



Manju Kapur's A Married Woman: A Personified Agony

Author- Dr Pooja Malik

Assistant Professor

Amity School of Liberal Arts

Amity University Haryana

Abstract

Manju Kapur is a name in the realm of modern feminist fiction which needs no introduction. She is an author who has given a new direction to the feminism through her novels. In this paper there is an analysis has been attempted of the second novel of Manju Kapur, entitled as *A Married Woman* in the perspective of the mental agony and suffocation of a married woman in the closed Indian society. *A Married Woman* is set in the time when women were considered to stay within the four walls of the house and the utmost priority of a woman's life was to prove herself as a good wife and a responsible daughter-in-law, along with the other relations of her life. The protagonist of this novel Astha is a victim of this contemporary stereotype of the closed Indian society. Astha tries to break the shackles of the womanhood, thrust upon her on the name of being a daughter, wife daughter-in-law, and mother. Astha is the symbol of that generation of women when they were supposed to keep a mum in all the phases of their lives. The character of Astha personifies the mental agony of the married women in Indian society.

Key words- Feminism, Closed Society, Mental Agony, Protagonist etc

Full Paper

Feminism is a term which has various shades in itself and it can be explained in multiple ways, whether about the problems of the half population of the world or about the improvement in the situation of this half population of the world, about the successes of the feminism or about the failures of the feminism. However, with the arrival of the fourth wave of feminism, this term has again become the most radical term in the realm of world literature. Feminism denotes an insurgence in which a woman tussles to attain cultural, social, financial, and mystical parity with their opposite gender. This insurgence takes place in several ways but on literary front, it has achieved remarkable height in raising the voice against wrong done to women. The injustice towards women is not confined to a particular country or geographical area, rather it is world-wide, though its forms may change with the society and community specifically. As far as India is concerned, in educated class of the society, the contribution women on different fronts, has been recognized but in depths, the suffocation of feelings and mental agony of the women

is still same. In modern days, women are supposed to take the responsibilities on the familial and professional front, but they don't get the social standard at par with the male members of the society. Sometimes, women don't get the support of the family in shaping their career as per their will just because of being women and on the name of familial duties and restrictions. This suppression of desire gives birth to a certain kind of agony in the life of women.

Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* highlights this mental agony of Indian married woman to the deepest intensity through the character of Astha. Manju Kapur is a well-known feminist in modern Indian English literature, and she deals with feminism in unique way. In one of her interviews with Ira Pandey, Kapur states:

"I am a feminist. And what is a feminist? I mean I believe in the rights of women to express themselves in the rights of women to work. I believe in equality, you know domestic equality, legal equality. I believe in all that. And the thing is that women don't really have that-- you know even educated women, working women. There is a trapping of equality, but you scratch the surface, and it is not really equal."

Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* is a perfect example of this angle of Kapur's feminism. While Manju Kapur's contemporary Indian novelists talk about feminism, women's liberation, male-controlled culture, male supremacy, and equality between the two sexes, Manju Kapur, in her novels, adds new essence in the field of feminist literature. Kapur portrays a new picture of Indian woman and creates exceptional aroma in the field of Indian English literature. The protagonists of Manju Kapur are highly dynamic and spirited ones. These characters don't believe in sulking or blaming only, rather the protagonists of Manju Kapur keep moving ahead always in the adversities. Kapur's protagonists face a lot of issues in their lives, but they never give up and amid all the oddities of their circumstances, they make their own way to get their goal, without getting frustrated. This quality of never-ending struggling spirit and dynamism can be clearly seen in her novels *Difficult Daughters*, *Home*, *Custody*, *The Immigrant* and in *A Married Woman* through the characters of Virmati, Nisha, Shagun, Nina and Astha.

As far as her novel *A Married Woman* is concerned, which is the centre of analysis in this research paper, is the story of Astha who belongs to a middle-class family in Delhi. She is a single child in her family and a passionate young girl by nature with the hobby of painting. She always dreams of love marriage but has to go for arrange marriage as the will of her parents. As a girl, the only destiny offered to her by her parents was marriage. Simone de Beauvoir also describes the institution of marriage in *The Second Sex* in the following lines:

"Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution."

Astha gets married to Hemant. Like any ordinary newly married couple, Astha and Hemant are happy with each other. Hemant takes care of Astha and loves her, but with the passing of time, boredom starts to take place in their life. Astha wants to do job in journalism, however, she is suggested to go for the job of a schoolteacher, so that she can maintain the balance between her familial responsibilities and her career. She has to sacrifice her dream

of becoming a journalist just because of being married and consequently of being a wife, mother and daughter-in-law.

She has to bear the burden of the expectations of her in-laws and her husband for giving birth to a male child at the time of her second pregnancy. As Julie Myerson, explains in her article *A Review of 'A Married Woman' by Manju Kapur*:

“Most of all, the even-handed and touching portrait of her marriage- the husband who genuinely cares and wants to be sexy and progressive but is in fact the uneasy result of traditional upbringing mixed with Western education – is brilliantly done. Kapur is a generous, far-seeing writer, who knows there are no answers, no conclusions to be drawn. May be that’s what I most admire; she thinks and writes in vivid colours, but it’s the grey area – life’s easy compromises – that she furiously yet tenderly exposes.”

