



**FROM SUBDUING TO INTROSPECTION: DISENCUMBERING THE
SOCIAL DISABILITIES OF WOMANHOOD IN MANJU KAPUR'S
*A MARRIED WOMAN***

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Abstract

Writing about characters and society is a form of introspection through allegation, and literature is where this occurs. Woman writer Manju Kapur, who has given up on her career, explores freedom and the precarious position of women in society. Her web series, titled "The Married Woman," was released on the internet on the occasion of International Women's Day. Furthermore, it addressed the challenges that are faced by middle-class women who are educated. Because their needs and goals are ignored, all of her ladies are perceived as being malleable in their lives and unable to conform to society's standards

Keywords: Dilemma; Female Kinship; Responsibility; Self - Satisfaction; Submissiveness.

Introduction

A woman must be virtuous, chaste, submissive, homely, graceful and devoted to her husband and his family. She must seek pleasure in these relationships. The faintest of any idea that every being exists primarily for the realization of oneself can never occur to her in the wildest of her dreams (Akhilleshwar 95).

India's women have clearly made progress in the fifty years since the country's independence, but much work needs to be done before there is full female sovereignty. Five years later, Manju Kapur returns to narrating women's difficulties in her second novel, *A Married Woman*, from the perspective of the ongoing struggle for liberation. There are variations in size, and other people have given them names. such as a wife, mother, sister, mentor, and daughter.

However, the woman's face is unchanged and won't be altered. Because it creates peace and tranquillity in the marriage, an Indian lady must be merely an obedient and subservient consort.

It is forbidden for women to voice their feelings and preferences because doing so could jeopardize their marriage. In today's world, women are fiercely arguing over the pursuit of their individual identities. Not enough room exists for uncertainty. Like many other female writers, Manju Kapur emphasizes the value of individuality in everyone while simultaneously recognizing the significance of the familial tie and expressing the challenges of her female characters. Women get treatment akin to dirt at specific stages of their lives. They need to be vigilant about their chastity and commitments in an effort to be honest with oneself when their thoughts and feelings are routinely ignored.

Even if a woman's efforts to succeed in her quest for self-expression were unsuccessful, she nevertheless deserves admiration for fighting patriarchal expectations and constraints in order to achieve self-actualization and satisfaction with herself over the course of her life. Poojatolani says:

"Even today, thousands of girls sit within four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to close their own lives, decide for themselves whether they want to be homemakers or move. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for a pizza with friends." (Poojatolani)

As Simon de Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents

in a society it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine.” Manju Kapur a well-known writer in contemporary Indian English literature and has been dubbed the Jane Austen of India. Her writings address every facet of the patriarchal culture and modern family. Her writings offer readers a contemporary portrayal of the modern woman, a person who craves to leave the protection of her family and build her own path. She represents a new woman trying to find her identity in her paintings.

A wide range of female writers emerged in the later half of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, addressing issues of women adjusting to life with family, domestic violence, health care, education, jobs, and working conditions. In dealing with contemporary hot-button themes such as sexual orientation, adultery, infertility, separation, and abduction, Manju Kapur provides her protagonists a distinct advantage over the others. In the field of Indian English literature, Kapur is a well-known novelist with international recognition. Her creative output consists of six books, including *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), *Custody* (2011), and *Brothers* (2016), all of which have received critical praise. She also served as the editor of the 2014 Hay House India publication *Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves*.

Manju Kapur has a remarkable way of expressing the inner thoughts and sentiments of women in her paintings. It is funny to note that Virmati, Ida, Astha, Pipeelika, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, and Ishita are all searching for their family in the incorrect way. Manju Kapur's area of specialization at Delhi University was English literature. Her characters are therefore also well-educated, and their wisdom fosters independent thought. It gives individuals the courage to defy societal conventions that would otherwise force them to submit to oppressive laws and regulations. Since education is the only route to independence, they are conscious of its importance. Every one of them tries to be assertive. These characters provide us a distinct perspective on assertive modern Indian women who may connect with a lesbian, as Astha does in *A Married Woman*, or they may have a scandalous liaison with a married neighbor, as Virmati does in *Difficult Daughters*, or our married neighbor.

