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PROBLEMS OF WOMEN SELF-IDENTITY IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL "A MARRIED WOMAN"

Mrs. Sk. Rehena¹, Dr. Rama Devi Amara², Dr. N. Vineela³,

¹Assistant Professor of English, Prasad. V. Potluri. Siddhartha Institute of Technology, Kanuru,
Vijayawada.

²Assistant Professor, K.L.E.F, Vaddeswaram.

³Trained Graduate Teacher in English, A.P. Model School & College, Reddigudem,
Email: ¹jarina.2005@gmail.com, ²aramadevi@kluniversity.in, ³vineelanandru0105@gmail.com

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Abstract:

*Manju Kapur in her novels depicts how women are coming out of their houses and are getting actively involved in social issues. She presents how life of these women becomes a pendulum vacillating between two ends i.e. family and social life. Her novels are pragmatic portrayal of the torment and the strife of the modern educated middle class women. She is clenched between patriarchy and custom on the one hand, and self-expression, distinctiveness and liberation on the other. Her lead characters feel that they are lost and confused in their exploration of ways to realize themselves as human beings. Her novel *A Married Woman* (2002) gives a forthright rendering of a married woman's dismay, sorrows, disappointments and exasperations. *A Married Woman* is a femino-centric disapproval to the phallogocentric society of male dominance. The world of men thrusts limitless control over women. The novel escalates the growing controversy on the issue of homosexual relationship in a formidable way. After so much of discussions on gay and lesbian relationships that they are not mere fancies, this is receiving more visibility in contemporary societies whether one accepts it or not. Manju Kapur is the first Indian novelist to present the lesbian love as a significant topic to be discussed by the women's rights activists and supporters. Kapur's emphasis on sexuality in the form of lesbian companionship leads to much uproar in the society. This paper explores the inner vents of her protagonists mind in the Astha's case, reveals the landscapes which are mysterious yet awe – inspiring and going through it, In addition to the display of woman's scuffle to acquire self-respect, and self-rule, Kapur lays bare the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression.*

Introduction

A Married Woman presents the portrait of women, whose endeavours for liberation has gone unnoticed and still goes on unheard in the patriarchal world. She offers a captivating sight into working of a woman's mind as she strives to gain more knowledge of her identity in a patriarchal world.

Searching for self-identity gets largely stressed upon due to the thwarting experiences born of the outrageous nature of the Patriarchal society of India. Emancipation of women doesn't mean to lose chastity or modesty or betraying the husband and longing for extra marital relationship. It is also not developing unnatural sensual and mundane relationship with other women through lesbian relationship. It is only trying and striving for self-identity and freedom within the well - structured traditions and having physical relationship between the two sexes within the well - established social system of marriage.

Portrayal of conventional patriarchal society

Kapur's novels bring forth a significant meaning when understood from the point of view of criss-cross ideologies of cultural critical thinking. *A Married Woman* is the story of Astha, the protagonist, around whom the whole story is finely fabricated. Astha is brought up in Delhi by typical middle class parents, who think that they are bringing up their only daughter properly, but never think of the other side of the life in society.

Astha's parents, in accordance with the common phenomenon of the middle class society, always think of her education, her character, her health, her marriage, and feel that she, as a daughter is a burden to them. But their 'precious treasure' hated her mother's over protection and her father's over expectation. Her mother in response sighed and prayed for a good husband for her daughter and asks her daughter to pray too. Astha pretentiously closes her eyes as if praying to God. Being, in her adolescence, the age in which the young girls have romantic dreams. This can be taken as 'flirting' with the opposite sex mentally though not physically. After all the domestic problems and oppression faced by her but she had the desires like any other girl in Indian culture, giving birth to a child and a loving husband. Astha also fulfilled her life by bearing a child.

Protagonist agony for self-Identity

In the conventional patriarchal culture, there is always a struggle for identity in women. She is like a caged bird without wings, An Indian woman has to follow the instructions of the male. The novelist portrays Astha as an independent woman. But there are various occasions where she faces the problems of identity. During the holidays when as a family they travel to Goa, Astha likes to purchase a silver coated box but is refused by her husband without showing any concern for her wish. This is the condition of most of the working Indian women who earn for the family but have no freedom to spend it for themselves.

Such suppressive and oppressive attitude of Hemant hurts the dignity of Astha. It indicates that because of the unbound dominance of male in the family and the society, a man has a right to take every decision. When Hemant disproves Astha to buy the silver box, her self-respect and independence are exhausted which influences her to carry a feeling of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the provocations of her life.

Trailsto get recognition in the society

Astha's inner turmoil and quest for identity leads her to "The Street Theatre Group". Aijaz, who is a lecturer of History, is the founder of the theatre group. Astha's social spirit and attitude is motivated and boosted by Aijaz. Astha starts liking him while they are working together. She goes with him during his visits to slums and other places. Astha starts reading history books. Astha loves looking at Aijaz while he performs on the stage. Aijaz admires her for her insightful and brilliant mind when he goes through her script on the

contemporary issues of Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi to be performed on the stage in the school. However her husband also knows that his wife is a proficient and intelligent writer and a poet, he never appreciates her whereas Aijaz appreciates her every time. Astha constantly compares her husband with Aijaz and feels that Aijaz would have been a better husband as he constantly helps her, supports her in every demanding situation and respects her for everything that she does while Hemant criticizes her mistakes in managing household works, doing incapability of family matters and wastefulness of the money in proper way as well. As a result, Astha involves more and more in outside works. She is keenly associated with the workshop conducted by the theatre group.