Despite this mental burden and agony Astha consoles herself and the baby inside her womb that the gender of the unborn baby does not matter for her and she will love equally to both of her children. Astha continues her job in school for her self-dependency. She is the one who is considered to be the sole responsible for household, in-laws, husband, children and her job, without any physical and emotional support from her family. Despite of all these things, Astha is not considered to be capable enough to look after the financial matters of her mother, after the death of her father. Astha’s mother trust Hemant, rather than Astha, to invest the money for the future of Astha’s children. In the depths of her heart, Astha again gets hurt when she can’t keep her father’s books in her house as a memory of her late father. Even, Hemant does not care about her mother’s loneliness. Here, Astha again feels the same anguish that the house in which she lives, performs all her duties, and is supposed to make each adjustment and understanding with everyone, is not actually her own house, because her mother cannot live in this house.

During her struggle with the emotional gap between Hemant and herself, Astha happens to meet Aijaz in her school. Astha gets attracted towards Aijaz because of his intellectuality and positivity, but soon Aijaz is killed in the communal riots. It was the time of communal riots because of the demolition of Babri Masjid and Aijaz becomes a victim of this clash. Astha’s feelings again remain unanswered and after Aijaz’s death, Astha meets Aijaz’s wife Pipeelika. Pipeelika’s friendship provides a different kind of strength to Astha and a lesbian relationship grows between them which the reflection of dissatisfaction between Astha and Hemant where Astha always finds herself a subordinate to Hemant.

Astha is a keen orator, a social and political activist as well as a painter but all these aspects of her personality are suppressed by the responsibilities which she always has to fulfil without any option or choice. She finds herself trapped on the name of marriage where there is nothing as per her will and she is supposed to be adjusting all the time as per the need of others. Astha’s closeness with Pipeelika shows her the way to bring out the suppressed aspects of her personality and takes active part in the contemporary social and communal upheaval by attending the meetings and delivering the speeches for social harmony. She visits Ayodhya several times with Pipee and make paintings to get money and then to donate it to Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. She has a remarkable grip over the human psychology and convinces the people for peace. Meanwhile, Pipeelika asks Astha to take divorce

from Hemant as she wants a full-fledged relationship with Astha. However, Astha understands her responsibilities very well and she does not want to leave her family just for her personal satisfaction. This decision of Astha puts an end on the relationship of Astha and Pipeelika which again proves to be disturbing for Astha.

Instead of giving up, this time Astha gives vent to her feelings by painting. She makes some fine paintings and organizes an exhibition in the National Art Gallery which proves to be a great success for her. This time, Hemant is also involved in her efforts and in her success along with Astha's children Anuradha and Himanshu. Before her departure to abroad, Pipee also comes to visit her exhibition and is much impressed by her art of expression. Astha handles the parting of Pipee from her life with great sincerity and maturity. She puts an end on her relations with Pipee with a happy note, without making any complaint. Though the love and companionship with Pipee, brings out a new Astha before the world who is much sophisticated and develops a feeling of self-existence. Roopali points out in her article *A Married Woman: A Saga of Post-Modernistic Ethics*:

“A post-modernistic ethic has spread its wings everywhere. *A Married Woman* deals with tradition *versus* no tradition, permanent *versus* temporary, moral *versus* amoral, usual sex to unusual sex, factual history *versus* imaginary history and religion *versus* inhumanism. The life in the novel presents, contradictions, paradoxes, illusions, and fantasies.”

In this phase of her life Astha is a successful and satisfied married career woman who has given a shape to her upcoming life. Though the journey has not been easy for her, yet it is her struggle which gets her a certain level of satisfaction and achievement. The journey which she has gone through has filled her mind with deep agony where she always she always finds her alone with all her responsibilities. Astha is married to Hemant as per the will of her parents and enjoys her married life as any other common woman. But when she adopts teaching job as her career, she realizes this as the commencement of endless adjustments in her life. At the time of her second pregnancy, she bears the pressure of gender biasness about her unborn baby from her family including her husband and mother. Her involvement with the Manch and in other political activities is disregarded by everyone at each step. She finds shackled in the household and familial responsibilities shared by none. She suffers from severe headaches. Despite her inner angst, she continues to move ahead on the path of her desires and passion. She paints and writes for the welfare of society. While Hemant has no sense about his social responsibility, Astha performs it well. Being dissatisfied in her married life, she develops lesbian relationship with Pipeelika and finds psychological satisfaction. After a lot of struggles, she is successful in establishing her career as a painter. All these aspects of her personality and her life, reveal her as a highly dynamic and unbeatable spirit. At the same time, she realizes her responsibilities towards her family and children and refuses to continue her relationship with Pipeelika who wants her complete devotion. She accepts Pipee's departure from her life with great patience and does not complain about anything. She accepts her married life though with a change where now she has a space for herself.

Though Astha gets remarkable achievements in her life, yet the agony suffered by her, seems to be the destiny of each and every married woman in the society where she is trapped in the familial responsibilities on the name of marriage to such extent, that she finds herself unable to take a step ahead out of this trap. In the starting the novel does not give the impression of something new or striking or interesting, but as far as we continue to read it, we

feel the captivating grip of the novel through the character of Astha. As the account of Astha's life seems to be the account of every Indian married woman's account of life where she is considered to be the embodiment of household responsibilities without any appreciation of recognition, as for, it is what she has been destined for.

Works Cited:

1. Kapur, Manju, "Interview with Ira Pandey" The Hindu: Jan 5, 2003.
2. De, Beauvoir Simone. *The Second Sex*, translated and edited by H.M.Parshley, Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1983
3. Myerson, Julie. *A Review of 'A Married Woman' by Manju Kapur*. The Guardian, 1st March 2003
4. Roopali. *A Married Woman: A Saga of Post-modernistic Ethics. In Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feministic Study*. Ed. Ashok Kumar, New Delhi: Sarup Book Publisher Pvt. Lmt., 2010