In comparison to their mothers, modern women are, on the whole, more emotionally and intellectually developed than their mothers were. This is something that novelist and contemporary Kapur is aware of. The historical records of Indian middle-class society found in her novels. They represent everything that happens in a middle-class family realistically throughout time, including genital malfunction, acceptance, adultery, planned marriage politics, adultery, infertility, and sexual abuse, among many other domestic issues. Manju Kapur's literary works depict the many nuances of women's mental health issues. where the books depict a feminist movement against ingrained traditions and conventions that serve as

justification for women's oppression in a patriarchal society. The novel *A Married Woman* addresses how patriarchy has become more widespread and how they are fighting for manumission. The journey of a lady who faces the empty shell of her life and ultimately looks for fulfillment. Generally speaking, men and women experience patriarchy and societal traditions differently. A woman who, in one way or another, rebels against the established structure is a unique individual.

A Married Woman is a beautiful, real, and engrossing novel of love and deep connection that takes place during a time of political and religious upheaval. An artwork that goes above and beyond the call of duty. This is supposed to happen in order to keep up with the generation we live in. Two of Kapur's powerful female characters, Astha and Pipeelika, are liberated intellectually from the limitations of patriarchy. From Astha's early years until her forties, the narrative portrays her existence, alternating between various expedients and straits, honors and rejections, commissions and annoyances. She is her parents' only child. Her liberal progressive father wanted to see her educated, and his actions and words demonstrated what a loving parent he was! "He didn't want his daughter to be like him-self, dissatisfied and wasted. You have so much potential, you draw, you paint, you read, you have a way with words, you do well academically, the maths is a little weak, but never mind, you must sit for the competitive exams. With a good job comes independence." (4) Yet her conventional mother, who only wants to see her daughter established in a secure arranged marriage, presents an obstacle. "Brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear". (1)

The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit is ripe it must be picked. Later she might get into the wrong company and we will be left wringing our hands, if she marries at this age, she will have no problem adjusting. We too are not so young that we can afford to wait. (20)

She tells Astha: "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth?" (1). Through Astha's story, Kapur illustrates how contemporary women ultimately decide to follow the path of freedom and dignity. Astha finds satisfaction in her existence there by defying patriarchal norms that would have justified her identity. Astha is so happy in her married life that she cannot even articulate her feelings and is solely lost in her husband. Astha experiences her whole femininity, which Kapur highlights: "She felt a woman of the world, the world that was covered with the film of her desire, and the fluids of their sex." (46)

Astha's life is made easier by marriage, but eventually she begins to feel unhappy and alone. Whether it's Astha's artistic ability, her tantrums, or her desire to become a teacher, he constantly finds something to criticize. As a wife, Astha always yearns for her husband's attention, but every time she tries to tell him that she wants to spend some special time with

him, she gets the response that she works too hard and doesn't have time for courtship. He only gives her affection in return by making love; by love, he only means physical sex and pleasure. In this regard, the writer asserts: "This is how he liked her. The looks on his face become focused as he pulled her sari palla away and yanked at the rest of the hooks on her blouse, drawing it down from her shoulders and arms" (67). In this connection, Simmi Gurwara opines that:

In the early years of her marriage, she was captivated by the magic of their sexual life. She eagerly looked forward to a physical union with her husband and enjoyed it immensely thinking physical intimacy to be the be-all and end-all of her married life. (90)

Astha wants to know the amount of money her mother gave Hemant. She states that her goal is to be self-sufficient: "That's not what I mean. I know she trusts you, certainly much more than she trusts me, but is it such a bad thing if I know how much is in my name and how I can have access to it? She meant nothing personal. She didn't want to feel dependent, that was all. Surely equals could relate better than master and slaves?" (99). Based on a traditional Indian web series featuring a loving family, *The Married Women* asks how it will become ordinary if there are no surprises? The two ladies at the center of the story are Astha and Peeplika, played by Ridhi Dogra and Monica Dogra. In an interview, she begins by discussing how the novels are being adapted for television and film:

Many novels are converted into movies around the world. If it is well done, it surely makes a mark. I want a lot of readers to be exposed to my work, through whichever medium possible. When you go to watch a movie, you do get to explore a totally different medium for a story already created. I don't have first thoughts as such but when they sent me a little promo video of two minutes, I thought to myself, 'Wow, this is really beautiful'. I'm so pleased. The two minutes that I got to see were pretty faithful to the book.

Astha starts to feel that in an attempt to fulfill her responsibilities to her family and to perform the tasks that are typically expected of her, she has given up on her uniqueness. She struggles with feelings of loneliness. It is clear that her experiences of isolation and loneliness have a big impact on her. She was raised in the conventional, average middle-class home. Astha is left alone at home by her husband, who is always preoccupied with work. "A deep seed of happiness settled in the pit of her stomach, she was married, she didn't have to be the focus of her parents' anxieties any longer" (37).

