

# Idiosyncrasy of women's perspective in Manju Kapur's 'A Married Woman'

<sup>1</sup>S. Lakshmi Prabha

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College, C. Mudlur, Chidambaram  
DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2023.14.03.175

## Abstract

Manju Kapur is a feminist writer because in all her novels she deals with the pathetic and oppressive situations of Indian women. Her novels denounce the socio-cultural predicament of Indian women imprisoned in a male-dominated patriarchal society. Her main novels are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Homes*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody*. Most of her main characters are educated wives and belong to the Indian middle class. They face struggles for freedom, identity, equality with people, and their own space. Her suffering and suffocation in her family and marital relationships are clearly reflected in her novels. This paper examines Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* from a feminist perspective.

**Keywords:** Manju Kapur, Married Woman, Feminist, Female, Patriarchy, Indian, Leiden.

## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is very sacred. It is very important in Indian culture. It is accepted as the union of two souls. She embodies trust, cooperation, integrity, dedication and understanding. Both counterparts include duties and responsibilities to keep the marriage running smoothly. Traditionally, all duties, compromises and restrictions were assigned to women. A woman was confined to her four walls. Gradually it suffocated in them. They rebelled against the puppet treatment of the patriarchy. The result was the birth of a new revolutionary star in the literary world. They left an indelible mark through their work. Our country's female writers have fought for their place and shown the world that women are not forced to be silenced, they can be empowered by speaking up. Her work helps raise society's awareness of the demands of women, provides a medium for self-expression, rewrites India's history, reconstructs stereotypical images, and elevates the status of women.

Manju Kapur's work is an activist lecture, not because she is a woman dealing with women's issues. She explores the culture of middle-class women in Manju Kapur, where women's roles have undergone profound changes. Her writings are little more than an analysis of women's character and cultural identity. She portrays female characters realistically. Depicting the inner sensitivity of the female heart, Kapur demonstrates a mature understanding of the female psyche. The women in Manju Kapur's novels are personified as new women fighting the evils of society. The protagonists of her novels seek to break the tradition of silence. Her protagonist experiences a loathsome absurdity and seeks to nurture an alienated self in a meaningless and chaotic world. I am giving They are more discriminated against and prejudiced based on their gender. Women live and struggle under the oppressive mechanisms of a closed society. It is reflected in the writings of Manju Kapur. She delves deep into the psyches of female characters, where she finds they struggle to find a balance between themselves and society. It highlights the factors of loneliness and alienation. Her novels depict the inner workings of a sensitive woman in her relentless quest for a meaningful life.

In the heroines of Manju Kapur one could see the emergence of new women who do not want to become rubber dolls so that others can move as they please. , asserts women's individuality and strives to become independent through education. They feed on their desire to be independent and have their own life. Kapur highlights the factors that limit women's freedom to live, grow and achieve the same as men. Methods of exploiting religion, tradition, and myth to force women to accept second-class status lead women to claustrophobia and restricted lives. Female protagonists resist and overcome ideological oppression, reconstructing ideals and meaningfully reinventing themselves. In this sense, her novels are a major contribution to the field of Indo-British fiction and feminist psychoanalysis in India.

In her novel *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur understood writing as a protest, as a way of mapping women's experiences. This novel is a candid confession of a woman in her personality cult on the brink of a bad marriage. This is becoming more and more visible in modern society.

*A Married Woman* (2002), Manju Kapur's second novel, focuses on deeply ingrained family values and rebellion against the

institution of marriage. In this novel, the novelist deals with an Indian woman who is trying to make a name for herself and place herself in the life and sociocultural sphere. She mainly focuses on a woman and her wants, desires, actions and reactions.

**Manju Kapur writes:**

I am interested in the lives of women whether in the political arena or in the domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupation in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both the inner and outer spaces in their lives what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home. (Kapur 1)

Astha is the female protagonist of her *A Married Woman*, belonging to a middle-class family seeking an identity as a woman in her own right, against existing patriarchal constructs and appears as an independent woman. She is a well-educated married woman and has everything a married woman wants in life - an established husband, loving children and a happy and comfortable life. In Gupta's view:

Though she seems to be happy being a teacher and mother of two kids, there is always an undercurrent of resentment against being treated as one of the inferior sex (Gupta 13).

