

Relocate the identity of woman in Manju Kapur's novel "A Married Woman"

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Abstract-Manju Kapur is one of the most successful Indian women authors in English who stands for women rights. Her amazing works have enhanced the Indian English fictional realm. Her compositions, with a delicate appeal, portray the true challenges in the lives of Indian women. She is a feminist writer who speaks out against women's plight in a patriarchal culture where social, cultural, and political factors stand in the way of a new woman.

In the cluster of Indian novelists in English, Indian women also find their place with their male counterparts by their significant writings to the enrichment of Indian English novels. In the past, the works of women writers were not considered worthwhile. Women are always considered as inferior, submissive, unrewarded characters in the male writings. Women are being respected but their emotions, ideas, thinking are being unvalued. It is the modern women writers who have added a value to the woman's life through their writings. Indian woman novelists have turned a new phase into a woman's world where they introspect their life and find their place and identity. Many literary figures like Kiran Desai, Shashi Despande, Kamala Markandaya, Manju Kapur and so on have given a second thought, a new outlook to woman's life other than being a daughter, a wife and a mother. She is seen as a Woman with life in Manju Kapur's, "A Married Woman".

Key words: cluster, introspective, new outlook, submissive, place and identity

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the social chain, chained to a woman to regulate her, from all her freedom. Society always has been trying to keep women under control through many means like marriage which limits her world from a well educated, highly qualified self dependent, employed woman to a homemaker. With the tagline of a woman, from bedroom to kitchen has to perform all household duties like cooking, cleaning, washing,

upbringing children and taking care of husband and in-laws as Astha performs in Manju kapur's "A Married Woman". Unknowingly she is curbed of her own secured world by the male dominated world. The paper makes an attempt to relocate the status of woman, who still lives a self chained life inspite of 75 years of independence. Freedom still remains a part of unattainable, unapproachable bitter grapes for her. She is still hungry for unbiased love, care, affection, education and yearns for a dignified, respected life of her own." A Married Woman" on the other hand talks about the different phases in the life of a woman, pre and post marriage of Astha, a main female character in Manju kapur's "A Married Woman".

The article focuses on the social impediments experienced by the Indian Women in the light of Manju Kapur's celebrated novel, A Married Woman (2002). The impediments such as child marriage, forced marriage, gender politics, societal customs and traditions, social taboos, education inequality, discouragement for higher education, patriarchal hegemony, sexual politics are the reasons, tried to block the woman from enjoying her freedom, education, employment and empowerment are being explored here. Women are always held before them the choices of the family first and her desires are unconsidered. She is ever expected to make sacrifices for the family or for society. Other than family and societal impediments they suffer the religious patriarchy and social taboos. Men are free from such taboos. In this fiction, Kapur's educated heroines Astha and Pipeelika are intellectually liberated but suffer from the other ties of patriarchy, a lot of social and familial taboos. Though their lesbian relationship tries to resist the men's world by showing that they are happy in their own world like men, but Pipeelika Trivedi shifting to US for Phd, breaks her down.

The novel tells the story of Astha, the protagonist, a talented painter and a daughter of a culture-minded family. She is the parent's only child who is encouraged to enjoy education by her liberal progressive father who wants to educate her, but the mother becomes problematic who is brought up in an orthodox family believed in settling her daughter into a family by marrying her to a guy with which her work is done. As a girl, Astha is brought up with a number of family strict rules and regulations that demand girls to get married and parents work done with their daughters getting married.

A Married Woman (2002) centers round the life story of a young Astha from her childhood to adulthood. The novel narrates a young, aspiring, romantic, dreamy girl before and after life of her marriage. As every girl's dream is to fall in love with a handsome boy, Astha also falls in love with young Bunty of her age. Age demands love, they exchanged a number of love letters. As she is from an orthodox family, her love is interfered with by her mother, who complains to Bunty's father that his boy disturbs her daughter and ultimately their love is shattered.

During her college life she falls in love with young teacher Rohan, with whom she gets emotionally attached. But her love breaks down within few days when he refuses to marry her after passing time with Astha. As per parents' wishes Astha marries Hemant an American returned, educated and only son of his parents, except that he has two married sisters Seema and Sangeeta. Astha's mother is satisfied by Hemant's nuclear family and he holds a good position in society and self-governing business and property.

Astha's life is governed by her husband and in-laws. At the beginning of her married life, everything seemed happy and expected. But gradually her husband trains her to follow a marital routine. Astha indulged herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife. Love life started between them which later took the shape of one as dominative and the other submissive. They became the parents of a daughter. But like an Indian father Hemant, her husband demands for a son and Astha conceives and gives birth to a baby boy, Himanashu. Astha is honoured with heavy jewellery for giving birth to a son which

completed their family. Indians have a notion that with the birth of a son, completes the family and parents get moksha. Gradually Hemant changes from an American father to an Indian father. Taking care of the child goes to Astha who takes up both the responsibility of father and mother. In contrast, Hemant is busy with his business.

