



The Travails of the Subaltern Woman: A Study of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

Abstract:

Manju Kapur is a well-known figure in the world of Indian feminists' novels. Her novels deal with on the conjecture that women persist on emancipation from patriarchal structure and thinking. This paper deals with her novel A Married Woman which explores the life journey of Astha from her childhood to young adulthood in her early middle age. Manju Kapur's A Married Woman constructed around the woman's quest for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, autonomous personality and self-actualization in which the protagonist Astha confer for her individual place in the society as well as in their family. This paper looks into that how Kapur explored the difficulties of reconciling the devotion to family expected of a middle-class Indian woman with her aspirations and desire for a life outside in this novel and conflict circumstances in which the protagonist Astha, torn between her sense of responsibility for the family and individual desire for independent identity.

Keywords: emancipation, patriarchy, identity, autonomy, individuality

In Indian novelists, in English, women writers like R. P. Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rama Mehta, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and Geeta Mehta have indications newfangled perceptions, principally the pathetic predicament of the Indian women. Through women writer's views, we can see a diverse world, with their sustain we can search for to comprehend the perspective of human accomplishment. However a Western art structure has been useful to an Indian mode of storytelling in the Indo-English fiction, the stuff of it looks to be Indian enlightens the Indian feelings and the Indian social and political conditions. The comprehensive vision and philosophical impending of the Indian novelist makes him on similarly with the writers of international status. There were also some women novelists who espoused the technique of reciting a fiction. If the male writers resolute on the individual's dilemma, socioeconomic, political transformation; and an over an overview of the feminine; women writers have apprehensive themselves with the enhancement of subjugation, problems of supremacy in a patriarchal structure and the underserved marginalization of a woman. Bheda says: "During recent decades, a galaxy of Indian women novelist have started writing about Indian women, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India" (Bheda 40).

Indian English fiction appreciation and occupies noticeable attraction among critics and readers in India as well as in abroad. Indian English Fiction was early remained evident by various critics and readers from various points of views. Writers like, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamla Markandaya are exceptions, whose works have been analyzed and explored from various aspects but a number of recent novelists have produced works which still remain deprived of a thorough analysis. Manju Kapur is most renowned and esteemed contemporary Indian English woman novelist. She is outstanding stature in Indian English fiction. She cosseted feministic approach in her novels. There are a number of recent women writers who have talked about Feminism, patriarchy issues in Indian society, male orienting culture and gender discriminations, but Manju Kapur above of them has fetched new approach in the world of feministic writing. She depicted in her all novels new appearances of women. She has introduced new women in her works who tries to equilibrium between society and self. Manju Kapur crafts man- woman relationship. Kapur looks inside of contemporary issues of a modern married woman with family and society, woman's role as a daughter, mother, sister, wife, and mother-in-law in Indian society and portrayed woman's changing faces in orthodox Indian society. She projected her women characters who are self- reliant, rebellious

and independent Manju Kapur discovered the intricate environment of the Indian domestic family and exposes various problems that are deep entrenched within the family, the rebellion against the ancient customs, quest for identity, the dilemmas of marriage issues which are prevailing in Indian society from old age and finally the women's fight for her existence to establish her own identity. Shashi Deshpande has projected the silent women who suffer in their life and achieved success in a crucial way while in the contrary Manju Kapur's protagonists in her all novels lives within the area of realism and successfully confers their Home. Manju Kapur's novel reveals her perceptions of considerate of human characters which lead her as a mellowness Indian woman writer.

Kamala Markandaya, Rama Mehta Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Dina Mehta, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale, and others female writers are prominent feminist writers. These writers are dealing with major themes like gender discriminations, female mistreatment and tyranny, the notion of being 'other' in a patriarchy Indian society, the theme of emergent childhood to womanhood, emancipation through self expedition, sexual independence, man-woman relationships, pragmatism, fantasy, Indian culture, urbanization, Indianness, migration, east-west conflict, quarrel between tradition and modernity, strives for autonomy and partition in their novels. The plot of their story is woven around the women who confer the domination of a patriarchal society.