She feels really let down by the way her family and society see the birth of her daughter, Anuradha. Although she is happy to have children now that she is married, she is upset about the gender gap. It has also become common knowledge that Astha's mother is a stereotypical woman who values having a boy more than anything else.

When Astha was expecting, her mother-in-law did a pooja so that she would have a son.

All of Astha's dreams are dashed when she encounters reality; she had thought that her destiny would be shaped by her partner who would spoil or look after her. "I had responsibilities to my parents. I am the only son, and I wanted someone who would fit in with our family life.

American women are too demanding. Their men have catered to all their whims and fancies (40)". weighed down by her liabilities to satisfy everyone's needs. She is "always adjusting to everybody's need" (227). She must be "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant's wife" (231). Hemant becomes restless when She expresses her own aspirations and seeks for recognition.

I need more space.

Hemant drew her close. The whole house is yours, AZ.

I was thinking of something more specific. You know a place to work in peace, spread my stuff about. (156)

You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the streets. (172)

However, this period of flawless marital bliss gradually disappears to the point where a routine, ordinary domestic life replaces it, leaving it gloomy, boring, and unhappy. After some time, Hemant surprisingly tells Astha about his upcoming boy son. "I want to have my son soon". Startled by this unexpected turn of events, she begs Hemant what to do in the event that a male child does not show up. Hemant encourages them to persevere till they are blessed with a son in a light hearted manner. When Astha retorts that trying to conceive a male child repeatedly will interfere with her teaching job, Hemant mockingly says, "Teaching is hardly a serious profession." "Oh no, what is there in teaching?" (68).

Hemant is a materialistic person who worships the body instead of the soul. Here is how the author characterizes Astha's circumstances: When she (Astha) was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that reason it was soothing to be with" (287). Astha's spouse, he adores her body but not her soul. He only expresses worry for her if he wants to elicit sex. He adores every part of creating love and is very conscious of it, which makes him a sex freak. Astha grows irritated and feels compelled to respond. "Then what? Do I have to give it just because you are my husband? Unless I feel close to you I can't — I'm not a sex object, you have others for that" (224).

He often criticizes Astha and accuses her of having poor management outside of their marriage. Also, Shweta Tiwari believes: "Hemant seems to disagree with everything that Astha

wishes to undertake further widening the chasm of temperamental incompatibility between the two” (Tiwari 422). Himanshu received a motherhood evaluation and approval at her birth. She doesn't believe that she is unworthy in society as a whole and her family values her because they “the family is complete at last” (68). It's amazing to see how mothers and other older women support patriarchal norms and act as a social conduit for the enslavement of other women.

According to Dr. Ram Sharma's Feminist Perspectives in Manju Kapur's "A Married Woman," The female protagonists of Kapur's novels protest against male domination and the marginalization of woman. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used to promote his sexual gratification but never has he desired to elevate her to her genuine rank. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind.

Hemant is not satisfied with his position or the path his company is taking, but he vents his frustration on Astha, whom he believes is entirely to blame for the current state of affairs. Hemant says in an irritated tone, “Obviously I am worried. Different unions compete for power over the workers, and we get caught in the middle. Everybody suffers but who sees that?” (213). Aijaz Akhtar Khan is a significant character in the book; he is a man of wisdom, thinking, awareness, observation, and knowledge of people and cultures. The author seems to be treating him well.

Astha mentioned during her chat with her teammates: “She didn't want to be pushed around in the name of family. She is fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail. (168)”. After spotting a condom in Hemant's travelling suitcase, Astha hesitated to be close to him. “Do I have to give it just because you are my husband?... I'm not a sex object, you have others for that. (224)” Hemant, Astha's spouse, has stopped being loving and caring for her.

Worse, her daily routine and the casual patriarchy in her home are beginning to suffocate her. Here, it's with Eijaz, a new student at the institution where she teaches, that she finds the missing spark—but only after he doesn't feel the same way about her.

During the students' stay at the school, Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the clever artist who owns "The Street Theatre Group," conducts a communalism class. To promote empathy and bring attention to social issues, Aijaz teaches history and puts on plays throughout the holidays in classrooms, slums, factories, sidewalks, and rural areas. Astha is fascinated by Aijaz's multifaceted personality, even though at this point she had already given birth to a son and a daughter. But shortly after Aijaz is killed while trying to destroy the Babri Masjid, her relationship with him too ends abruptly.

