

# NEW WOMEN IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL A MARRIED WOMAN

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**ABSTRACT--***Manju kapur is one of the successful names in the galaxy of Indian women novelists in English. She has enriched the Indian English fictional world with her great creations. Her works reflect the realistic problems in the life of Indian women with a sensitive appeal. She is a feminist writer, who gives voice to the women's pathetic condition in a traditional and patriarchal society, where social-cultural and political circumstances are the obstacles in the way of a new woman. Her novel A Married Woman deals with the inner turmoil of a new woman, who feels a lot of difference in her life after marriage but at last she struggles for her basic rights of equality, identity and self-satisfaction. Kapur's protagonists are mostly educated, so they are conscious for their individuality. The paper brings out the feminist views of the writer to create awareness among women for their identity and status in a family and society, a woman like Astha, the protagonist of the novel can be called a new woman who tackles the situations of her life without creating any violence but being dutiful towards her responsibilities in the family. A new woman gets satisfaction by her own way breaking the norms of traditional society where male domination is in power. Manju Kapur, a modern woman novelist like kamla Markanday, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shashi Despande, Shobha De and so on paved the way for modern new woman's feelings. She is well aware of the condition of women in the traditional society, where they are only sub-servient and submissive and this continuous state of their life becomes the cause of their psychic and neurotic problem. They never utter a word against the male-domination. These women are considered to be ideal Indian wives. But in modern era, a woman disapproves the traditional social structure of society. She is against unjust norms and tradition and becomes a rebel rejecting the ideal image of woman. The new woman is conscious for her rights, identity, independence and personal fulfillment. The fictional writing of Manju Kapur suggests her concern towards radical feminism, emphasizing sexuality as a central basis of woman's subordination. Indian gender ideologies have historically encouraged female effacement or self-sacrifice. Postmodern tendencies have been reflected in the fictional works of Indian women writers which pave the way to the new socio-cultural and political conditions. Conventional system in India is structured around gender discrimination approving male supremacy. A woman has no place in a family and in a society, her opinion or ideas are not considered valuable in spite of her good education and intellectual caliber. She feels frustration and at last thinks to achieve her own goal for her own satisfaction or fulfillment. She turns towards lesbian relationship without thinking about her married life. This is the unique aspect of a woman who is ready to take any risk to get equal status like men in society. Her views may seem strange to some people but it is the inner voice of a new woman who wants to enjoy full stretch of her life at any cost.*

**Keywords--** *New woman, Identity, satisfaction, male- domination, Patriarchy, tradition.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The second novel of Manju Kapur *A Married Woman* (2002), is set in Delhi against the backdrop of communal riots on the controversial Ram Janma Bhumi Babri Masjid. The novel depicts Astha's story from her childhood to her forties from hopes to miseries and recognition to agony. She has been brought up in a patriarchal atmosphere full of fear and stress. It describes her young adulthood life to her early middle years where in her romantic dreams she thinks about a handsome guy. In this prime time of her life, she dates with young men for her satisfaction, she engaged with Rohan emotionally and physically and realizes her dreams. She surrenders herself to Rohan in the hope that he will marry her but she was only a thing of enjoyment for him, after the breakup of these relationships she unwillingly gets marry with a man of her parent's choice and tries to achieve bliss of happy married life with her husband, gives birth to children, but unsatisfied from him, maintains a distant from him and struggles to become a painter. Astha, a modern educated woman is conscious about her inner strength which she achieve through education. She wants a respectful independent life in a male - dominated society.

JeanBakerMiller observes, "When women begin to perceive forms of strength based on their own life experiences, rather than believing they should have the qualities they attribute to men, they often find new definitions of strength" (Towards a New Psychology of Women, 38). At last she becomes a social activist against the wish of her family asserting her desires and falls in love with a woman to fulfill her emotional desires. Astha symbolises the middle class ethics and values, enjoys the harmony in her marital life but gradually feels something missing in her life. She suffers from a sense of incompleteness. After marriage she feels entrapped and bored. According to Baker, "many women now seek to explore their own needs and to evaluate themselves in their own terms and it seems as if there is a point in doing it"(140). Her involvement with the outer world of upheaval and protest provokes her inner pain and suppression. Her interest in lesbian relationship for temporary relief remains hollow and unsuccessful. Beauvoir says that, "lesbianism...is an attitude that is chosen in situation...It is one way among others for woman to solve the problems posed by her condition in general and by her erotic situation in particular" (The Second Sex ,448).