There are some far-reaching revolutions in Indian English women's fiction from pre-Independence to modern period in Indian English literature. From ancient period, women struggled to acquire sovereignty, from half of the entire people of the world from male supremacy. Feminism is neither a movement nor a consistent annex of the civil rights movement, but the protest against the legal, economic and social boundaries on the basic privileges of women which have subsisted all over history and in all society. Naturally, the ideology of feminism has been expressed elongated before. The male and female resist towards the domineering civilization are very general in perspectives to Indian society because it was men who commenced social reform movements against diverse social plights. Mary Wollstonecraft proficiently states she argues about women's impediment towards autonomy and liberty by these two most clear-cut condemnations in her masterpiece *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). The foundation of aggression against women is seen in the subordination of women in the world *The Second Sex* states noticeably that gender is not rather than that is only a subject of biology without grave connotations rather it is an approach of patriarchy to depart deeper in order to accomplish their knave intends, they shaped gender which produces cleavage between man and woman. Gender is a socially created perception which society steadily maneuvers in women, constructing them recognize that they are women, i.e. a weaker part of society who require the head and shelter of males or else it is not possible for them to sustain Female self has thus been dominated and subjugated by the prevailing sex that is a man. This connection of the fragile and potent is like a political relationship where the prevailing personality or dominant party rules above the other. Like a man who has commanded in his dispenses has more persuade in the society, in the similar approach this relationship of man and woman in the society is recognized as a political relationship which Kate Millet in her essay, *Sexual Politics* refers to and dwells on the details of this topic in detail. The questions occur why woman are so fragile and who enlightens them that they shape a weaker in part of society, is there anything inborn in them which they require which obstructs them to be associated with men or God has prepared them hence? No, the obvious reply is they have been habituated so that they should begin reaction about their weakness, it is the family, friend sphere where a female child nudges in, the school and soon after on in life, college environment where she strokes her shoulder with others that induce her and impulsively she starts to experience that she is fragile or conceivably requires the attribute that provides her strength and vigor. As the feminist Helene Cixous, dwelling at length about the way women and men are different puts it in the following manner: "Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. The way we make love because it isn't the same produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text"(Cixous 230).

Actually, in this male subjugated society, a woman performs her duty as wife, mother, sister and homemaker. She is projected to serve, give up, surrender and endure each evil against her serenely. Her independent identity has very little identification in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her ordinary approach of life. The representation of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari are always likely to be pursued by her. But the manifest mark is that these idyllic women presented merely in epics, they represented as princesses and queens and much far away from the trouble and agony in the modern world in which modern woman has no individuality her own. She exists for others and exhales for others. And the circumstances turns into more tedious when we capture it in Indian background where women must adjourn to her husband and construct the matrimonial house pleasing for him. In Manusmriti Manu has specified the inferior position to women. Indian society from the era of Manu has socialized women in this approach only and has left no stone unturned in constructing gender prejudice so that the inferior situation to women may be set. Manu says: "A woman should never have freedom, when they are young they should be under their father, after marriage, they should be under their husbands if their husbands die they should be under their sons" (Manu 2). A woman has been measured significance not anything; she is a product that is used and frightened away. This objectification is a dreadful offense. It obviously illustrates that women in the Indian society were never allowed to have liberty as our own scriptures utter the society to endowment zero autonomy for women. Recording in new boundaries, these and many more contemporary women novels carry out the argument of gender through the Indian female consciousness in its communication and linking with the male consciousness. In the dusk sector in which the innovative intelligence dwells, there is an innate feminine attitude to revolve arrived, to recognize perception and compassion as ideals long with the moderate feeling to one's innate milieu and to the concealed communications among human beings which assemble the thoughts and descriptions and carry out the new feminine influence creating new territory.

