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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

ISSN: 1305-578X

Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17(3), 2021-2025; 2021

Emergence Of New Woman In Manju Kapur's A Married Woman

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APA Citation:

Kamala, K., & Shanthi, R. (2021). Emergence Of New Woman In Manju Kapur's A Married Woman, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 2021-2025

Submission Date:08/10/2021

Acceptance Date:22/12/2021

Abstract

Indian Women Writers have been depicting women in various incarnations. Women portrayed by earlier Indian Women novelists are the silent sufferers, a strict follower of traditional values and ethics, the unholder of social taboos, an epitome of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their counterparts, unlucky, unskilled about their rights and so on. Women are not supposed to voice for their rights, assert against injustice or question the already existing rituals and customs. They have to be silent, compliant, docile and inactive without demanding any of their rights as women they have to merely exist subjected to the patriarchal system. Concepts of individualism, quest for identity, protests and rebelliousness are alien ideas in Indian culture as far as women are concerned recently, the post-colonial Indian Women novelists have brought an immense change in the tendency of depicting women characters. A remarkable range of India's most accomplished women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Gita Hariharan and Manju Kapur have intuitively perceived the gender issues that upset women and portrayed women as an individual who rises against the suppressive and oppressive forces of patriarchy. Women are no longer characterized to surrender, submit and suffer to martyrdom; they reveal the hidden secrets and disclose the deliberate denials that are refutable in today's context.

Keywords: Women, Society, freedom, self, patriarchy, rebel, morality, quest, identity, lesbian, individuality.

1. Introduction

Manju Kapur is a celebrated author in the world of contemporary Indian English fiction; she has six novels to her credit till date: *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011) and *Brothers* (2016). Though all male characters in her novels exercise patriarchal control, they are not represented as heroes. They affect the spirit of women to such an extent that all the female protagonists, whether they are Virmati (*Difficult Daughters*), Astha (*A Married Woman*), Nisha (*Home*), Nina (*The Immigrant*) and Shagun (*Custody*), all are on the verge of segregating themselves from the company of men. These female protagonists are trying to carve an identity for themselves in the male-centred society. Society, morality and values are like peonage to

them. Therefore all of them are marching forward in an inexplicable manner amidst ruthless urbanization and westernization Dr.Ashok Kumar comments thus.

A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus, it is interesting to see the emergency of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women waiters from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic women eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact (Kumar 164)

Told with sympathy and intelligence, "*A Married Woman*" is the story of an artist who aspires for a career and homosexual relations challenges the restraints of middle class existence every now and then. Astha has everything an educated middle class Delhi Women could ask for children, a dutiful loving husband and comfortable surroundings she is at the risk of losing the acquisitions of her conventional marriage. The term "freedom" in the context of a woman can be economical, educational and more imperatively sexual emancipation. Sexual freedom can be interpreted in two distinct ways. First is the liberty of enjoying extra-marital physical relationship and the second refers to gender freedom. Gender freedom means freedom from all types of male dominated constraints, freedom of expression and living her life in her way alone.

In *A Married Woman* the protagonist Astha manifests a quest for sexual freedom. Both aspects of sexual freedom can be evident in the case of Astha extra-marital sexual relationship is presented in new dimension of rebel feminism. Astha in an artist whose canvas challenges the restraints of middle class existence and the established notions of heterosexual relationships with pipee. Ashok Kumar opines thus:

Manju kpuur has exposed a woman's passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance with passion to revolutions the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for their triumph (Ashok 165). Delving deep into Astha's conscience we can observe that in college she created, "Delicious images of a romantic somewhat shadowy man holding her in his manly embrace" (AMW-1)

At her young age she falls in love with Bunty whom she meets casually and fancies him to be the ring of her dreams later on she is greatly relaxed in the luxuriance ambience of Rohan whom she meets in the college Manju Kapur writes about her romantic fury thus:

All she wanted was for him to start, so that the world could fall away, and she should be lost. This love, she told herself, no wonder they talk so much about it (AMW-24)

Astha believes that a woman not only longs for bread, butter and physical comfort but also desires something more, something else. She never finds that something more, something else. As a result she feels a kind of incompleteness in her life. She is carried for away from filial duties due to her individuality and quest for emancipation. The imagined mansion of the married life of Astha develops cracks after becoming a mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of 'Mother and father' for her children she is denied self-fulfillment and the institution of marriage collapses to defiance and restlessness.