Meanwhile, a warm-hearted feeling develops between these two. She wants to be always with him. Unfortunately, Aijaz and the members of his troupe are caught up and killed while performing the play on Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi by some extremists. The narrative takes a ghastly turn; When Aijaz along with his troupe of the Street Theatre Group is abducted and murdered. Hemant gives Astha the newspaper but she is unable to read and tears starts flowing from her eyes. Again she finds herself lonely.

But soon she finds a good companion in Pipeelika, who works with an NGO named Ujjala. Pipee is a widow of Aijaz. Astha decides to arrange an exhibition of paintings in the memory of Aijaz. Each artist of their group donates one painting for the exhibition. She gets a good recognition for her painting exhibition organized by the Manchand earns thirty thousand rupees. Their death actuates and leads Astha to unfold herself as a social activist and her participation in rallies for justice is highly objected by her husband. Consequently it becomes impossible for her to pay attention to the family and house which naturally makes Hemant angry. She even asks for the room which belongs to Sangeeta, his sister, but Hemant becomes angry and refuses to fulfil her demand. Astha intends to have her own space in which no one is entertained to control her. She also wants to have a happy that is both within her house and outside the house. So, she resolves to attend the meeting of the SampradayaktaMuktiManch, to challenge and denounce the construction of the temple of Lord Rama in the Masjid place. Though her husband and in-laws are not in favour of her decision and even tries to prevent her from attending, but Astha decides to visit Ayodhya as the Manch compels her to give a speech in the public rally. She visits Ayodhya where she meets Pipeelika, the wife of Aijaz.

Pipeelika is a social activist. She helps the poor. She is associated with the NGO named Ujjala. She is bold and free in her way of life. She faces lots of criticism when she engages with Aijaz Khan, a Muslim. Her mother horrified after hearing about her engagement. She lives alone in Delhi. She meets Aijaz Khan at a conference where she is reading a paper on the effects of communalism on the education of Muslim children in the basti. As he is a prime mover and shaker of 'The Street Theatre Group', Pipee decides to stay connected with him. As they meet frequently, love develops between them and they get married. But her fate has some other plans for her as Aijaz is burnt alive with his drama crew by crazy mob during the riots. She becomes widow of Aijaz Khan at a very young age.

Pipee's life takes a big turn when she meets Astha. She has many qualities common with Astha. They understand each other very well. They share their feeling of joy, fear, anger, love and angst with each other. It is 'EktaYatra' from Kashmir to Kanyakumari for the sake of communal harmony which brings them much closer to each other. As the time passes they involve themselves in a lesbian relationship.

Astha observes gratification in the association of Pipee. In contrast to her husband, Pipeelika appears to have a better understanding, caring and loving for her. Hemant dominating behaviour makes Astha uncomfortable. He wants to dominate everything while she enjoys in sharing everything. Both are of completely different nature. But that is not the case with Pipeelika. She has many common qualities with Astha. They enjoy each other's company.

Her relationship with Pipeelika gives a new direction to her pursuit for identity. There is a collision among the roles of a lover, wife, mother and that of a daughter-in-law. But she feels that being a wife and a mother, she never denies her responsibilities towards the family. Astha resolves to leave her in-laws home, husband and children for staying with Pipee but Pipee receives a letter from her brother related to higher studies. Pipee left her and Astha moves back where again she has to carry her married life. In the meantime Hemant is diagnosed for chest pain because of the work pressures and Astha's observation and care of her husband become her priority. Like an ideal Indian wife, she shows much concern towards her husband's health, diet and exercise. Although she has turned towards lesbian relationship as retaliation to the patriarchal society, its tradition and particularly on her husband, it is evident that she cannot break the emotional bond with her in-laws home. Paradoxically when she engaged her time with Pipeelika, she never neglected her motherly role of taking care about her children. Debalina Banerjee states that Indian English women novelists have largely concerned themselves with representations which are overtly heterosexual in nature

Eventually, Astha's entire family gets disturbed and they start questioning each other. As a mother of nice-looking two kids Anuradha&Himanshu, she aspires to free herself from family without worrying about her children and husband. Astha's children cry in frenzied way when they get poor marks. She is not bothered to think about the future of her children. She has not shown any concern to join the parents meeting of her children in the school because she thinks that it is time consuming. But she finds time to go on *EktaYartra*, which cause her husband to lose his temper. In the end Astha arrives at no place and she has to return to her family and relocate herself in age-old traditions.

Conclusion

ManjuKapur's novel 'A Married Woman' is a seductive story of a love that is narrated in the conditions socio-political turmoil. This depicts with sympathetic feelings of an artist whose canvas provokes forces of middle-class existence. In exploring the inner delicacy of a woman's mind, Kapur presents a full-fledged appreciation of the female psyche. Best of all, Kapur oversees to combine the internal with the external. She speaks like some-one who has personally experienced the turmoil of the communal riots, which are by far, affected the lives of many Indians.

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