## II. RESULT

In *A Married Woman*, a feministic voice can be heard, as Astha, the protagonist of the novel, brings the struggle of Virmati in a new battle field. The findings of researchers tells about the pathetic condition of women due to tradition norms and socio-economic culture of society. Much research has been done on different aspects of woman's condition in male-dominated society and how a modern woman struggles for her rights but still many aspects of a new woman's life are needed to explore because she is still facing the problems in a modern society which is educated but their mind set is based on traditional norms of society. An archetypal image of submissive and mute woman should be erased from the psychic of the patriarch of the family and society and an honorable place must be given to a woman. The attempt in this research is to represent the main obstacles in the way of a new woman and how Manju Kapur suggested her views boldly through her protagonists' rebellious actions, with conscious mind and spirit, Manju Kapur, a feminist writer believes in the rights of women and also expresses her views through her writings. Her women protagonists are educated and conscious about their rights of equality and

freedom. The female protagonist of the novel, Astha is the daughter of an educated father and traditional mother who has earnest desire to get due place in the family. But she faces domination and discrimination in her married life. Baker describes the condition of women, “As wives, mothers, lovers or workers, women often feel that other people are demanding too much of them; and they resent it. Frequently they can not even allow themselves to admit that they resent these excess pressure”(54).

Astha compares her life before and after marriage. Now she behaves like a puppet to maintain the values of a traditional family as an ideal woman. Her marriage with Hemant, does not seem to be based on mutual understanding and co-operation. Hemant behaves like a typical dominating husband and feels proud to be a representative of a patriarchal society although he is foreign returned. Juliet Mitchell comments, “The patriarchal law speaks to and through each person in his unconscious; the reproduction of the ideology of human societies thus assured in the acquisition of the law by each individual” (413). After her marriage Astha is a dutiful wife and sacrificing mother. She is exploited physically and mentally. She has no one to share her emotions. Being depressed and frustrated, she leads to lesbian relation, for her emotional discharge.

Manju kapur in her novel, *A Married Woman* advocates a self governing life of the woman for self reliance and fulfillment through the life of protagonist Astha who experiences marital relations before and after marriage, encourages inter religion marriage and female female relationship challenging the patriarchal norms of traditional society. Juliet Mitchell, encourages the challenge of modern women, “Women have to organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society. To be effective, this can be no righteous challenge to the simple domination of men” ( Psychoanalysis and Feminism, 414).

After marriage she has to lead a conjugal life with Hemant. She feels disintegrated in her husband’s love for her and family. Her mother-in-law wants her to be a traditional sacrificing ideal woman, a devoted wife and mother. She realizes stress and suffocation under the burden of her domestic responsibilities to please everyone in the family. She is “always adjusting to everybody else’s needs”( 227). She pathetically feels that a married woman’s position in the family is based on her husband’s attitude towards her. She is torn between her responsibilities and socio-religious ideas imposed on her after marriage. She is trapped in domestic life in such a way that she is not able to think openly for herself. She irritates with her responsibilities and realizes “tired women cannot make good wives ” (154). She feels dejected under the pressure of a married woman who is only like an unpaid servant. She has a responsibility of pleasing her husband and surrender in front of him. “A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth”(231).

A woman is marginalized in her own family by sadistic social atmosphere of differentiation and inequality. Beavoir penetrates the domain of male privilege and comments, “Being on the fringes of the world is not the best place for someone who instead to recreate it : here again, to be beyond the given, one must be rooted in it”(154). Astha broods over her sufferings and thinks to free herself from tension, pressure and depression. The only way out she finds the job, as her father always suggested her, “with good job comes independence”(4). She joins as a teacher and remains busy in school activities, but this job does not keep her free from distress and trauma of discrimination in socio-cultural system. In Indian society, even in educated cultured families’ preference is given to a baby boy than a baby girl. Manju Kapur delineates this harsh reality of Indian society through this novel.

Astha's family believes in superstition for a baby boy. When her daughter Anuradha was four, Astha conceived again, her mother brought a pujari to perform a special pooja to grant a boy for Astha. But even after giving birth to Himanshu, a son, she does not get status in the family. The family members feel "the family is compete at last"(68). Nancy Chodorow observes, "This duality expresses itself in the family. In family Ideology, fathers are usually important and considered the head of the household. Wives focus energy and concern on their husbands, or act at least think and say that they do"(The Reproduction of Mothering ,181).

A woman feels degradation in the family for which she sacrifices her desires and serves till the end of her life. Nobody cares for her emotions, freedom and identity. Astha is shocked at the different behavior of the family and society at her daughter's birthday. But she actually receives an appraisal and appropriate status of motherhood after giving birth to a son. According to Chodorow, "Parenting, as an unpaid occupation outside the world of public power, entails lower status, less power, and less control of resources than paid work"(31). She like a modern, educated and conscious woman refutes and dislikes the hollow thinking of discrimination between a son and a daughter. She thinks for her "with her child too caught up in the web of daily life"(84)and becomes the victim of tension and depression considered as "the disease of modern life"(76).