*A Married Woman* is Astha's exploration of identity in frustration, alienation, oppression, isolation, and the need for an artificial culture. In Indian culture, middle class parents are always worried about their daughter's future, education and marriage. Marrying a daughter is a burden for them because they have to find a suitable life partner for her daughter. Even after marriage, issues such as dowry, common family system, and incorporation into the in-law family are some of the key points that need to be resolved. Astha's mother is a traditional Indian who can not think of a way out of the narrow gender roles of a patriarchal society.

Astha's mother wants her daughter's wedding to take place at the right time. Her mother teaches and trains her how to live and conform to her in-laws' house, how to obey her husband as a god, or how to worship her husband like a traditional Indian woman.

Like many of her other adult girls, Astha has her own dreams and desires. She has her own romantic world. She dreams of being a prince. As a result, she falls in love with Bunty. Her love for Bunty is beautifully told by the novelist:

Day and night the thought of him kept her inside churning, she was unable to eat, sleep or study. Away from him her eyes felt dry and empty. Her ears only registered the sound of her voice. Her mind refused to take seriously anything that was not his face, his body, his feet, his hands, his clothes (Kapur 8-9).

As generally happens for teenage girls in Indian culture, Asta's love affair ends tragically. She puts all her relationship with Bunty behind her and she enrolls in college, where she falls in love again with her college professor, Rohan. Out of her love, she develops a physical relationship with him, but Rohan refuses to marry her after drinking from her body, leaving her alone to study at Oxford University. He does not love her, but uses her only to meet his physical needs. Caught up in her bourgeois values, she accepts her destiny. Ultimately, she agrees to marry Hemant, a man chosen by her parents for an arranged marriage. A Hemant is a permanent foreigner who belongs to a family of bureaucrats. Both are settled in the posh area district of New Delhi. However, Astha is not happy and satisfied with her married life. She is tired of boring and boring life because she has to live alone in her house all day long. She has to wait hours to join Hemant's company. She is stuck in the traditional roles of her wife, daughter and daughter-in-law.

To escape the monotony of her life, she decided to take a job as a teacher at St. Anthony's School. Her job changed her life and she began to open up to the outside world, learning about the boundaries and limitations around her. Now from a full-time housewife to a working woman. She came out of the four walls of her house. She is no longer a caged bird, but she begins to live like a free bird. This is the beginning of their search for identity. Like a traditional Indian woman, she tries to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Like an Indian wife, she fulfills the double duty of a dutiful wife by serving her husband and teacher. She also does all the household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, raising children and taking care of her husband and her in-laws. In this way she realizes her own subordinate position in her husband's house. Through the character Astha, Manju Kapur exposes the position of thousands of traditional wives who are considered "submissive" to their husbands.

According to Indian culture, having children is very important for women. This position is unique to women. A woman's life is fulfilled only when she gives birth to a child. Asta also wants to live out her life with the dream of being a child. So she encourages her husband to have children. In time, she becomes the mother of two children. Anuradha and Himanshu. Astha is committed to raising children.

As the time passes, Hemant turns out to be a busy man, focusing on his business to build her future and not caring about Asta and her children. Their married life is disrupted due to Hemant's change in attitude and neglect towards Astha. Astha is always

unhappy with Hemant's attitude towards them. This troubled relationship has robbed them of their happy home. She controls everything inside and outside her home, but she is accused by her husband of her poor management, wastefulness, inefficiency and incompetence. She does not find from her husband the same care, warmth and attention she received in her past. Unable to find a way out of her situation, Asta finds her own remedy by writing poetry and drawing sketches to ease her feelings of rudeness and loneliness. Painting is a source of relief for her. In writing her poetry and drawing sketches, she expresses pain, suffering, fear and sorrow.

