

Language and Style in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

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Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) intuitively appears to be a highly lucid and readable novel but this intuition needs to be verified on the basis of somewhat objectively verifiable criteria. In this regard, this paper attempts to be in line with the perceptive observations by Raja Rao (1938), McCutcheon (1969), Sales Salvador (2001), Sarangi (2005), Bandyopadhyay (2007) and Rollason (2008) about sociolinguistics of Indian Writing in English (henceforward referred as **IWE**). Further, this paper also tries to explore the stylistic charm of this novel by evaluating the views of scholars, like Genette (1972) and Leech and Short (1987). McCutcheon (1969:10), a very important and old critic of IWE remarks about the use of the English language, "The fascination of Indian Writing in English lies ... in the phenomenon ... of literary creativity in a language other than the surrounding mother tongue." He (1969: 15), further, adds about the use of dialogue in IWE works: "It would require very exceptional gifts and total bilingualism to express directly in English the lives of people who do not themselves speak English." He also goes on to say that under the English language surface there lies a radically different Indian mind. Rollason (2008) interprets this as a constant and creative tension between medium (English Language) and content (Indian mind). This suggests that an IWE fiction appears to be the result of a process of translation. Dola Sales Salvador (2001) goes a step further and finds "literature written originally in English [as] a sort of transcreation." Rollason (2008) finds the concept of transcreation very closely related to the issue of Indianisation of English by creative writers. Raja Rao (1938:5) also talks about the same idea of Indianisation in the preface to his novel, *Kanthapura*:

English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians (...).

This paper tries to discover the extent of transcreation or Indianization in *Difficult Daughters* credited with several accolades including the prestigious 1999 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the Best First Book category in the Eurasia region. *Difficult Daughters* is rich thematically also. Pallavi Rastogi (2003:124) appreciates it as Kapur's 'commendable effort to peel away, even if partially, the silencing layers of historical time.' Meenakshi Mukherjee (1998) has hailed *Difficult Daughters* as 'an impressive novel', Shirley Kossick (1998) appreciates it as 'a part of the

new and vital wave of Anglo-Indian fiction', Bibi Shah finds it 'an eye opener in many ways' and Nira Gupta-Casale (2000) discovers it as 'a novel about female desire and entrapment, about compromise and compliance ...'. Besides, several critics and reviewers find it highly lucid and readable. To illustrate, Nira Gupta-Casale (2000) considers it 'an extremely readable novel.' When an informal survey was done, several university teachers working in the area of IWE confirmed Gupta-Casale's opinion intuitively. This paper, therefore, is a modest attempt to explore several factors, including the range of transcreation or Indianization, responsible for the novel's high readability and lucidity.

Here it may seem apt to mention Kapur's high concern for the use of language in *Difficult Daughters*. In an interview with Jai Arjun Singh on 9 August 2008, she mentions a small incident which may tell a lot about her perfectionist attitude to language used in *Difficult Daughters*. After being refused by one of the publishers on the ground of its meandering quality, she removes 30,000 words from the manuscript. She later confesses that when she gets a choice between not getting published and the pain of cutting, she selects the pain of cutting as it will definitely cause 'the lesser pain.'

Readability (or lucidity) of a text is usually determined on the basis of some mathematical calculation or by using word-processing software. There are several popular readability tests like Gunning Fog Test and Flesch Readability Test. **Gunning Fog Test** takes into account the number of words in a paragraph, the number of sentences in the paragraph and the number of words having three and more syllables. This test implies that short sentences written in plain English achieve a better score than long sentences written in complicated language. **Flesch Readability Test** measures readability by taking the number of words in an average sentence and the number of syllables in an average word. In this test the higher the score, the easier the text is to understand. So, a score of hundred implies that the text is very easy to understand and a score of zero means that the text is extremely difficult to read. However, in this paper, the readability has been discussed in a somewhat non-technical sense. Here it has been associated with lucidity, flow, and the ease one experiences in reading the novel.

