop love in her. Yet it was a dangerous thought to send Jane outside during a bad weather. This act displays how devoted Mrs. Bennet was for the marriage of daughters. She was even ready to take risk of her daughter's life in order to accomplish her motherly duty to supervise and get them married one by one. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst also discussed about the adjustment of women with societal roles. Besides the truth that they belonged to upper class, they were tending to Jane when she fell ill thus taking her responsibility. —All women are likely, at some period of their lives, to be called to perform duties of a sicknurse...^l (Austen, 1813, p. 38). Undoubtedly a woman had to get married to sustain in such a society. In Elizabeth Bennet's case the situation is dreadful because Mr. Collins fate is to be entailed to Mr. Bennet because Mr. Bennet had no son and Collins was the likely inheritor for his estate. In that society a woman could only be either tutor or a governess, which was also not an honored profession, marriage in a rich family was only the place considered respectable for a woman. Elizabeth does not bow down in front of her situations and resists performing her mother's will, having for a rich husband. As Mrs. Bennet said —Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane's disposition as you do^l. —But if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out^l ... (Austen, 1813, p. 19).

Your plan is a good one...replied Elizabeth, “ Where nothing is in question but desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane's feeling; she is not acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of degree of her own regard, nor of its reasonableness. She has known him only a fortnight. She danced with him at Meryton; She saw him one morning at his own house, and has since dined in company with him four times. This is not quite enough to make her understand his character. (Austen, 1813, p. 19)

Darcy's initial disdain for the Bennet family stems from Mrs. Bennet's uncouth behavior and her relentless pursuit of securing marriages for her daughters. However, her actions are driven by financial desperation, as the family's fortune is to be inherited by Mr. Bennet's heir. Elizabeth, a feminist of her time, rejects the notion of marriage for financial security, spurning both Mr. Collins and Darcy's proposals in favor of love and genuine affection. Over time, Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice dissolve, as Elizabeth sees beyond Darcy's arrogance, recognizing his true character, and Darcy admires Elizabeth's independence and defiance. He finally discovers in her, his match in prudence so what if not in social class. As Elizabeth tells him at the time of his proposal:

My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners_ my behaviour to you was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence. You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused and interested you, I was so unlike them. (Austen, 1813, p. 368)

Austen (1813) critiques the rigid class structure of 18th-century England, challenging the notion that class distinctions should influence marriage. Elizabeth, though from an inferior class to Darcy, proves intellectually equal to him, demonstrating that class does not determine worth. Darcy, initially blinded by class snobbery, realizes his prejudice is unjustified, particularly after Elizabeth defends her family's honor. The novel can be seen as a critique of an era where women's worth was tied to marriage for survival, with clear gender and class distinctions. Austen (1813) emerges as a feminist and Marxist figure, recognizing the flaws in these societal constructs. Elizabeth Bennet, through her wit, intelligence, and independence, asserts her equality with Darcy, transcending both class and gender barriers, earning his respect and admiration.

Austen (1813) highlights the patriarchal structures that defined 18th-century England, where women were expected to secure their stability through marriage, as they had no other means of social mobility or independence. The principle of entailment, which ensured that property was inherited only by male heirs, further reinforced this inequality, leaving women to depend on marriage or face poverty and subordination. Elizabeth Bennet's situation is a rare exception; her intelligence and independence make her stand out, but her potential marriage to Darcy could have been a situation of subjugation had circumstances been different. Austen (1813) also critiques marriages that are driven by societal pressures rather than love. Mr. Bennet's marriage to Mrs. Bennet is based on her youthful beauty, but he later regrets it, realizing she is senseless and unsophisticated. Similarly, Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins, but their marriage lacks love and fulfillment, becoming another example of an unloved union. These marriages show how societal expectations trap individuals into unions that fail to offer emotional satisfaction, highlighting the role of marriage as an entrapment for women, in particular. Mr. Bennet, while intelligent and curious, is stuck with a wife who is simple-minded and unpleasant, emphasizing the emotional and intellectual mismatch within their marriage. Through these portrayals, Austen (1813) presents a penetrating critique of the patriarchal and class-driven marriage system of her time, illustrating how women were often forced into marriages for status, security, and survival, often at the cost of personal happiness.