Through, the character Astha, the author hopes to reflect the hard and competitive life of an Indian woman. In patriarchal cultures, women have no identity of their own. She is like a wingless, caged bird that has no right to fly independently. Indian women must obey men's instructions. She must obey her father before marriage and her husband after marriage. She has no right to choose the path she wants. This woman has suffered greatly to this day under special pressure and control. She faces discrimination and prejudice based on gender. This social reality is reflected in Manju Kapoor's novels. Here, she seeks equality and reveals the subordinate position of women as worthy members of a patriarchal society. Her wife is forced to always obey her husband, and her husband does not care about her wife's feelings. Astha's feelings and emotions are ignored by Hemant.

Another female character in this novel is Astha's mother. The novelist describes the character of Astha's mother very well. She is a quintessential Indian woman and like traditional Indian women, she adheres strongly to patriarchal norms. She is used to living under male rule and personally prefers male domination in her family. She also asks Astha to worship her husband like a god. So, when she sells her one of her properties, she gives her large sum of money to her Hemant instead of her Astha. When Astha asks her about it, she replies:

"He's a man and he knows money. He'll invest it for you and your children." (97)

Both characters are ideologically contrasting. One represents a typical Indian woman and the other represents a modern or new 21st century woman with new thoughts and ideologies. Asta raised his voice against male dominance and fights against the family and the society to establish her identity. Like an Indian woman she does not want to turn her face from the familial responsibilities of a wife, daughter-in-law and a mother but she wants to participate in all the decisions of the family.

The novelist portrays Astha as an independent woman. But there are many ways she faces identity issues. During her family vacation, her family visits Goa. In Goa she wants to buy a silver box but her husband refuses to buy it. She is strongly rejected by her husband who hurts her so much. This is the condition of most working Indian women who earn for their family but have no independent right to spend it for themselves.

I also earn. Can't I buy a box if I want, even if it is a little overpriced? You earn ! snored Hemant. 'What you earn, now that is really something, yes, that will pay for this holiday. (Kapur 165)

Such suppressive and oppressive attitude by Hemant undermines Astha's dignity. It proves that men have the right to make all decisions because of their superiority in family and society. When Hemant refuses to buy Astha a silver box, her dignity is violated, her self-esteem and independence are shaken, and she begins to feel guilt, negativity, and lack of self-esteem as she faces life's challenges.

Her inner turmoil and search for identity led her to a street theater group. Aijaz is a history lecturer and founder of a theater group. Astha's social spirit and attitude are motivated and encouraged by Aijaz. Aijaz appreciates her intelligent and talented mind when she reads her script about the burning issue of her Babri Masjid and her Ram Jammabhoomi being dramatized at school. Asta's husband is well aware that she is an excellent and intelligent writer and poet, but while Aijaz thanked her every time, he never thanked her. Always compares her husband to Aijaz, who always helps her, prefers her in every difficult situation, and appreciates what she does. As a result, Asta becomes more and more involved in working outdoors. Actively participates in workshops sponsored by theatrical companies. Meanwhile, tender feelings develop between Asta and Aijaz. Unfortunately, Aijaz and members of his army were kidnapped and murdered while performing a play about Babri Masjid and Ram Jammabhoomi. Her death motivates and guides Asta to act as her social activist and join rallies for justice, despite her husband's objections. She is also busy with paintings for a donation to an exhibition set up to commemorate the Street Theater Group. Due to all these activities, she is unable to take care of her family and home. Hemant then angrily advises her to give up all these activities. But she refuses because Astha wants her own identity, independence and self-actualization. It becomes clear when she says "I want something of my own" (148). Like Virginia Woolf in *A Room of My Own*, she wants her own room. She also asks about her sister Sangeeta's room, but Hemant angrily refuses to comply with her request.