One of the sources of high readability of the novel appears to lie in the extensive use of Hindi and Punjabi words in the novel. These words have been derived from different areas of experience. In fact, the English used by Manju Kapur is geared towards expressing a distinctly Indian sensibility. Therefore, her English has definitely a local flavour. This variety of English (i.e. Indian English), though, has been frowned at by purists, like Nemade (1985: 31) and Kimbahune (1999). Nemade (1985:31) considers it as a temporary and rootless phenomenon which is reflected as 'parrotry' (p. 33) and 'mimicry' (p. 36). He, further, makes a

great prophecy that no Indian writer in English can ever enjoy a position of eminence as his writings lack national culture and national language (p. 36). On the same line, Kimbuhne (1999:80) quite brutally comments that the novels like *A Suitable Boy* and *The God of Small Things* belong to the history of politics of publishing houses rather than the history of literature.. However, we find its excellent defence in scholars, like Quirk (1972) and Bandyopadhyay (2007). Quirk (1972:51) discovers Indian English as a self-respecting and established variety of English and Bandyopadhyay (2007) finds it as a *specific variant of International Standard English*. Her analysis of specific IWE texts for her Ph.D. dissertation proves that IWE text is generally marked by many sociolinguistic features, like Indianisation of vocabulary, loan translation, use of repetition and linguistic creativity. She (2007:3) asserts her opinion in the following way:

The term “Indian English” refers to the variety of English which is learnt and used by a large number of educated (...) Indians as a second language Indian English has the status of an Indian Language, serves the international role of communication with the global community of nations and intra-regional roles of link language among people of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Manju Kapur’s novel is full of instances of Indianisation of vocabulary, loan translation, use of repetition and linguistic creativity as discussed above with regard to Indian English. She voices her joys and hopes by using colourful words of colloquial Punjabi and creates a wonderful cultural context for her novel. An example of this linguistic creation can be witnessed in ‘the devotion with which the native Punjabi extols the soul-satisfying virtues of butter and lassi’ (Gupta-Casale):

(i) The milk had a thick layer of malai, yellow, not white, like nowadays. And when food was cooked, ah, the fragrance of ghee!

At this point, words fail them.

I had grown up on the mythology of pure ghee, milk, butter, and lassi, and whenever, I came to Amritsar, I noticed the fanatical gleam in the eyes of people as they talked of those legendary items. Perhaps, if I could have shared that passion, the barriers of time and space would have melted like pure ghee in the warmth of my palm. (p. 4)

The source of high readability can also be accounted for in terms of the Manju Kapur’s use of code-switching and code-mixing devices. Sarangi (2005) has tried to examine if various sociolinguistic concepts, including code-switching (moving from one language to another), code-mixing (including elements of more than one language in the same utterance),

role-relationships (the structuring of dialogue according to the speaker's different roles in society) and turn-taking (the social conventions deciding who speaks when) occur or recur in IWE works. Here we have attempted to explore only the use of code-switching and code-mixing in *Difficult Daughters*. A thorough investigation of the use of these devices reveals that Manju Kapur has used them extensively at the lexical and syntactical levels to express herself in a better and satisfying way. Her use of these devices seems to be governed sometimes by the non-availability of an equivalent word in English and at other times to make the context or narration more realistic. In the sentence, "A woman's shaan is in her home" (p. 13), Kapur's choice of 'shaan' instead of 'pride' lends this expression a homely and realistic touch. Her use of Hindi/Punjabi words represents a vast area of experiences, but it is remarkable that these Hindi/Punjabi words are mostly concrete ones as opposed to abstract ones. Here concrete words refer to the objects normally perceived by our sense organs. A list of these words used by Kapur, in the table 1 (adapted from Roy, 2001: 64-65) below, not only refers to a wide spectrum of her experiences but also shows that she is trying to make all the details of the novel realistic, thus increasing the readability of the novel.

