



Women's Quest for Self-realization and Freedom for their Own Destiny in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

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DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.13193318

Abstract:

Manju Kapur explores women's quest for self-realization, freedom, and a struggle for their own destiny. The voice of the heroine Astha helps this paper, handle the women' strengthening. It revealed the plight of modern women in a culture that still places a premium on men and the harmful habits that prevent women from being free from discriminatory masculine strength. To regain their voice against sexual enslavement and concealment, it dismantles traditional male-centric developments and opposes persecution of women. A sincere wish for harmonious coexistence within the family is held by the female lead of the book *A Married Woman*. Manju Kapur challenges the patriarchal conventions of conventional culture in her book *A Married Woman* by supporting inter-religious marriage and the female-to-female link through the character Astha.

Keywords: self-realization, liberty, independence, self-discovery, emancipation

Introduction:

The essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" by Elaine Showalter is a notable effort to free women from the constraints of tradition and conservatism. It emphasizes how feminist views must develop a framework. She emphasizes the need of gynocritics, which address issues related to writers' experiences. According to her, the feminist critique is primarily political, polemical, and theoretical in nature. Gynocritics is more independent and experimental in relation to Marxist sociology and aesthetics, and it has links to other forms of contemporary feminist inquiry. The feminist criticism can bring us from the land of female enslavement in Egypt to the promised land of the feminist vision. We might compare the feminist critique to the Old Testament, searching for the crimes and mistakes of the past, and the gynocritics to the New Testament, seeking the grace of Jeresmiah.

In her seminal essay *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir draws attention to the status of women and inspires them to overcome the many obstacles and dangers that stand in the way of progress. Her idea of the "Woman as Other" is crucial to the life of a woman who is focused on her work. She note:

"...woman is defined by man, not by herself, but in relation to him. Humanity is male." "She isn't thought of as an independent entity. [Woman] is only what man says she should be; so, she is referred to as "the sex," implying that her primary attraction is to men as sexual beings. She is

sex, pure and simple, to him. She is what makes a man, not the other way around; she is what makes a man, incidental and inessential as opposed to essential. She is the other, and he is... the Absolute".(TSS.33)

Considering the aforementioned remarks made by many feminist activists, it is evident that many people have contributed to the idea of women's freedom, which is gaining traction globally today. It's fascinating to observe that the majority of women nowadays have a college degree. They aspire to live a life of self-discovery and independence in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*. They can now be seen claiming their uniqueness and female rights to the same opportunities as males.

The Western feminist movement has resulted in women writing in English in India. Women gained several additional privileges during the late 1800s and early 1900s. A turning event in the history of society, the feminist movement changed the status of women. Despite the fact that males have portrayed women as Shakthi, the Mother Goddess, Indian society is fundamentally patriarchal. The Indian spirit is maintained overall by women's post-colonial Indian English fiction. It does a good job of capturing the Indian woman's feelings and thoughts. Instead of restricting women's life to a single ideal, contemporary Indian literature portrays the diversity of women and the uniqueness within each woman.

In her works, Manju Kapur explores women's quest for self-realization, freedom, and a struggle for their own destiny. In her novels, she

reveals the subtle nuances of women's psychological situations. To a large extent, her female characters try to undermine the gender divide. The female characters in Manju Kapur's works are not your typical wives, who believe that marriage is their destiny and that their wives must submit to their husbands' wishes. They break all societal taboos and constraints, question conventional conventions, and emerge as a self-aware modern woman. The personification of "modern women" may be found in the female characters in Manju Kapur's novels.

A modern woman is focused on her profession because she knows that her fight against the male-dominated society is driven by her desire for financial independence. Manju Kapur portrays her female characters as contemporary ladies who lead modern lives. The rapidly changing periods that Kapur depicts are portrayed through her female characters, who are able to adjust to new circumstances that test them at every stage of their life. Like a few other modern Indian novelists, Manju Kapur attempts to reconsider femininity in her second book, *A Married Woman*.

Astha is paving the path for independence, something that an Indian wife and mother would not normally have the confidence to do, even if she is living the conscious life of a typical Indian mother to her children and a traditional wife to her husband Hemant. She married Hemant, the son of a wealthy administrator who returned to America after completing her undergraduate studies. Astha is content in her marriage. Astha felt like a lady of the world, one enveloped in the film of her desire and the fluidity of their sexual encounters, and Kapur brings out this fullness of womanhood.

However, the joy of married life gradually fades. Astha experiences an arrival of discontent in her marital life, leading to a sensation of boredom that suffocates her at home. Hemant stops spending time with her because he gets busy. Astha ought to find a way to help others. She decides to become a teacher, which gives her the freedom to break out from her boring daily schedule of housework. However, this shift has also caused her conscious existence to take a new direction, revealing new aspects of her personality. It prompts her to make some significant changes in her life.

Astha shares the real her from her inner world, and the larger external environment gives her more freedom to express her creative nature. She still had to confront challenges in her life, though, despite her improvements. The news that Astha is expecting their first child brings joy to both families. The child's intended father would prefer a boy. Hemant informs Astha's mother and Hemant's mother that he would prefer a female child and asks why men in India differentiate between the sexes when they expect a male child.