Hemant always supported Astha's love for painting and composing poems. She later expressed her wish to join Aijaz Theatre Troupe, a local political activist. Hemant disagrees with Astha's involvement in social movements and work with a man. As an Indianised husband Hemant is liberal regarding Astha's teaching profession and her art works, but is not happy with her social and political awareness with Aijaz Akhtar Khan. Hemant wants his wife to take care of family and its duties and her profession as an artist.

Next, she is judged as a careless woman whose potentiality is degraded. Her life as a wife and mother is questioned, she has been claimed by her husband for mismanagement, wastefulness, inefficiency and incapability about her family duty. She is not counted in any of the family decisions and slowly started losing the same care, attention and affection from her husband as before. Drawing and painting are her sources of relief and a way to express her pain, suffering and anguish.

Astha in such a distress, she happens to meet Pipeelika Trivedi, a Hindu girl who marries the Muslim Theatre activist Aijaz Akhtar Khan breaking traditions. But Pipeelika became a widow very soon when Aijaz died in a communal riot. As a widow she works as a NGO worker and works for social welfare.

Hemant accordingly makes fun of Astha's work as an artist and as a mother. She wants something of her own. Apart from her gallery work, she takes care of her kids' homework, kitchen work with her restless mind. Luckily, Astha sells two paintings for thirty thousand rupees. Hemant is happy now and wants to celebrate their fifteen years anniversary in Goa with the money of Astha that she has earned by selling painting.

As the days passed, Astha got busy with the anniversary of The Street Theatre Group. Astha is busy with her secular activities. Astha's mother-in-law starts complaining about her negligence in her household responsibilities. When Astha is busy with two days and three nights for Ayodhya Andolon, her husband Hemant goes to Delhi for the purpose of business. On her return from Ayodhya, she discovers a condom in her husband's suitcase. Astha doubts her husband's extramarital relationship. Their married life began to sink and started losing faith in their relationship.

Astha, with lost hope, meets Pipeelika for the first time. Astha soul searches for the one with whom she wants to share her hidden treasure. Astha finds Pipeelika, a perfect match with whom she feels comfortable with soul and body. She develops a lesbian relationship. Pipeelika, a young widow refuses for remarriage because of her bitter experience with her muslim husband Aijaz Akhtar Khan who had an extra marital affair with Reshana Singh, a classical singer in Street Theatre Group. Both Astha and Pipee sale in the same boat and shared the same feelings of hatred for males and thus they are engaged in a same sex relationship.

For Astha, her relationship with Hemant seemed just a sexual slavery and her relationship with Pipeelika comforted her. She wants to teach her husband a lesson and by her protest in building a lesbian relationship with Pipee. But very soon their comforted life comes to an end when Pipee goes to the US for a Ph. D. degree. Pipee departs from Astha with a heavy heart. Finally, Astha unwillingly comes back to her marital relationship with a swollen heart.

Marriage is a social norm that has to be followed by all girls willingly or unwillingly. It is a formal responsibility every woman has to bear. They have to go through this stage of life by choice or by force. By birth, they are taught to follow all the norms of the society and boys are free from such norms. Boys enjoy all the rights. Girls are taught to sacrifice all their desires for family, Marriage is an institutional agent that binds the opposite genders and fixes the equal responsibility to both husband and wife. As mother and father their responsibility doubles but the woman

is made a victim to bear all the responsibilities of the family which is unfair even in the case of Astha. She is expected to fulfill all the responsibilities that are expected by the society and fails to recognise Hemant's act of extramarital relationship as unacceptable. Marriage is the medium of female exploitation in Indian patriarchy that curbs her of her dreams, her life as an individual, her identity as a woman. For many ages she is trying to relocate her identity as an individual that man has been enjoying since ages.

Earlier she was exploited physically but in the present generations she has been exploited in different ways which is much more horrible than earlier generations. Manju Kapur's books focuses on the woman being deprived of her womanhood.

CONCLUSION

In the structure of the family she equally bears all the responsibilities of the society expected her to bear but it is the same society that has been ill treating and killing all her dreams. Household chores are systematically performed as a wife and as a mother without the least expectation from patriarchal society but even then she is claimed to be escaping from her duties. Astha's fall into such a category. She is the one who wakes up early and sleeps late after everyone goes to sleep. She is pictured as a well educated slave in the patriarchal world.

A woman is always called a dependent, a daughter depending upon her father during her childhood, depending upon her husband during her youth and depending upon her son during her old age. In this way she is curbed of her freedom in her stages of life. New patriarchal rules marginalize women to carry on their individual rights and freedom. In the novel and real life women are seen as dependent on one or the other throughout their life. She has been struggling to find a place, relocate her identity in all ages of life. A new woman with a search for a new identity is challenging.

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