

# MODERN MARRIED WOMAN'S VOICE: A STUDY OF MANJU KAPUR'S A MARRIED WOMAN

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## Abstract

Manju Kapur is the contemporary popular writer of Indian English Literature. The image of modern married woman and her quest for identity, her determination to realize personality and to achieve self-definition through life growth and experience, is portrayed in Kapur's second novel, *A Married Woman*. This article mainly focusses on the voices, agonies and aspirations of Astha, the Protagonist of the novel. She is the only child and her mother considers her as a social burden. She is always encouraged for study by her parents. She was fond of reading romantic novels in her teenage and had a short-lived relationship with Bunty and Rohan. She accepts to marry Hemant, a foreign return, the choice of her parents. Her husband's attitude changed after an initial bliss. When Hemant was away, she kept on thinking of only one thing and that was the moment of their union. She couldn't figure out what life was all about. She considered herself a woman of the world, a world engulfed in the film of her passion and the sex fluids. Her dissatisfaction developed to rebellion and restlessness. Her worry, discomfort, loneliness, and isolation, on the other hand, did not push her to express her happiness over her damaged relationship, but rather led to emotions of guilt, pessimism, and low self-esteem as she faced the problems of her life. She ached for freedom as her restlessness pushed her to relish complete solitude, a kind of captivity by the family, its commitments, and persecution. She develops psychosomatic symptoms of stress and depression and finds an escape in writing poetry and sketching. To reduce her boredom, she joined as a teacher in a school. Here, her mind and heart were happily engaged and she is attracted emotionally towards a youth Aijaz who is a social worker and artist. After his death, she was attracted towards his wife Pipeelika. Both wish to satisfy their inner feeling of romance which they could not fulfill with their spouses. Astha's character shows that modern woman has its own aspirations which should not be neglected by husband and family, otherwise there may a serious problem in family or married life. Modern woman is more demanding and is not ready to compromise with an attitude of neglect. A Woman has her own choice to live a life, takes a decision what she wants, but she has a relation with man who bound herself in a typical criterion of patriarchal structure.

**Keywords:** marriage, woman, patriarchy, agony, aspiration, defiance

Manju Kapur is the contemporary popular writer of Indian English Literature. She started her fiction writing at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kapur's second novel, *A Married Woman* which explores modern married woman and her quest for identity, her determination to realize personality and to achieve self-definition through life growth and experience,

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**Journal of the Oriental Institute**, ISSN: 0030-5324, UGC CARE LIST NO. 135,  
Vol. 71, Issue. 02, No.01, April -June: 2022, pp. 125-128

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“...despite belonging to a upper middle class liberal Hindu family, still has to fight against the bondages of patriarchal conventions in order to establish her identity” (Kapur 85). Moreover, this article mainly focusses on the voices, agonies and aspirations of Astha, the protagonist of the novel. Right from the beginning of the novel, Astha’s details have been presented in the light of women’s perspective. She is the only child of her parents. Her father is quite older than her mother because of their late marriage. Like the typical Indian parents, the parents of Astha carefully planned her future because she is the only hope in their life. Further, her father thinks that, “his daughter’s future lay in her own hands, and these hands were to be strengthened by the number of books that passed them...If she did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS, and find a good husband there...with a good job comes independence” (Kapur 2-3).

Astha was very curious about her education and she has the realization that only education can bring real freedom in her life. She was admitted in a college for higher education. On the other hand, her parents become conscious as well as anxious about her marriage. However, Astha does not appear to be in a hurry to marry. Bunty, her first love, still holds a special place in her heart. She will not accompany an unknown man. She finds new love in the arms of Rohan after her breakup with Bunty. Astha and Rohan become quite close in a short period of time. They begin to engage in physical intimacy, but their connection does not last long. In Indian society, any type of interaction between boys and girls prior to marriage is frowned upon.

Astha marries Hemant in the end. They are content with one another. They also have a good level of bodily fulfilment. It is at this juncture the couple decides to have children and Astha delivers her first baby, a girl. Hemant whose initial response to the girl child is seen that in western education no difference between a boy and a girl. He declares his high opinion about girls: “I want a daughter...In America, there is no difference between boys and girls. How can this country get anywhere if we go on treating our women this way?” (Kapur 57). Astha gives birth to a daughter and named her Anuradha and after that Astha delivers a baby boy very soon in her second pregnancy and named Himanshu. With the family becoming complete with two children Astha’s marital life enters a new phase where the husband becomes progressively busy with the business matters and gradually develops an indifferent attitude towards his wife and family commitments. As a result, they get unsatisfied after a few months. In her own unique way, Astha tries to console Hemant. Money isn’t everything, she tells him. Money cannot bring happiness to a person’s life. She says, “Money isn’t everything darling. Look, you have your family, me, our parents” (Kapur 50). She has actually realized that true happiness can only be found in the success of family life fulfilment.