Astha thinks that the sexual gratification is not the only thing a woman longs for in her life Astha finds Hemant in different even to her small petty desires the novelist writes thus:

Astha's desires receded she felt cold, dreary and distanced from him she had been waiting for him all day thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. (AMW-50)

Hemant blames Astha of mismanagement, incapability and wastefulness. For hemant maneuvering homely chores was the sion of a good wife. Astha reaches the turning point of her lipe when she meets Aijaz Astha begins to compare and contrast between Hemant and Aijaz. Astha finds Hemant dispassionate and objective to all she did on the other hand Aijaz is very perceptive, giving what Astha sought for, appreciating for what she did and encouraging her to do something of her won Hemant's indifference even in Aijaz's death furthered her distance from hemant. Astha is smothered and choked from within she is in need of an outlet to express her repression this result is painting. Astha longs for appreciation from someone it can be Hemant but not at all it can be Aijaz but he is no more. The ideal gratification eventually got its outlet in a dream. In her dream she is with Aijaz not with Hemant Astha accomplishes her sought affair with Aijaz in dream Astha becomes a protagonist and drafts a poem when Hemant rejects her views on poetry and paintings she writes thus:

The eventful release from pain in the tearing relentless separation from those in halrit loved can come so slowly it seems there will never be a day of final peace and tranquility (AMW-180)

Hemant considers the poem as an attack on male-dominancy. But she gives up waiting and begins sadly to draw and paint sketching with soft pencils and coloured charcoal. Hemant proves to be a stoic rebelling and unfeeling when it comes to the issues of Astha, be it a matter of demanding a separate room for painting, expecting ideal love from her husband purchasing of a box in Goa or seeking permission for going to Ayodhya. Hemant tries to make her understand many times that she is a married woman whose responsibilities towards family are more than other responsibilities. Hemant expects Astha to be part of his decisions whether she likes or not. He demands Astha to comply his wishes he comments thus:

You seem to have forgotten that your place as a decent family woman is in the home and not in the streets (AMW-172)

Astha is not contented with earning money, feeding children, running a family, social obligations and always remaining bound for Astha these were not just living a life. He aspires for some higher and wider objective in life. It was just unthinkable for Hemant to fulfill her objective. She judges the male impression of woman and thinks that a married woman is an object of mind fucking. When Aijaz Akhtar Khan dies in a communal riot. Astha feels it foam the heart. She is not able to stop her tears and sentiments.

Hemant, watching her, immediately lost his temper 'Why are you crying?' he demanded 'What was he to you?' Some murderers trap and burn a whole theatre group in a van and you ask me why I am crying?' 'This kind of thing happens all the time, I don't see you wasting your tears'. I can't weep for the whole world, only when it means something to me may be I am deficient, but I knew him, he was always working for every body's good, even the children loved him and he has been burnt to death. Is not that reason enough? She sobbed rocking to and fro with rage and grief (AMW-139)

The irritation, anguish and travails of Indian middle class woman who are at a loss to condemn social conventions and traditions are well brought out by Manju Kapur, Astha tries her best to find her place in family and society. Due to her moral imbalance and unnatural wishes to be in communion with Pipee, Aijaz's widow she reaches nowhere. Astha meets Pipee who again becomes the source of delight to

her. She feels spellbound, reaches on the extreme in every meeting she falls in love with pipee. This new engagement results in new clashes between Astha and Hemant. She swallows her direction and acts accordingly. Astha and Pipee are under the illusion that they are making themselves free from the shackles of male dominance. But they stand nowhere when thing freedom is weighed on the scale of morality, values and maintenance of family peace. Their identity is turned to naught. Astha never takes for granted any comment from Pipee. She irritates Hemant Pipee makes Astha feel that she has potential and she can never go wrong. She also instills the confidence in Astha that she can lead a fuller life away from home Pipee understands Astha more than Hemant. Moreover Pipee persuades Astha to involve in a new relationship with her. "There was no aphrodisiac more powerful than talking, no seduction more effective than curiosity" (AMW-218). Astha's relationship with pip ensures her freedom particularly from Hemant's general indifference in whatever she did Pipee's words appeases her shattered and battered soul she feels.