Kapur brings forth the consequences of the neurotic and psychic diseases of women in our traditional Indian society. Kapur being feminist also fights against these cultural prejudices against women. All cultural norms are constructed only for women in which she is called an ideal woman, if she never asks for her rights. Culture plays a critical role against woman by saying women to be broad minded like earth instead of providing them equal status like men. Manju Kapur, through this novel represents unequal treatment in the family and society. According to her, women must have equal position like men in socio-economic structure of society.

A revolution should be brought against traditional norms of society which do not consider women equal to men. Chodorow comments, "Hetrosexual marriage, which usually gives man rights in women's sexual reproductive capacity and formal rights in children organizes sex. Both together organize and reproduce gender as an unequal social relation" (10). Astha's present condition compels her to lead a pitiable life. She experiences suffocation with her liabilities to the requirements of family members forced on her. Now, Astha is in a respectable profession of teaching. But her husband's unconcern to her emotions fills her mind with pain and agony. She thinks herself as a futile object of the house, which is not valuable to anyone. The political, social, economic and cultural stuff of the society is responsible for woman's dependent, secondary and subjugated condition. She is forced to do unpaid work at home to be fully dependent on her husband who remains irresponsible to his family and children. Astha, a modern educated conscious woman at last responds against her husband's insensitive behavior towards her. She also fights against the traditional attitude of the society, that women should be full of virtues of an ideal submissive woman. She should be devoted to her family and follow strictly the norms of society. And she should not react against the atrocities of her husband or her in-laws because religion does not permit her to disclose the family matters openly in the society. The expression of her personal injustice is believed to be the breaking of traditional norms.

A woman is marginalized in a conservative society like untouchables. She has no place in the patriarchal system for her development and success. Millers suggests , " Women need the power to advance their own development, but they do not 'need' the power to limit the development of others"(122).But the protagonist of

the novel Astha shows disgust against the conventional thinking of the society and anchors her personal identity denouncing the traditional thinking of her family. In her husband's opinion "religion is a choice as much as other thing." (89). For her satisfaction she rebels against her husband and challenges the conventional barriers enforced on her. She turns to Pipeelika a Hindu brahmin girl, who is married to Ajjaz Akthar Khan, a Muslim lecturer in history.

Astha encourages Pipeelika's idea of inter-caste love marriage. Pipeelika is also a modern open-minded woman who marries a Muslim against her mother's wish and social norms. She also as a new woman achieves her right to marry the man of her choice. On the other hand, Astha has frustrated and exhausted with her burdensome married life, turns to lesbian relationship with Pipeelika and defies her husband out of her inner rage. Beauvoir says "the women under the pretext of freeing herself from man's oppression makes herself slave of the personage, she did not want to confine herself in a woman's situation, but she imprisons herself in that of the lesbian" (447). Pipeelika is also victim of social upheaval as her husband died in riot and she turns into a widow of Ajjaz. Astha did not create any scene at the condom-episode because she had a substitute husband in the form of Pipee. She thinks that if her husband had an extra marital affair, she can also do the same. Here, she wants to do equally all things like her husband, keeping in her mind the pain of gender difference and inequality in a family and society.

Chodorow explains her views about inequality, "Boys are taught to be masculine more consciously than girls are taught to be feminine" (176). Astha wants to live a meaningful life as she finds herself trapped in a traditional, socio-political and cultural system where her husband never shows any concern to her emotions but only treats her antagonistic way. On the other hand, Pipeelika gives solace and pleasure to her emotions, which she never gets from her chauvinistic husband. She is a conscious woman of post-modern era, who breaks the shackles of social codes that restrict her from asserting her own rights of womanhood. She gets strength in her life by connecting herself to Pipeelika. Beauvoir feels, "The free woman is just being born" (767).

Manju Kapur has clearly shown the pathetic condition of the woman in the patriarchal society which has deprived woman from socio-political and economic rights. Women are considered inferior to men who are caught in the emotional web of family and society. But a subjugated and devalued woman shows her threat to the male ego which is a challenge to patriarchal ideology. Baker explores a woman's condition, "Women are encouraged to 'transform' their own needs. This often means that they fail, automatically and without perceiving it, to recognize their own needs as such. They come to see their needs as if they were identical to those others- usually men children" (20).

Kapur's focus is on the troubles of women in general and Indian women in particular. Through Astha's character, she challenges the manmade discrimination and wants to liberate women from horrific authority. Astha turns to lesbian for her quest of self-fulfillment, and by doing so she gets relief equating her self with men who are allowed to do anything without any restriction of social code. Kapur's protagonist Astha is different from Virmati of *Difficult Daughters* who also breaks social norms having married a man of her choice against the wish of her parents.