Table 1: Nouns

Food	Place	Profession	Event	Relation	Dress	Utensils	Miscellaneous
Dahi	Dharamshala	Chowkidar	Shadi	Bade Pitaji	Dhoti	Karahi	Baithak
Chutney	Aangan	Bania	Chauth	Baoji	Dupatta	Katori	Durries
Khas	Gully	Munshi	Uthala	Bhai	Kurta	Thali	Furlong
Dal	Ghat	Dhobi			Kameez	Patila	Havan
Pakora	Zenana Aangan	Randi		Bhai Saheb	Pyjama		Kewara
Paneer	Kothi	Pundit		Bhenji			Sandhya
Morra ba				Maji			

Kulcha s				Chachi			
Mathri				Beta			
Tando ori				Masi			
Luchis				Bua			
Lassi				Pitaji			
Malai							
Puris							
Atta							
Sherba t							
Papad							

Table 2: Other Words

Reduplication	Religious Invocation	Adjective	Exclamation	Compound Word
Bas-bas	Bole so Nihal	Badmash	Arre wah	Dhoti kurta jooti
Seedha- saadha	Allah-o-Akbar	Shaan	Hai re, hai re	Gajjar-mooli
Shor-shaar	Har, har Mahadev	Gandi	He Bhagwan	Puris and parathas
			Bap re	Zenana aangan
			Arre	

Table 2 (borrowed from Roy, 2001:65) given above suggests that Manju Kapur switches code on various levels like reduplications, religious

invocations, exclamations and compounding, etc. Further, she uses this device in expressing agreement, affirmation and consent. The following two extracts illustrate the agreement (between the two speakers):

(ii) 'What a lovely place to be finally laid to rest!'

'Hoon,' said Virmati absently who saw nothing so remarkable about the gravestones. (p. 176)

(iii) At the doorway she (Kasturi) turned back once to say, 'Indu, ... use the fresh butter in the doli, the old one is for ghee.'

'Han,' said Indu ... (p. 74)

Here an agreement has been shown by the use of words like hoon and han.

Kapur extends the use of code-mixing to phrases and sentences also like,

(iv) 'puris and parathas wrapped in Britannia-bread waxed paper' (p. 2)

(v) 'aalu ki sabzi in mithai boxes' (p. 2)

(vi) 'They ... skirted the zenana aangan' (p. 180)

(vii) '... and pull her sari palla' (p. 213)

In the above examples, we get excellent use of code-mixing. To illustrate, expression number (iv) shows how two Hindi words (puris as well as parathas) have been combined with the help of an English conjunction, and. Further, in (v) two phrases (like aalu ki sabzi as well as mithai boxes) are connected with the help of an English preposition, in. In fact, the whole noun phrase in (v) can be further subdivided into a Noun Phrase (aalu ki sabzi) and a Prepositional phrase (in Mithai boxes). Looking closely at many code-mixed noun phrases in *Difficult Daughters*, we notice that the Hindi/Punjabi words sometimes are used as headwords (e.g., sweet morabbas in huge jugs), sometimes they are the constituents of a post modifier (e.g., four varieties of barfi) and at times they are used as a headword as well as the constituents of a post modifier (e.g., sherwats of kewara). Thus, the code-mixing device gives a great freedom to the author to use native words in plenty and consequently make English nativised significantly.

A high lucidity of *Difficult Daughters* is also caused by the narrative technique used in the text. The major part of the story is told by the author herself as she appears to be omnipresent and does not take part in the story. This type of narrator is called 'heterodiegetic' (Genette, 1972:255-6). Only a very small part is narrated by Ida, Virmati's daughter, who is a participant also. A narrator of this type is labelled as 'homodiegetic' (Genette, 255-6). Ida starts narrating the tale with a very cryptic statement: "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (p. 1). From this very point readers get curious 'to explore, and analyse why she did not like to be like her mother and relate the answer to the larger issue of patriarchy' (Bala and Chandra, 1999). Surprisingly enough, the book ends as it began with the angry Ida's comment:

(viii) 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 any more (p. 259).