The other important male character in the novel, Mr. Darcy, is also a good example of male supremacy. Miss Lucas also claims about Darcy —One cannot wonder that so fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud (Austen, 1813, p. 17). Darcy is prosperous, successful, smart, and dignified but he is also class-conscious and arrogant. He is unlike Elizabeth who is outspoken and finally through her humaneness manages to mend his thoughts towards middle and lower classes. Thus Darcy realizes that character cannot be defined by the class. Belonging to a high class family does not surely make one intelligent in character or more ethical, as he detects the nonsensical attitude of Miss Bingleys who keep chasing him. So Austen's happy ending is not totally a compromise but a description of what it meant to be successful as a woman in those days. To win for a woman in Austen's age was her marriage in a well to do family. Women had to lose their independence and powers to self-assessment to marry an upper class man who would take responsibility of them for the rest of their lives. *Pride and Prejudice* also presents gender issues of the boorish economic realities. Marriages became business proposals, as Mr. Collins' offers to marry Elizabeth, thus displays his business proposal. He reveals her financial condition to her and explains how the decision of marrying him would reduce her financial hazards, without considering whether she has any feelings for him. The various marriages can be described as forms of fortune hunting, with the females marrying as usual into wealth and security.

b). Negotiating Gender Issues in Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

Kapur's (1998) work addresses a wide range of social and political issues, including communalism, dowry, education, sexual abuse, partition, and women's sexuality. Her protagonists, such as Virmati and Astha, navigate the conflict between tradition and modernity, striving for love, freedom, self-expression, and personal fulfillment. In her narratives, Kapur (1998) explores the complex and often harsh realities of urban middle-class life in India, focusing on themes such as extramarital affairs, societal alienation, and the challenges associated with motherhood and identity. These characters' journeys reflect the broader societal struggles faced by women in a changing cultural landscape.

Difficult Daughters opens with an allegation by Ida which shows the image of her mother that she had in her mind. —The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother (Kapur, 1998, p. 1). The novel starts with the rejection of mother by her daughter; it begins with Virmati's death and cremation. After cremation and separation from her mother Ida feels a loss of something and experiences hollowness in her life. Ida psychoanalytically represents her views; she shares her personal emotions to release herself from deliberation with her mother. She writes to stop being haunted by her mother. She implores her mother not haunt her: —This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore. (Kapur, 1998, p. 280) Ida looks into her mother's past and starts finding more about her. Her aunt and uncle tell her about their big joint family, which comprises of 11 children, of whom Virmati was the eldest one. Their mother, Kasturi, was —blessed. It seems, with posterity beyond human capability. This attempt caused harassment to her own body. This is a sign of women's entrapment and weakness, both physical and mental. After marriage, Kasturi's existence relies on producing offsprings. Her in-laws continuously tell her that god has favoured her with many children but she never understands this. She only felt an unending so tiredness and helplessness which brought her to the edge of deep illness. When she conceived for the

eleventh time, her body and mind were not ready for it and she in fact felt that she would die if she gives birth to one more child.

Kasturi 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 child was a strain, even when they were very young. Her stomach was soft and spongy, her breasts long and unattractive. Her hair barely snaked down to mid back, its length and thickness gone with her babies. Her teeth bled when she chewed in morning neem twigs, and she could feel some of them shaking. She had filled her house as her in laws had wanted, but with another child there would be nothing left of her. (Kapur, 1998, p. 9)

When she tells her bua about this: —I am going to die, Maji, this time. I know it. “Dont talk rubbish, beti, retorted the older woman sharply. God has favoured youll (Kapur, 1998, p. 8). Virmati has to face much hindrance while studying as her mother always pushes her to take care of her siblings. She is unable to reveal her sentiments to her mother who cares nothing for such sensible things? Education has been the only medium to get an identity for women at all times. It is Virmati’s cousin, the well-educated and independent Shakuntala, had inspired her. I want to be like you, Pehnji, blurred Virmatill (Kapur, 1998, p. 17).

