

A Woman's Journey for a New Self in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

J. DIVYA, Research Scholar in English,

Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Thuckalay, Tamil Nadu, India.

Dr. J. Chriso Ricky Jill, Professor of English,

Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Thuckalay, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract:

Literature has always been an accessible tool in discovering the gender relations, sexual differences and several matters connected to woman's journey for self in a patriarchal social set up. A reasonably new perception of women for having their own identity has discovered some of the biases at work in the traditional approach to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine perspective. Manju Kapur's novel is based on the hypothesis that women insist on liberation from Patriarchal social construction and thoughtful. They powerfully protest against every brutality committed on them by any fair name of religion or morality. They boldly demand human rights and pride for women who remained dump and submissive for centuries in the male dominated world. Her novels are continuously looking for freedom from social and moral constraints and cast a look on women's quest for having their identity. *A Married Woman*, the novelist fully strives to undo this tiled and distorted image of women whose cries for freedom and equality have gone and still go unheard in patriarchal world, a malist culture. Thus denied the freedom to act and choose on their own, women remain solely inside the field of vision, mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished.

Keywords:

Marriage, love, dignity, identity, longing, money, business, family bonding, growth, lesbian, disappointment, alienation, emotion,...

Manju Kapur builds the story on the concept that women of the present day society stand on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. A Married Woman presents a sensitive portrayal of women's quest for identity and lends a voice to their frustrations, disappointment, and alienation in a patriarchal world. It is a novel which provokes our thoughts as to how Astha, a married woman in search of her identity, registers her protests against existing patriarchal set up and emerges as an independent woman. The novelist, in the very beginning, establishes the recognition of Astha as a girl.

Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. She was her parent's only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were their burdens. She was their future, their hope.....(1)

Astha is chained by her middle class values where she wants to uplift herself to upper class and always be afraid of failing down to lower class. Her first encounter with Bunty and then with Rohan, fails because of her middle class status and she accepts her fate and goes for arranged marriage where she plays a role of typical Indian house maker and gets frustrated in waiting for her husband, after the work and taking care of children and in-laws.

Astha is born and brought up in a traditional middle class family. Her parents are very conscious of her needs and role in a middle class family. Her mother is very protective of her and she expects her to conform to traditions. She often tells Astha the real meaning and worth of a woman lies in getting married happily and having children and serving husband as a God. She tells Astha:

“When you are married, our responsibilities will be over.

Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth?” (1)

It is important to note that Manju Kapur allows the patriarchy to operate through the mother. Astha’s father, unlike her mother, wishes for his daughter to have a successful career and to be independent. Her father remarks. “ If she did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS, and find a good husband there.”(3) Thus her identity will flourish and shine like luminous stars radiating different rays from different corners of the sky. But Astha, like a common teenager school going girl, remains absorbed in her romantic visions, often imagining of a romantic and handsome young man holding her in his strong manly embrace.

In the final year of her college she is deeply involved with Rohan, a senior student of University, in order to make her identity. They enjoy each other company. But it is soon over as Rohan went abroad for study and her marriage is settled with Hermant, the foreign returned son of a bureaucrat living in the posh colony of New Delhi. Like a middle class girl, chained by values, she submits herself to the inevitable. She has seen her mother forever sacrificing for the family. So she leads a typical Indian married life of a woman. She does work in the kitchen, washes clothes and arranges them. But it takes just a few months to realize the dullness of her new life around her, she thinks “ What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come Home?” (46)

Nothing stays forever. Joy, happiness, pain, grief, emotion, excitement and zeal etc. all come and go alternately. After a short phase of excitement, enthusiasm and joy, dullness enters into Astha’s life. She is suggested join a school as a teacher. Gradually, the job brings changes into her life. Astha’s participation in the workshop begins her journey of breaking all the boundaries one by one. Now she is a mother of a son, Himanshu and a daughter,

Anuradha. Even though, she is fascinated by the multifarious personality of Aijaz. Astha 's involvement with the Street Theatre Group lends fuel to the fire of her quest for identity. During this workshop she finds that a tender feeling develops between Astha and Aijaz. This brings to her a unique feeling. " Perhaps she should not think of him so much, but soon it would be over, where was the harm, it made her happy, and that in itself was worth something."(113)

After the murder of Aijaz and his troupe member's while staging a play on Babri Masjid Ram Janambhoomi controversy, Astha emerges as a social activities and starts taking part in rallies and staging, in spite of much resistance from her husband and in –laws. She is sick of her frequent sacrifice for family and her status of " an unpaid servant sacrifice for family and her status of "an unpaid servant". (168) but now " she didn't want to be pushed around in the name of family. She was fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail" (168) she decides to go to Ayodhya to chart her course as a social activist to fight against old oppression and suppression.

During her stay there she meets one of the participants, Pipeelika and visits various and temples with her and begins to like her. She realizes about Pipeelika, "A stranger she had hardly spoken to, to bother about her clothes, what was wrong with her?" (199) Astha's association with Pipee gives a new dimension to her quest of self. A powerful emotional relation develops between them despite offences from her husband and children. Astha falls in love with her. A strong sexual relationship is stablished between them within a few meeting. Astha spends more and more time with her and enjoys her company. " Afterwards Astha felt, strange, making love to a woman took getting used to. And it also felt strange, making love to a friend instead of an adversary" (231)

The conflict between her roles of wife, mother and that of a lover continues and she finds herself torn between her desire for freedom and duty towards her family. She realizes that any relationship, even that between a woman and another woman, becomes demanding after a length of time. Astha finds a soul mate in Pipee

“Astha thought that if husband and wife are one person
Then Pipeee and she were even more so. She had shared
Parts of herself she had never shared before. She felt
Complete with her.”(243)

She is on the border of losing her conventional marriage with Hemant and traditional family life. She lives in a haze. Her roles of mother and wife are on litmus test. She decides to leave her home, husband and family for Pipee. But suddenly, Pipeelika is offered a scholarship from American University to do research and the relationship comes to an end. Kapur shows Astha's growing and evolving at various stages through various relationships and she becomes the first Indian novelist who highlights woman's desire for homosexuality. The roots of tradition, living up to the benchmark of the ideal Indian woman, sacrificing for family, putting self behind, devaluing herself, being content to live in the safety and security of husband, home and family continually come in conflict with her postmodern sensibilities that lend her wings to question established norms, to search for her identity, to long for a soul mate, to develop, to enter socially forbidden relationships

Tradition in Indian society is so strong that a woman of average capability fails to break them and get out of them to make a separate identity of her own. She makes her attempts she covers some distance but ultimately she returns to the four walls of her family to lead the life of slavery and servitude in the patriarchal set up. She is progressive and conscious of her rights, but she quickly compromises to the fact that a woman's real position lies within the family unit which she must sustain and protect and not ignore or neglect due to

the false notion of being “liberated”. In this sense Astha is not only the face of the new woman of our time but also the real woman of our time.

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