In *A Married Woman* the novelist shows a protected, non violent path of rebellion against male dominated and chauvinistic society. Astha like a courageous and conscious post modern woman does not

shatter herself and becomes aggressive, and violates the conventional notions of society but she severely attacks on the customs of socio cultural set up of patriarchal system by turning into a lesbian relationship. She defies masculinity of her husband and pleases her emotions of womanhood by keeping her relationship with Peepilika. "slowly Peepilika, put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of the back [...]feeling her back with the palm they were enclosed in a circle of silence the only sound the sound of their breathes, close together and mingled"(230-231).

Manju kapur, through this novel has delineated the passion of a woman for another woman and also projects lesbian relationship forcefully a component for the satisfaction and fulfillment of woman's emotional and sexual desire. Astha is a victim of household violence and Pipeelika is a victim of social violence who becomes widow after her husband's death in riots. The novelist has involved them in to lesbian trace for their own self-fulfillment and satisfaction. It is also the way of showing new woman's tyranny and emotional hunger, both are challenge and threat to male dominated society.

Women are more pulverized by any type of violence in household or in society. After the death of her husband Pipeelika has lost everything except her heart. Manju Kapur, like other women novelists, is a feminist who presents her women protagonists' struggle for their rights like Astha who rebels for her rights and equality. Beauvoir regrets on women's condition, "Even the women who has emancipated herself economically from man is still not in a moral, social or psychological situation identical to his"(739). Kapur has openly rebelled against social code of marriage in which women are compelled to act passively and submissively in their in-laws house. They have to accept the rules made by male dominated society.

### III. DISCUSSION

Although this is the modern age of development, but in Indian society traditional norms and customs are still prevailing which become the cause of female suffering, unhappiness and restlessness. Women are not able to gather courage to voice their husband's distressed painful relationship. A married woman remains in anxiety because of her husband and in-laws which is the cause her psychic and neurotic problem. Though women are raising their voice against traditional restrictions and sexual discrimination, but Indian society is not accepting changes whole heartedly. According to Juliet Mitchell, "It is not a question of changing (or ending) who has or how one has babies. It is a question of overthrowing patriarchy... it would seem, is the swan-song of the 'immortal' nature of patriarchal culture to be heard"(416). But Manju kapur's female protagonists Astha and Pipeelika are modern women who find out the way of their fulfillment. They are new women who want to assert their individuality, freedom and equality practically and not theoretically. They emancipate themselves from traditional codes of restrictions creating their own ways of contentment. These new women of postmodern era get empowerment through self-satisfaction. They struggle hard for absolute freedom, self-reliance and restrains of socio-economic norms.

Astha becomes a teacher and gets individuality and economic freedom, Pipeelika goes to USA for pursuing her Phd degree. Both try to free themselves from social restrictions by following the way of empowerment. They want to enjoy their physical satisfaction and emotional needs.

In this novel Manju Kapur has shown that change is necessary in the system of patriarchy to give equal opportunity to women for their individuality freedom and rights, so that they can feel relief and enjoyment in their life like men. Postmodern era's new women cannot bear suppression and subjugation in their life. They want equal utilization of socio-political and economic rights. They are not in favor of any type of domestic violence or aggression. They do not want any interference of social or religious matters in their individuality. They are conscious against any subjugation or exploitation. Astha, protagonist of *A Married woman* seeks freedom denouncing the concept of traditional society in which a woman remains subservient, meek, ideal, but she wants to challenge such conventions which create obstacles in the development and progress of a woman. A woman is also a human being like man so there should not be any gender discrimination.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Equality is the solution of all evils, but first of all patriarchal and traditional rules should be abolished which are trapping even an educated conscious woman in a cage. Women can no longer remain submissive, subjugated and discriminated. The educated women of the novel as Astha, Ajjaz and Pipeelika are open-minded. Ajjaz works for a theatre group which awakens awareness in society. Pipee runs an NGO, Astha is interested in *Manch* and also tries to bring political awareness through her paintings. Manju Kapur presents extra martial lesbian affair in the novel boldly. The concept of 'New Woman' has been shown in the name of *A Married woman* which is a post-modernistic trend in this novel. A sensitive woman who firmly asserts her desires in a traditional family and decides to go on her own way to experience what she wants, as a new woman in real sense. In Indian society, there are many examples of such working women who bear the burden of family happily to maintain the harmony in the family and to nurture the web of their relations but they are not weak internally. An atmosphere of full liberty is required for women who are the base of humanity, then she will be truly emancipated from traditional norms and will also achieve equal socio-economic status in life. Educated women like Astha are compelled to become rebellious only for their basic rights of equality, freedom and individuality. Manju Kapur raises the contemporary issues related to women and believes that education is not only an important tool to get a suitable match but to enjoy self-respectful place in society.

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