Kavita asserts: "Manju Kapur's novels offer a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in a patriarchal world" (Kavita 179). As in a typical Indian family, Astha in *A Married Woman* "was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear" (1). She was her parents' only child just as Judith to her parents. Astha's education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were the burdens of her parents. She was their future, their hope, and though she didn't want them to guard her so carefully, they did. But Astha's mother "every day in her temple corner in the kitchen, prayed for a good husband for her daughter" (1). Astha's father also took an enormous care for his daughter. This novel begins with Astha, indicating that she has been brought up and nourished in as the usual atmosphere of a middle-class family. She is her parents' only child and also a center of a lot of expectations. Her father always pinches her to do hard work in her studies. But the purpose behind it is not to make her independent only. He thinks that if his daughter Astha will "sit for the IAS" (3), she will "find a good husband there" (3). He even slapped her once or twice to shape her his estimate. Manju Kapur brings out her young heroine's emotions in the following words: "Tears surfaced, but she wouldn't act sorry, would rather die than show how unloved and misunderstood she felt" (2). It was their custom to do Pranayam together in the early morning in the patchy grass surrounded by a short hedge outside their flat. Sometimes Astha's father took her out for a stroll through the colony in the evenings. It was not only Astha's father who was worried about her marriage but her mother also. The mother thinks and believes that if parents die without marrying their daughter they can't get peace. She describes to 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)? She begins to think that getting love is the only aim of this life. She begins to imagine a "shadowy young man holding her in his strong manly embrace" (1).

Parents of marriageable girls become upset if they do not get any formal proposals from eligible boys. Before Astha's parents became panicky, Astha had a proposal from the US-returned MBA chap. She was wondering whether she should tell him: "though she had kissed a boy, her hymen was intact" (35). The engagement was over and both started dating. The marriage took place on an auspicious day. Rohan had abandoned her, Hemant had married her, he valued her, and he thought her so charming. In their honeymoon in Kashmir, he told her that he was happy because he wanted to

marry “an innocent, unspoiled, simple girls” (41). That was fulfilled for he was so sure that Astha was a virgin. But asked herself: “Had she been a virgin?” (41). As such thoughts were useless, she decided to stop thinking about the past. Whenever Astha's parents find her deviating from the trodden path of tradition and culture, they guide her and when needed they forced her to follow the trodden path. In contrast, Astha is a student of English literature and has grown up in the modern society of Delhi. She is not a firm believer in culturalism. She is not interested in the person to whom she doesn't know and to whom she doesn't love. But finally, her marriage is settled with Hemant, a Delhi businessman and the only son of a bureaucrat. Astha's new family lives in Vasant Vihar, a posh colony in New Delhi. She starts her marriage life with Hemant. They go to Srinagar for their honeymoon. There they come closer to each other. Hemant takes good care of Astha. He does everything that he finds useful in making their honeymoon memorable. He takes endlessly photograph, wanders “around the tourist spots of Srinagar, hand in hand” (38), admires her poem and painting, addresses her with touching words like ‘darling’, ‘my baby’, ‘my wife’ and ‘poor baby’. “Back in Delhi, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law”(43). Her father-in-law and mother-in-law are happy and satisfied with her. Astha has proved herself a responsible, loving, caring and devoted daughter-in-law and wife.

Astha desires to recede. 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 a criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. Astha tries to forge a new identity as a teacher at St. Anthony's School. She becomes a woman who transforms her occupation of housewife for a working woman. At the same time, she tries to keep a balance between inner and outer spheres. She performs the role of a dutiful wife by serving her husband as every Indian wife does. Astha feels: "Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, taking off his shoes, feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet" (50). Hemant, like a typical male in the Orient, didn't care much to the inmost longings of his wife. Even Astha's just demand of having a baby was defined by Hemant. She had to repeatedly plead to him to stop using birth control devices. He would remonstrate: “You can't be so old fashioned (....). With a young wife, one can afford to wait” (56). Hemant loved her even after Anu was born to them. However, she didn't like the way he pushed her into the bathroom to have sex with her. He would pacify her saying: “How do you think half the country fucks? You think they have separate rooms? (60). She didn't like the industry in Noida and began selling black and white TVs. Somewhere along the way, Hemant's attitude to Astha changed. It oppressed her very much. Her longing for a better relationship with him did not materialize. He would say: “I have no time for all these games” (66). Every married woman of the society feels that life is more meaningful when she has a baby. Therefore, Astha says to her husband she wants to have a baby. Astha reflects the hard and struggles life of a woman who lives in bondage with no gratitude and identity as well. However, Beauvoir says: “This has always been a man's world” (Beauvoir 93), is true for a woman who has to live according to the decisions made by man.