Astha wants her own room. She wants to have fun outside as well as inside the house. There she attended a meeting of Sampradayakuta Mukti Manti to protest this decision and denounce the decision to build a temple of Lord Rama on the premises of the Masjid outside Rashtrapati Bhavan. Hemant and her in-laws refuse. Asta ignores her and she decides to go to Ayodhya because the Mankh insists on giving a speech at a public meeting. Now she decides to fight the old taboos of the patriarchal society. She visits Ayodhya, where she meets Aijaz's wife Pepyrika. In total we visit different places and temples.

Astha finds satisfaction in her Pipee's arms. Unlike her husband, Piperica seems to be more understanding, caring and loving

towards her. Asta said she refused to approach Hermant when she found a condom in her pocket. , instead showed more interest in Pipey. Her relationship with Pipeelika puts a new twist on her quest for identity. Her roles as wife, mother, daughter-in-law and mistress are in conflict. But she feels that as a wife, as a mother, she cannot deny her responsibility to her family. Asta decides to leave her home, her husband and children in charge of Pippy, but Pippy receives a letter from her brother regarding her Ph.D. enrollment in an American university. Her pipe leaves her and Astha returns to her conventional married life on her own. Meanwhile, Hemant also develops chest pains from the burden of work and Astha's attention is drawn to him. Like an ideal Indian wife, she takes care of her Hemant's health, diet and exercise. Astha has sought a lesbian relationship to take revenge on the patriarchal society, its traditions and especially on her husband, but she cannot emotionally break free from the marital home. She is busy in Piperica Even at times, she always worries about her children.

The end of her novel is very important. It shows the inability of Indian women to break family ties. Astha encounters different stages through different relationships in her quest for identity and complete independence in her life. She also enters into socially forbidden relationships.

Astha finds a kind of fulfillment outside the home in having a lesbian relationship with Piperica. She has everything Husband, children, marital status, comfort environment. But she lacks what she wants to achieve in her life. Astha's decision to return to her family instead of abandoning it was not forced on her this time; it was her own decision as a mature woman. She returns to her traditional roots, but has her own choices. Thus, Astha represents the image of a new woman who longs to have her own place within the orthodox patriarchal culture. She fights for freedom and speaks out against a male-dominated society. She tried her best to break the tormented silence trying to get out of the cage.

To conclude one can say that Manju Kapur registers her concern for Indian Women in this novel. She dwells on various feministic issues in this novel like female education and their empowerment, financial independence and so on. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in post-colonial India. Manju Kapur advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. It is important to note that education plays dominant role in the lives of women. If in certain cases it fails to free them from the shackles of male dominance, social tradition and popular prejudices. It also gives them the authority to doubt and question to assert and reshape their lives. Her novel *A Married Woman* enables us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against biases and search for distinct identity. We can say that her novel evokes some concern over the problems of women in a male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix and a husband stands as a sheltering tree. Hence progress and development depends on the emancipation and empowerment of both the sexes.

## REFERENCES

1. Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: India Ink, 2006 print.
2. Mishra, Binod. "Obsession to Ovation: A Thematic study of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*." *Studies in Women Writers in English*. Ed. Mohit Ray and Rama Kundu. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2005.
3. Sharma, Ram. "Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*: A Study of Woman's Struggle." *Rise Of New Womans*. Ed. Satendra Kumar. New Delhi: Manglam Publishers, 2013.
4. Ashok Kumar, *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feministic Study* New Delhi: Swarup and Publishers, 2010.
5. Gajendra Kumar, *Indian English Literature: A New Perspective* New Delhi: Saarup & Sons, 2001.
6. Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman*, New Delhi: India Ink, 2002.
7. Gupta, Poonam Rani. "Breaking the Tradition of Silence: A Study of Manju Kapur's Novel." *Rise of New Woman: Novels of Manju Kapur*. Ed. Ram Sharma. Delhi: Manglam Publications, 2013. Print.
8. Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: India Ink, 2002. Print.
9. Sharma, Gajendra Dutt and Rakhi Maheshwari. "Woman in Quest for Sexual Freedom and Emancipation in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*". *Rise of New Woman: Novels of Manju Kapur*. Ed. Ram Sharma. Delhi: Manglam Publications, 2013. Print.