In the beginning Astha is glad she married Hemant since he is a man of great tolerance and does not discriminate based on gender. He presents himself as an American-bred person here. Hemant assists Astha in raising the child, so relieving her of some of her work responsibilities. After a few years, Hemant tells Astha, "I want to have my son soon," that he would soon give birth to a boy. (AMW 68) She asks Hemant what they should do if a male child is not born because she is taken aback by this unexpected shock. In a lighthearted manner, Hemant says they should keep trying till they produce a boy. Hemant teasingly responds, "Teaching is hardly a serious job," to Astha's rejoinder that trying repeatedly for a male kid might affect her teaching career. "Oh no, what's involved in teaching?" (AMW 8)

Hemant's behavior changes dramatically from an all-American to an all-Indian personality, and Astha discovers that he is a victim of masculine ego. Hemant once said that sex is what it is and explained, to the best of her knowledge, the distinction between what a male does and what a female does. He informs her straight out that she needs to leave her job in order to properly organize the household duties. To the detriment of Astha's personal objectives, he has fully associated with the goals of his roles, leaving her feeling isolated and hopeless. Despite having considered quitting her work on several occasions, she is reluctant to do so since she enjoys her joyful sense of independence as a teacher.

She gradually loses her once-most-cherished desire to be one with her devoted hubby due to her unwavering love of independence. As a result, Astha's attitude toward her spouse and herself has changed. Her sense of freedom, which is closely related to her work, gradually replaces her need for love. Astha prefers to be a teacher than a home wife because she feels her spirits growing larger via her interactions with other members of society. She also understands that she doesn't have to ask Hemant for every rupee she spends because of her salary.

Astha uses poetry and her drawings, which are colored with dark hues, to express the emotions she has been holding inside. Although the language is ambiguous, her constant representation of her own sensations provides a safe haven from her suppressed emotions. The husband and wife are not mentally compatible. Like other traditional-minded husbands, Hemant believes he meets all of his wife's material wants, but he overlooks the important fact that wives actually require the satisfaction of their emotional demands more than their physical ones. Hemant is not creative or sensitive, thus he is unable to appreciate the beauty of Astha's poetry. However, her poetry suddenly look depressing. "It's all about cages, mice, birds, and misery in settings that aren't

even really apparent".(AMW 84) Her poetry is nothing more than her inner world as it truly is.

She is flattered and naturally compares Aizaz, who sees her skill, to her husband, who discourages her at every turn. Since she has been appreciated for her presence for the first time, Astha feels worthy. Citing the same, Ishwar makes a well-chosen reply. At home, she feels a little stifled, taken advantage of, and ignored. Aizaz is inspired to think outside the home by her trust. He gets her to consider the current social and political issues, which sparks her interest in the future. Aizaz's drive aids in her personal growth. She finds him handsome, enjoys his admiration, and is captivated to his charming nature, but she is forced to live in moral limbo until his tragic death in a Hindu-Muslim riot because of her moral commitments.

Hemant cruelly questions his wife, who is apathetic to the terrible catastrophe, asking why she is grieving over the death of someone who means nothing to her. Astha tells him that human pity would be evoked by any such horrific catastrophe, which makes her feel very disgusted by her spouse. According to Manju Kapur With disgust, Astha fixed her gaze on her spouse. This was all he had to say about the ten guys who had perished in the most horrifying way possible. Did he not feel anything? (AMW 140)

Astha's coworkers just so happen to discuss marriages and divorces that occur both in India and the West. Astha, a just emerged lady, is tired of making sacrifices, fed up with the idea of the ideal Indian womanhood that is exploited to trap and imprison people, refuses to be treated like a pushover in the name of family, and hesitantly shares her thought that Perhaps it's not a bad thing. "Having the ability to leave a bad marriage is a good thing."(AMW 168) Astha was somewhat disillusioned with the "rocky terrain" of her own marriage, which is what inspired her to say this.

Astha and Hemant have occasionally disagreed, but despite this, she has never opposed him; instead, all of her disputes with him are expressed in asides. Hemanth publicly objects, saying that she is his wife and should not leave the house, leaving the children in the care of the servants, even when she wants to travel to Ayodhya in connection with the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. She enters her well-known nervous state and asks, "As his wife? Was all that she was" (188), as though she lacked any unique personality.

Though Astha is kind and hopeful about friendship, she also experiences emotional alienation in an attempt to escape her state of uncertainty. Astha understands how to support the system that marriage gives her, therefore she maintains a higher standard for her married life. At some point in time, Astha comes to understand the importance of marriage in her conscious life. It

stems from the values she absorbed from her parents, particularly her mother, who repeatedly reinforced the chastity of marriage by ostentation. Ultimately, Astha grows from these confrontations and becomes a self-assured, imaginative lady. By participating in public affairs and growing in her social consciousness, she tries to reshape her identity.

Astha dedicates her life to painting since she found that "work" is the one place she can truly forget about everything and transform into her hand, her intellect, and the image in her head. In the end, she finds comfort in the realm of art, best exemplified by her husband's painting exhibition. Her display turns out to be a success. Over 50% of the paintings are sold, bringing in nearly two lakhs for Astha. By utilizing Astha to represent her inner potential and need for personal acknowledgment, Kapur presents a direct challenge to patriarchal thought, societal structure, and control mechanisms. She is progressive and aware of her rights and potential, but she swiftly concedes that a woman's true place is in the family, which she must uphold and defend rather than overlook or neglect because she mistakenly believes she has been "liberated." In this way, Astha represents both the modern Indian lady and the face of the new woman of our time.

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