Sometimes man does not have enough time for a woman. There could be several reasons for this. Business, employment, mental exhaustion, social duties, and so on are some of the obvious explanations for their lack of interest. Hemant could be logical. He thinks well of Astha, but only in terms of Astha’s sexual completion. But sex is nothing before mental happiness. Man’s natural tendency is to focus solely on bodily compulsion. Astha, on the other hand, recognizes a marriage characteristic. Marriage entails the surrender of personal interests, pride, and self-identity. Between Astha and Hemant, distance grows gradually. So, Astha is exasperated with stress, depression, negativity and anxiety. Astha slowly starts to disbelieve in the very institution of marriage. She now looks for an outlet to relieve the pressure that has been building up in her inner self through the pursuance of her creative abilities such as poetry and painting. ‘The eventual release of pain...To hide me in the break of day’ (Kapur 80-81). So, against her husband and in-laws’ opposition, she begins teaching in a public school. The Street theatre group holds a workshop in the school where Astha teaches. She meets a social worker Aijaz, the owner of the workshop. He stages social issues like unemployment, poverty, atrocities against women and communalism, etc. Despite her husband’s annoyance she participates in this workshop. Aijaz asks her to draught the script for the drama Babri Masjid. She puts in a lot of effort and receives a lot of praise from Aijaz, the director of the play. Astha is naturally drowned to him. During this workshop she finds that a tender feeling is developed between them. The relationship is deep-frozen as the workshop is over. After a few days, Astha reads the news of Aijaz and his troupe members murder while staging a play on Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy. Tears roll out of her eyes when she reads the news item. She participates in the condolence meeting and



funeral procession. She also joins the massive protest rally organized by Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. She is told that Aijaz has left behind a widow. She wants to meet her and shares her agonies. She makes the decision to travel to Ayodhya to resist extremism. Her mother-in-law objects to her going: "You know I never try to stop you from doing anything. Even when you neglect the children and are busy in your painting and meeting. I do not say anything. I am not the type to interfere...but it is my duty to point out that you are going too far" (Kapur 187). During her time in Ayodhya, she meets Pipeelika, one of the participants, and they go to various locations and shrines together, and she grows to like her. She later learns that the woman she met was Aijaz's widow. Pipeelika visits Astha in Delhi and spends some time with her. Despite her husband's and children's offences, a strong emotional bond develops between them. Astha has a crush on Pipeelika. Within a few sessions, they have developed a strong sexual bond. Astha is spending an increasing amount of time with Pipeelika. She is on the verge of ending her typical marriage and family life with Hemant. She's lost in a fog. Her mothering and duties as a wife are being put to the test. She makes the decision to abandon her home, husband, and family in order to pursue Pipeelika. She is unconcerned about her responsibilities to her family. She expresses her own preferences and dislikes. She advocates for violence free society. She protests the demolition of the mosque and the construction of temple in the place of the demolished mosque. Her speech in Ayodhya was delivered in a hushed tone. People should appreciate various religions, faiths, and values, she says. She couldn't tell the difference between a mosque and a temple. There is only one God. He can be found in every temple, mosque, church, and Gurudwara. It is fruitless for her to look for Him at a certain location. Regardless of the conflict between her personal and social lives, her voice is a representation of her freedom of opinion. Astha was surprised to learn that Pipeelika had been given a research scholarship by American University. Astha returns to her family, heartbroken, after she left India to study abroad. She also wished to return home with dignity and passion, but this was not feasible.

Astha's ambitions are not simple; her search for identity and cry for liberty and independence are not without foundation; and her frustration, depression, and animosity are not insignificant. Her unconventional behaviour is not surprising. She and Pipeelika appear to be challenging the traditional notion of society in which women play a minor role, demonstrating that they are different types of women who must play a larger part not just at home but also outside of it.

Kapur 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. In her novel *A Married Woman*, Astha 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. This article 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 like 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 tradition society where male domination is in power. The new woman is conscious for her rights, identity, independence and personal fulfillment. She turns towards lesbian relationship without thinking about her married life. This is a 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.

Thus, *A Married Woman* explores Astha's longing for a purpose to her life other than being a wife and mother against a vividly realized back-drop of Indian sectarian politics. Therefore, this novel is not a lesbian text because lesbian sexuality is depoliticalized and is reduced to the matter of private preference. Astha's choice of hetero-sexual family, marriage and children along with her private preference for lesbian sexuality, makes one wonder if it is a lesbian text. We are also told that even in the most intimate moments that Astha spends with Pipeelika, she cannot help



thinking about her kids. Her relation with Pipeelka was not the outcome of her sexual desire, to be with a woman, it was more an incidental happening resulting from her predicament. Astha's character shows that modern woman has its own aspirations which should not be neglected by husband and family otherwise there may a serious problem in family or married life. Modern woman is more demanding and is not ready to compromise with neglecting attitude. Singh very aptly says, "They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibility that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented" (76).

Every woman has her own choice to live a life, take a decision what she wants, but she has a relation with man who bound herself in a typical criterion of patriarchal structure. Hence, the fight of the protagonist is against the fascist mode resisting against the irrationality of denominational forces. Hindu fundamentalism is more different than the Muslim fundamentalism. Astha becomes the part of the group who protests against those, "Who have launched such a bloody war against secular society."

Moreover, when 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 frustrated and at last thinks to achieve her own goal for her own satisfaction or fulfillment. 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.

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