When Kasturi becomes seriously ill after her eleventh child, the doctor advised that her body needs fresh air and she may recover soon at such a place, were moving away from the unhealthy atmosphere. The family moves to a house in Dalhousie. Here Virmati meets her cousin, Shakuntala. She is the —new womanll who initiates the views of personal ambitions in Virmati. Shakuntala is a teacher in Lahore. She rejects the idea of marriage even at the cost of becoming the black name for her family. She explains to her eager-eyed cousin Virmati —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 (Kapur, 1998, p. 17). For the very first time Virmati realizes that it impossible to be something other than a wife and seriously decides to continue her studies, since higher education is the only way to attain individuality. Kasturi’s views about education were different from Shakuntala —Hai re beti! What is the need to do a job? A woman’s shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shadi here Kasturi’s eyes glistened with emotion. After you get married, Viru can followll (Kapur, 1998, p. 17). When Virmati had her FA exams she had not been able to study well due to her responsibilities towards her siblings. They were all dependent on her as a second mother more than their real mother Kasturi. She got irritated and complained to her mother, but again Kasturi did not understand her emotions and blasts of her:

Leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first. Now it is you who are eating my head. What good are Shaku’s degrees when she is not settled? Will they look after her when she is old? Demanded Kasturi irritably. At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother (Kapur, 1998, p. 22).

During her BA studies at Arya Sabha College, an unexpected event occurs when Virmati falls in love with her neighbor, Professor Harish Chandra. He is an Indian with a British degree who has come to Amritsar with his mother, wife, and child to teach at Arya Sabha College. The Professor is much attracted by his student’s —offering eyesll and his desire to possess her soon extends to Virmati’s heart and mind. He is married to an illiterate woman, Ganga. Ganga is a very simple woman and totally devoted to her husband.

The woman's own mother had never read, nor felt the need. She had thought the woman everything she knew. By the time she was ready to leave for her husband's house at the age of twelve, she had mastered the basic items of a pure vegetarian diet. She was quick and inventive with the embroidery and knitting needle, as well as with the sewing machine. After her marriage, her mother in law made sure that she learns the ways of her in laws household from the moment of her arrival. All this part of growing up, she knew, but how was she ever dream that without desire to read and write, she was going defenceless into union with a man so unlike the others she knew, who didn't seem to care about household skills at all? Yet he was impatient and angry when the food was badly cooked, and the house carelessly managed. (Kapur, 1998, p. 40)

Kasturi always respects and feels secured in the presence of her father-in-law Lala Diwan Chand. She tells to Virmati to be thankful to her grandfather and father, who have allowed her to study more. —They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you (Kapur, 1998, p. 54). Lala Diwan Chand takes all the decisions in the family and discusses with Lajvanti about his granddaughter: —I have been approached, and when the time is right, I will pick a boy from our samaj, educated and homely. We must be careful because where the first one leads others will follow (Kapur, 1998, p. 23). Kasturi becomes the voice of patriarchy when she says her daughter to follow the words of her father: —Remember you are going to be married next month, if I have to swallow poison to make you do it (Kapur, 1998, p. 60)! Virmati gets entangled between the intents of her family and herself desire, Virmati feels split into —two socially unacceptable pieces (Kapur, 1998, p. 55). She lacks a feeling of self-identity, she requires the strength to openly assert what she wants, and consequently, unable to resolve her domestic situation, she tries to commit suicide by drowning herself.