Men were so pathetic, so fucked un themselves, they only understood the physical and in this way she felt soothed (AMW-219)

Pipee surprised Astha by the typical reality and lesbianism a real and normal phenomenon Pipee lays bare Astha's soul before her and eventually groomed her. She turnabout to be so defiant and chides Hemant when the latter comes to make love Astha reaches on the extreme as she begins telling lies against the will of man as he has not owned her Astha feels that a married woman's status is that of an unpaid servant or a slave in the family. The thought of divorce results in social and economic death in Indian status. The reason for Astha's challenging relationship with Pipee is that when she has lost all her hope of love from anybody she finds a real love Astha opines that is her husband loves her, he loves her at night she thinks thus:

If god had given her love, there was no time supplement with the gift, so Astha often found herself wishing despairingly she could live each day twice, once with pipee and once on the ordinary plane (AMW-235)

Thought Astha has in numerable engagements she manages to come out of her marital home into the land of illicit relations. She throws aside her filial duties and participates in Ram Mandir and Babri Masjid issue along with Pipee. She neglects her family totally. Though Hemant tries to stop her she never commences on his path her husband Hemant does not find a place in her life his condition is like that of a rubber stamp. If she decides to go, she goes whether he permits or not she is least bothered about her husband, children or in-laws. When Hemant reminds her of her sacred obligations she tells him that she is going to demonstrate outside Rashtrapati Bhavan. Each and every member of the family say something as her whole family is disturbed. She wishes to free herself from family even without caring for husband and children when her mother-in-law interferes she loses her temper. She says:

You know I never try and stop you from doing anything. Even when you neglect the children, and are busy in your painting and meetings, I do not say anything I am not the type to interfere I am glad my daughter-in-law does not feel she has to sit at home. Till I have the use of my hands and feet I will help you, but it is my duty to point that you are going too far (AMW-187)

The children cry when they get poor marks but she does not bother about the future of her children. She is unwilling to participate in the parents meeting of their school just because she considers it as time consuming. Hemant tries to stop her when she goes to Ekta Yatra. Astha comments thus:

Then he started and went on and on I was running off on a wild goose chase, neglecting my family and burdening his poor mother with my responsibilities I had no sense of what was fitting for a woman; I had bothered to ask him whether it was appropriate or convenient ever since Aijaz had died, and I had started being exploited by the Munch, and gone to Ayodhya and met Pipeelika khan, I had no sense of home, duty, wifehood or motherhood (AMW-248)

Astha's quest for freedom becomes futile in the end she realizes that it is a mere illusion it has kept Astha blind of her situation for long. She is not ready to abandon her family, when Pipee demands Astha to come to her leaving her family behind. After this, Pipee departs from Astha's life forever and leaves for U.S to pursue Ph.D., In the end Astha has to come to terms with life, come back to her family with all that fellows with no place for Pipee. She sees herself as a bird packing at a few left our crumbs from the feast of life she, a tiny particle of dust wanted to soar higher unfortunately the wind dropped down and dropped her down everything became dull for Astha, the grass looked bleak, the point or canvas colorless Astha comments on her devastated married life thus:

When she was with Hemant, she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that very reason it was soothing to be with her body was his, when made love it was Pipee's face Astha saw, her hands she felt she accepted the misery of this dislocation as her due for being a faithless wife (AMW-287)

2. Conclusion

Astha's rediscovery of her difference with her husband, her transition from a tender bride to a battered wife her engagement with Pipee led to the realization of the other state of woman in her distress. This leads to an immoral guilt consciousness of lesbian love rationalizing her outmoded morality towards the end Astha reaches nowhere. She does not appreciate superstition, subjugation and having children just for their discriminated sex in the Indian context.

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