Furthermore, he doesn't appear to care that Astha is grieving over Aijaz's death. To prevent Astha from leaving when she wants to go for her "Munch" and "Yatra" obligations, he

plots his deliberate departure. He counsels: "Anything can happen. All these Yatras have gone as attached to them. You think everybody who is going is so moved by the desire to unite our country? Our country is better united by you staying at home, so that there is one less incident to cope with." (249)

Hemant wants his wife to quit her profession if she persists on painting, but she can't as her line of work gives her independence and self-determination. She feels her work as "represented security, not perhaps of money, but of her own life, of a place where she could be herself." (149) When Hemant finally compliments her on her artistic ability, Astha notices the sweetened tone in his voice; "but for all this she feels proud and sees the vision of herself as a woman who had sold two paintings in one year and, she felt rich and powerful, so what if this feeling only lasted a moment." (159)

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* elegantly illustrates the challenges faced by working women: "Thus the independent woman of today is torn between her professional interests and the problems of her sexual life; it is difficult for her to strike a balance between the two; if she does, it is at the price of concessions and sacrifices which require her to be in a constant state of tension." (705). Hemant once made the teasing comparison between sex and labor, implying that, depending on her consciousness level, there are distinctions between the kinds of work performed by men and women. Without hesitation, he advises her to quit her work so that she can adequately manage the household responsibilities. Since he had fully aligned his professional goals with the detriment of Astha's own, she felt abandoned and let down. She has thought about leaving her job on several occasions, but she is reluctant to do so because she enjoys the pleasant freedom that comes with being a teacher. Simone De Beauvoir, the first feminist, discusses the two prerequisites for a woman's emancipation: "Economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society" (328).

Hemant criticized Aijaz's writing about the Babri Masjid, saying it sounded like a parrot, whereas Aijaz praised it for its qualities. Hemant tells Astha, "You sound like a parrot," and offers advice and encouragement. Does voicing an opinion equate to being a parrot? Please stick to your areas of expertise, which include teaching, the family, and the kids. Nothing fits you.

Feeling moved, she compares her husband—who is often critical of her—with Aizaz, who is impressed by her abilities, right away. Astha feels worthy since, for the first time, she has been acknowledged for her presence. Ishwar remarks appropriately in relation to the same: She feels somewhat suffocated, exploited and unnoticed at home. It is Aizaz's trust which motivates her to think out of the house.

He makes her think about the ongoing socio-political activities which become her future interest. (Ishwar 2) Aijaz's sudden touch leaves a lasting impression on Astha, who is impressed:

“What did it mean?” Did he want to have an affair with her? Why was she so startled by his hand on her knee? “Why hadn’t she responded, but she was a married woman with two children, and those were right in front of her eyes?”

When Hemant wants to go to Ayodhya with the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch, she protests vehemently that she shouldn't leave the house and leave the children with the staff because she is their spouse. That causes her to lapse into her typical contemplative state of discomfort. “As his wife? Was all that she was?” (188) as if she has no identity of her own. There are many different aspects to a marriage. Jasbir Jain appropriately states in this regard: Marriage is a bond to many a woman, but it is not necessarily the same kind of bond. Some are protected by it, some create their own space, others are irked by the dependence and the bondages it imposes on them. Yet marriage is valued by society because widowhood circumscribes a woman’s life port and is considered inauspicious. (2003 :82)

Astha finds it hard to get out of her own inner dialogue and dreams. She is observing the conflict between her growing resentment and the social and political upheaval in India. A Manch organization member asks Astha to speak to women at the divisive Ayodhya site in an effort to let them realize they have “some kind of [a] voice” (185). In her speech, Astha makes emotional appeals to women rather than delving into the specifics of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanma Bhoomi dispute:

In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brother and children... We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering... History cannot be righted easily, but... pain and trauma to women and children come easily. (197-198)

Astha discovers, in the meantime, that Pipeelika Trivedi, a Hindu woman, married Muslim theater activist Aijaz Akhtar Khan against all odds because she was in love with him. Indeed, Pipeelika lost her husband a few days into their marriage. Aijaz's death was brought on by a societal strife. Pipeelika Khan currently works for Ujala, an NGO led by three women. She is a career-focused student at Delhi School of Economics who hopes to obtain a doctorate in the US. After her husband dies, Astha is left alone and yearns for a friend, which causes them to become friends. Hemant never showed her love or affection, but Pipee did. “Astha thought if husband and wife are one person, then Pipee and she were even more so. She had shared parts of herself she had never shared before. She felt complete with her.” (243)