In this way, the novel appears to form a complete circle and this circularity gives a direction, continuity and speed to readers. Ida takes over the narration of the tale at different points in the novel, but only for a very brief period and this breaks the monotony in the reading of the novel. Ida starts the story in Chapter 1 wherein she talks about her dead mother just after her funeral at Delhi and then she reaches Amritsar where she starts piecing together her dead mother's past, but as she has been able to provide only a small aspect of her life, we get the remaining big part of the story mainly by the author. Ida takes up the job of a narrator again in chapter 9. She, along with Kailashnath, goes to the college where her father worked for a very long time and her mother's love affair bloomed with Harish. Thereafter, she again starts telling the story in chapter 17 (second part) wherein she meets Swarana Lata Sondhi, the roommate of Virmati during her Lahore days, to explore some more facets of her mother's personality. Later, she tries to reconstruct the story in chapter 19 (second part). Here, she comes to know how Swarana Lata helps her mother to get rid of the unwanted pregnancy. Further, in chapter 23 (second part) Ida talks to her Masi about her mother's marriage and in chapter 25, she is trying to pick up the loose threads of her mother's marital life. And finally, at the end of the Epilogue, she becomes autobiographical and bids farewell to her mother's memory.

The reader develops a bond of trust with the author who is the main narrator in the novel. Her omniscient nature can be felt by her presence as a storyteller in about 250 pages of the novel, which runs into 259 pages. This is also realized by her familiarity with the characters' innermost thoughts and feelings, her knowledge of past and present and her presence in locations where characters meet in total privacy. In

addition, what makes this novel lucid and distinguishes it from other tales of adulterous love and romantic intrigue is the sympathy and integrity with which the author and Ida reconstruct the past of Virmati (Gupta-Casale).

Mukul Kesavan, a famous novelist, commends *Difficult Daughters* as ‘a first rate realistic novel’ (Bala and Chandra, 1999: 106). A close analysis of the novel reveals that realism also promotes a high degree of reliability, and realism, to a large extent, is realized in ‘verisimilitude’ and ‘credibility.’ Cassirer (1944:144) defines art as ‘a continuous process of concretion.’ Leech and Short (1987:156) explain this definition in the following way: ‘The sense of being in the presence of actual individual things, events, people, and places, is the common experience we expect to find in literature’ and this very aspect of the illusion of reality is called verisimilitude. The novel is full of instances where readers get the impression of being participants or observers themselves. For example, Virmati’s traumatic experience of unwanted pregnancy mitigates the gap between a reader and a participant, at least for a short while:

(ix) Quickly she calculated dates.... She was certain she was pregnant. With this certainty, the nausea came again, ripping through her throat, salivating her tongue. She thought of all the hours she had spent over her practical files, her teaching charts, ... What would happen to her BT now? (p. 141)

Verisimilitude is closely connected with another aspect of realism called credibility. Credibility is “likelihood or believability of the fiction as a ‘potential reality’ ...” (Leech and Short, p. 157). Kasturi gets surprised at the fuss that people are making in the house after Virmati fails at her FA examination. She does not give importance to the success in the examination – instead, she strongly believes: “...it is the duty of every girl to get married” (p. 13). Her belief lends credibility to the novel because the same belief was a part of Indian consciousness till some years ago.

A lot of local expressions with a flavour of local culture and customs also make the novel lucid. Some examples are cited below:

(x) Hai re, beti! (p. 13)

(xi) He is ill, he is sick, he has fainted, hai re, hai re. (p. 78)

(xii) Come here beta. (p. 202)

(xiii) Mornings, toast and milk. Lunch dal, rice, chappati, vegetable, dahi, sometimes a sweet dish, for tea, pakora or mathri, for dinner, dal, sabzi, sometimes with paneer, rice, chapatti. (p. 108)

To conclude, we may say that the novel is brilliant not only because it is ‘about female desire and entrapment, about compromise and compliance’ (Gupta-Casale) but also because of its great lucidity triggered by Kapur’s

use of code-switching and code-mixing devices. Besides, the third person narration contributes to develop a great bond between the author and the reader. In addition, Manju Kapur's sincere effort to make the novel realistic also makes the text highly lucid and readable.

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