Swarna the independent one knew the value of freedom and she cared about it more than herself: —Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war _ the satyagraha movement because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail, wake up from your stale dream (Kapur, 1998, p. 151). Virmati begins to realize her foolishness in believing that the myth of romantic love and union with one single man is the key to happiness and wholeness. Virmati starts to doubt her own freedom:

Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organising, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. And she has a „friend“, who lives in the city. Thank God Hari lives in Amritsar. Otherwise I would be completely engulfed. But isn't that what I want? What'll happen when we marry? (Kapur, 1998, p. 142)

The family framework at the Professor's house is as oppressive as it was in her maternal home, there too she had to fight to get her mother's love and here also she faced the constant struggle to acquire the Professor's love and attention. And yet she was restrained at her prior roommate Swarna Lata's endeavours to be consoled and supported to bring some changes and be a part of the change. She tells Virmati to take part and exhibit against the Hindu code bill. Virmati starts remembering the words of demonstration:

Men 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! Imagine! (Kapur, 1998, p. 252)

On the other hand, Virmati finds herself torn between her emotions and family values, struggling with the conflict between her heart and her responsibilities. Ultimately, she follows the path that her heart and body dictate. While the Professor is away with his family, Virmati endures the physical and psychological trauma of an abortion alone, with only Swarna by her side to assist in arranging the procedure. Virmati's only strengthens her relation with the Professor: —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 (Kapur, 1998, p. 177). Faced with the prospect of losing Virmati, the Professor finally decides to introduce her as a second wife. Being a second wife Virmati knew that it was not the end of her struggle. Virmati is sure that her parents will never spare her and she will have to face everywhere. The circle of rejection now is completed. Her mother literally beats her and throws her out of the house for the shame she has brought to their family. When she goes to her maternal home, Kasturi says what she expected —You've destroyed our family, you badmaash, you randi! You've blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on our family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are! (Kapur, 1998, p. 221)! She is rejected just as completely by Harish's family: his mother, Ganga, and the children treat her with open hostility, regarding her as a shameless Punjabi witch who has stolen Harish. As Harish's mother said —He was a good son. How was it his fault if he was caught in the trap of some shameless young Punjabi? Her daughter-in-law was exemplary, thrifty, efficient, industrious and respectful, but if this was to be her fate, what could anyone do? She would have to accept it! (Kapur, 1998, p. 210). Shame becomes the epitome of her entire existence. In the train on the way to her new house, Virmati can still dream of a blissful marriage which will finally bring a recognisable pattern to her life. At the end of her first day as a married woman the illusion has already evaporated and she confesses to her equally unhappy husband: —I should never have married you... and it's too late now. I've never seen it so clearly. It's not fair! (Kapur, 1998, p. 212). After going to Lahore again for study in a conversation with Swarna said, The Draft Hindu Code Bill. What did removing inequality mean? Would a new Hindu Code remove the inequalities between two wives? From Ganga's point of view, she was the one with too many rights, the one with monopoly. Their husband's semen should be shared. Virmati began to giggle hysterically to herself (Kapur, 1998, p. 252).

c). Comparative Study of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*

The textual analysis highlights the issue of inheritance and its implications for women in patriarchal societies as portrayed in Austen's (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* and Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. *Pride and Prejudice* highlight how inheritance laws favored men, often leaving women financially dependent on their families or husbands. Sons were prioritized for education and inheritance, reinforcing women's reliance on marriage as their primary means of achieving financial security and social status. In Austen's (1813) narrative, women, like Charlotte Lucas, faced societal pressure to marry to avoid the stigma of remaining single, often at the cost of personal fulfillment. Marriage is portrayed not merely as a romantic ideal but as a necessity for survival in a male-dominated society.

Both Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) critique male-dominated societies and explore the consequences of women's dependence on patriarchal systems. While Austen (1813) focuses on the personal and social dimensions of marriage and inheritance within a British context, Kapur (1998) presents a broader spectrum of issues, including systemic violence and evolving gender roles in Indian society. The works collectively emphasize the enduring struggle for women's autonomy and the complex interplay between tradition and change.

Both Kapur and Austen (1813) critique patriarchal norms and their generational impact on women. As Kapur writes, —What will happen to you after I am gone?‖ (*Difficult Daughters* 279), emphasizing the enduring dominance of societal expectations. This echoes Austen’s (1813) nuanced exploration of women’s dependence on marriage as a means of social security. Kapur (1998) reflects on the struggles of Indian women, where patriarchal norms dictated their dependence on men and subjected them to various forms of physical, emotional, and social subjugation. Her narratives explore the systemic oppression of women under the guise of culture, tradition, and morality. Kapur’s (1998) characters often endure mental and emotional abuse within their families, highlighting the pervasive violence women face in adhering to societal expectations. However, Kapur (1998) also depicts moments of resistance, where women attempt to redefine their lives despite societal condemnation, signaling a shift towards modern attitudes and individual agency.