They are happy and contented with one other's company. Her lesbian love has brought happiness and vibrant health into her existence. Astha confronts Hament with a forceful declaration: "I am thirty- six. I need to be independent. I am always adjusting to everybody else's needs" (227). She no longer believes she is undeserving. After discovering the intimate pleasures of sexual orientation with Pipee, Astha musters the courage to tell her boyfriend that she cannot be a sex object and that she is not in the mood for making love. She questions him: "Do I have to give it just because you are my husband?" (224). Astha repudiates Pipee's proposal because she has a children and family and can't commit to a long-term commitment. I love you; you know how much you mean to me; I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can't abandon my family, I can't. Maybe I should not have looked for happiness, but I couldn't help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had not foreseen... Oh Pipee, I'm sorry I am not like you. (242).

Astha is burdened with an abhorrent guilt conscience by the time the conclusion arrives, which stems from her lesbian love justifying her antiquated morals. Ultimately, Pipee leaves for the United States, purportedly to complete her doctorate in higher education. After marriage, Astha loses her sense of self, but she eventually discovers contentment in herself by proving her worth in the pursuits of her passions. Her creative work and association with Manch demonstrate her political sense and knowledge. Notes Amar Nath Prasad: Women are no longer flowers of the pot for only decoration, rather they are the fragrant flowers of open garden diffusing aromas to all corners, braving the storms and rains. (Prasad, 2005)

Manju Kapur made lesbianism a potent instrument for quelling a woman's emotional itch and gratifying her sexual cravings by foretelling a married woman's love for another woman. As the author acknowledged the oppression and emotional need of women such as Astha and Pipeelika, she placed them in lesbian paths for their own self-fulfillment. Both are victims: one suffers from home abuse, while the other is the victim of social violence and becomes a widow after her husband is killed in a riot. In an interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur states: it an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually, a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man.

Sahir Raza and Juggernaut Productions are the producers of the eleven-episode online series *Where, The Married Women*, which explores the uniqueness and interaction of two women. The show only depicts certain situations, specifically:

First *Blurred Lines* is about, Astha and Aijaz grow fond of one another, but Aijaz is put in danger due to an unfortunate incident. Second episode *is Across the Line* about Astha falls for Aijaz, but Aijaz only likes her as a friend and confesses her love for him. Thirdly, *What Lost*,

Get What, is Astha and Hemant host a party. Forth is *Meeting Myself*, Astha consoles Peeplika and everyone accepts Mudassar's marriage. *Beyond Right and Wrong* is the Fifth episode, Astha denies her feelings for Peeplika, but Peeplika encourages her to embrace her true self. Where the Sixth episode, *O! My Childish and Naive Heart, what has happened to you?* is about, Babbo confides in Hemant about Astha-Peeplika relationship. Seventh episode, *Love and Fragnance* is about Astha lies to Hemant about her plans, leading to riots. And Eighth episode is *Half Full/Half Empty*, Hemant suspects Astha of cheating and Astha tries to put her side, but things go south when riots break out again. In Nineth *The Wedding Anniversary*, Astha and Peeplika get intimate at Hemant's wedding anniversary. *New Horizons* is the tenth, about Astha decides to move to Paris after a heated argument with Hemant, which leads to Peeplika taking her with her. And the Eleventh, last episode is *Crossroads* shows, Astha trains her kids to be self-dependent and confronts Peeplika's past before making her final decision. It's appropriate to mention Chaman Nahal at this point, who says: "A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-reliant and rational having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense" (Nahal 17).

Conclusion

Kapur portrays women who want to develop their own identities by establishing new partnerships. She adamantly advocates for a genuine shift in women's status from being a toy in the hands of men to a powerful life partner with equal rights and dignity. Because she would run the risk of being abandoned without her family's protection, Astha is unable to leave their protection. She also has stability and security in her life since she cannot jeopardize her reputation as a decent wife and mother. The views expressed might seem strange to others, but they are the inner voice of a newly arrived woman who wants to experience life to the fullest. Two characters in *A Married Woman*, Astha and Peeplika, exhibit their independence and spirit of rebellion.

They show their drive and ambition by getting into fights with other men. But they never feel that they could manage without their guys. After her short affair with Pipeelika, Astha goes back to Hemant to live in harmony with her family. At last, Astha develops into a confident and artistic lady. She tries to take back her identity by becoming more conscious of her surroundings and actively participating in public life. They feel fulfilled in their manufactured connection, but they are never fulfilled.

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