Through the protagonist Astha, Manju Kapur reveals that woman still upholds the position of inferiority in spite of her quest for equality and a worthy member of the patriarchal society. Astha is very emotional when Hemant refuses to keep her father's books with them. Instead, he makes the decision to donate it to a library. Astha claims to her mother for agreeing his words, but her mother added: “It is Hemant's house, and he said there was no room” (87). Astha gets angry with her husband as he has not consulted her before taking up any decision. She expects equality, but Hemant plays the role of primary position in the patriarchal family. She exclaims: “Then who am I? The tenant? We could have found room, we could have built bookshelves, done something, we could at least have discussed it” (87). Again, in the course of time, when Astha's mother sells her plot, she delivers a large amount of money to Hemant's hand instead of her daughter. When Astha asks why it is to him, her mother says: “He is a man, he know about money. He will invest it for you and the children” (97). Such attitude of Astha's mother exhibits woman is regarded as a subordinated figure of a man. Manju Kapur reveals Astha is a woman of today who raises voice for equal treatment with a man in society. Though Astha accepts her duties at home, but she wants to participate in any decision taken by her husband either in management or investment. Thus she expresses: “Really Ma, don't you think women can be responsible for their own investments?” (97).

Astha reaches of the extreme in every new engagement. She involves in the love affair with Pipee. As days went by, a great change came upon Astha. She was in a state of continued war with everything around her and herself. She could never truly find peace with herself. She was caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her and coming to understand creating a space for her as a lesbian by making Pipee the steady sweetheart. Through this process, she released herself from an obsession with the male partner, her husband. She was clearly in love, in love with another woman much against the tradition-bound society. It was quite likely that she would continue this secret relationship until Pipee would go away from her life.

On the other hand, when Astha gets all the comfort and affection from Pipee that she doesn't receive from Hemant, she thinks: "... 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). Therefore, the marital relation of Astha and Hemant turns out to be devastated. Astha realizes herself as a faithless wife and accepts the miseries that come into her life. Astha is on the verge of taking a decision about her life with Hemant, her conventional marriage and traditional family life for Pipee. She decides to abandon her home, husband, children so that she would be able to live her life on her own term. But, Pipeelika receives a letter from her brother Ajay who is staying in America. The letter is about sponsorship registration of Ph.D. at an American University. Pipee informs to Astha that she is leaving India for her further studies in America. Astha feels that her life is again deceived, but significant. Thus, Astha comes again to her own conservative married life. Rajput observes: "Astha and Pipee both are living under the illusion of making themselves free from male bondage, but when their freedom is weighed on the scale of morality, values, and maintenance of family peace, they stand nowhere" (Rajput 117).

Like most of the second-wave feminists, Manju Kapur thinks that women's oppression has cultural rather than biological roots, and women's cultural production like the novel in reference is central to 'consciousness raising' and thus to social change. What she aims at in her fiction is to decant the straight, male, cultural authority. It has opened up, among other things, a fictional space within which the culturally marginalized women could assert their own subculture specificities. Ashok Kumar says:

Manju Kapur has exposed a woman's passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance. With a passion to revolutionized the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. She is stunned at the intensification of fundamentalism and the augment of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity (Kumar 165).

In the novels of Manju Kapur women appear in their new form. It seems that Manju Kapur defies the definition of Simon De Beauvoir about the woman. Simon has told that "a woman is a womb, an ovary, she is a female - this word is sufficient to define her" (Beauvoir 12). Manju Kapur's heroines are the power to take their decisions by themselves. They are struggling to save both their individuality and self-respect hand in hand. Ignoring the so-called primary responsibility of domesticity and children, they move one step forward neither; they want to be neither mere rubber dolls nor they want to wear the tag of a traditional woman. In conventional societies like India's, for a woman to free herself from the imperious patriarchy and to discover her own voice to articulate her views, to create her own ways to cope her 'self' is a lengthy and arduous voyage against female-subservience, self-sacrifice, and self-restraint. Manju Kapur's fictions are apprehensive, not only with social and psychological dilemmas affecting middle-class Indian women but convey about the obscurity of their status and their changing approaches to and their capabilities in tackling those circumstances. Kapur explores the demonstration of woman's subtle ways of negotiating with her life in sort to achieve autonomy over her body and psyche to have the liberty to decide her own identity liberated from all conditionings, freeing her from sex-determined roles and performances, in spite of what she has to many times countenance as consequences.

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