According to Kapur (1998), all his characters have been searching for an identity since childhood. For example, Virmati wants to determine herself through knowledge and decision-making. For instance, the protagonist’s defying traditional roles of women, like rejecting a forced marriage, results in her being confined at home. Despite regrets, she also cares about her individualism and personal pride. Consolation is derived from a close relationship with her sister, Paro, who does not scold but holds that the manipulative influence has led to Virmati’s plight. In her female characters, Kapur (1998) shows the transformative agent of education in their lives. Virmati’s cousin Shakuntala, who is a relatively older and confident, self-sufficient woman, encouraged her to get higher studies.

Another shared theme between the two authors is the role of mothers in shaping the lives of their daughters. In Kapur’s (1998) selected novel, mothers are depicted as deeply invested in ensuring their daughters conform to traditional gender roles, particularly in relation to domestic tasks like cooking and managing household responsibilities, which are considered integral parts of an Indian woman’s daily life. This emphasis on food and domesticity contrasts with Austen’s (1813) portrayal of women’s roles, but both writers reflect on the societal pressures faced by women in their respective cultures.

Kasturi was taught that food was one of the ways to please the in-laws. —she could make puris with syrupy gram inside, luchis big as plates, kulchas, white and long... rotis...parathas.... morrabas...seasonal pickles of lemon, mango, carrot..... sherbets of khas, rose and almonds with hot and cold spiced milk.... papad...‖ (Kapur, 1998, p. 63)

Within gender and social roles, Austen’s (1813) main themes in her novels address the roles of women in their home and their society. In Austen (1813), there is a kind of achievement of romance where reason and intellect dominate the discourse and elevation. In relations, incredibly romantic, she is rather strict; eroticism is expressed somewhat moderately. In the role model, she depicts her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, as being middle-class, rational, and intelligent, whose conflicts and resolutions of the established society as well as the individual’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Austen (1813) employs wit, sometimes sarcasm, to give her female character’s liveliness and strength in addition to expressing their faults. In contrast, the heroines represented by Kapur (1998), Virmati and Astha have far from a happy and untroubled existence, which is so characteristic of Austen (1813). Kapur, unlike the post-modernist writers, is a more pointed feminist writer who writes about the social taboos and patriarchy and how women fight these systems in her writings.

Despite the differences in cultural and historical settings, both authors make a valuable contribution to the feminist debate through their depiction of women’s realities and struggles.

The concept of marriage and economic security, as depicted by Austen (1813), shows how little control women had during that time compared to Kapur (1998) in a relatively more modern society where women fight the system in the most direct ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jane Austen's (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* negotiate gender issues within distinct socio-cultural frameworks, highlighting the enduring struggles of women under patriarchal norms. Austen (1813), writing in early 19th-century England, subtly critiques societal expectations through the lens of marriage, class, and inheritance, focusing on personal growth and autonomy within the constraints of her time. In contrast, Kapur's (1998) late 20th-century Indian setting broadens the thematic scope to include complex issues like Partition, communal violence, dowry, and women's sexuality, portraying female agency as both a personal and political struggle. While marriage and relationships serve as central themes in both works, Austen (1813) portrays them as avenues for stability and self-discovery, whereas Kapur explores their potential for oppression and defiance. Both authors emphasize generational tensions, with maternal figures embodying societal expectations that their daughters challenge. Education emerges as a pivotal theme, facilitating self-awareness and liberation in both contexts. Stylistically, Austen (1813) employs irony and restraint, while Kapur's narrative is direct and confrontational, reflecting the urgency of her themes. Together, these texts underscore women's persistent quest for identity and agency, illustrating how gender issues, though shaped by distinct cultural contexts, remain universally relevant across time and geography.

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