
HOPEFULNESS AND FRUSTRATION IN DOMESTIC LIFE IN MANJU KAPUR'S A MARRIED WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to bring new women in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* taking into account the hopefulness and frustration in domestic life. With diverse cultures, histories, and distinct forms of ethics and values, the women's question, despite essential solidarity, needs to be tackled about the socio-cultural circumstances. The lives of women who survived and struggled under the suppressive mechanism of a restricted society can be manifested in the novels of Kapur. She has written fiction focusing on the predicament of contemporary women particularly in their struggle for empowerment and independence from the male- chauvinistic social structure. Now "Woman Question" is no longer a problem limited to the condition of women within the family or their rights to equality with men in different facets of social life. It is part of the total, far broader question considering the direction of change that Indian society is making - social, political, economic, and the intellectual viewpoint and examination of that process.

Keywords: Women, Domesticity, Cultures, Family, Liberation, Frustration, Hopefulness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hopefulness and Frustration in Domestic Life in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* Among the Indian-English women novelists, Manju Kapur has acquired a distinguished position. She has sensitively and realistically dealt with the typical Indian themes and lucidly manifested the contemporary middle-class women with a rare proficiency. In a greater sense, her themes are nothing less than human predicament and alienation. Her portrayal has become more realistic with a distinct impetus of anxiety and hostility of modern women. The women characters conceived by Kapur feel torn between the rival pulls of tradition and modernity. The predicament of the working woman in her novels gets amplified by her issues with marital compromises and her quest for her identity.

Kapur's second novel, "A Married Woman" was published in 2002, and is the tale of Astha, an educated, upper-middle-class working woman. The narrative is set at a time of religious and political catastrophe. As a sensitive daughter of an open-minded father and conservative mother, Astha was brought-up in an educated middle-class family in South Delhi. Unlike most unmarried women she has her infatuated love for Bunty, a boy of a neighbor colony, and then for Rohan who goes abroad for a better job. But her real story of love and marriage began with Hemant, the son of an influential government official in Delhi. Soon after marriage, Astha gets disappointed about human nature in general and the politics of the nation in specific. She is fed up with the politicians who, in the guise of democrats and socialists try to organize different yantras for their vote banks under the pseudo-secular banner of national unity. On the other hand, Astha's family affairs are not on god terms and nothing is right with her. Hemant does not prove to be a suitable boy nor does she become a desirable daughter-in-law in her in-law's house.

Astha has everything that a woman could ask for a responsible husband, children, and nice surroundings in the central part of Delhi, Indian Capital. But Astha's requirement to affirm her identity finds expression in the paintings that she makes. Art is a refuge for Astha. She strives to express herself but puts her thoughts on the canvas. Her husband was lovable and caring when Anuradha was born. He stresses giving Anuradha her Sunday bath. He has been educated abroad and has perceived how couples equally share the upbringing of the child. "He insisted on doing this, ideas about fatherhood are so antiquated in India" (60). But Hemant's aspiration to have a son and his emphasis that he would not stop until he has one makes Astha frustrated and anguished. She cannot understand her man. Just after marriage, Astha started teaching in a school. Her job forces her to wake up early so that she can reach her school on time. She has exercises to convert, and lessons to prepare, but because she is still very much in love with Hemant, she looks forward to spending the evenings with his company. Hemant starts coming late, accuses his manager when he fails to complete his projects, and in general expresses his disillusionment with everything. These criticisms leave her, dreary, cold, and detached from him. She has been waiting for him all day, contemplating of their being together, but nothing of this is reciprocated.

He is a criminal, deteriorating her anticipation and impairing her happiness. When Astha is pregnant for the second time, everyone hopes male baby. Though she declares to the fetus that she would love the child is it a boy or a girl, she is very much anxious. Soon after, Astha's happiness receives a jolt because "between Anuradha's birth and Himanshu's, Hemant changes from being an all-American father to being an all-Indian one" (70). He refuses to keep with Himanshu's upbringing. He has made business trips to abroad four times a year as he started a TV manufacturing unit in Astha's name in Noida. This leaves Astha to cope single-handedly with her dilemmas - job, children, and home. Astha dabbles with the idea of resigning but does not want to do so: "...she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence. Besides, there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs" (72).

Gradually, headaches start to attack Astha until the doctors advised an operation on her nose. For four days she is hospitalized and during this time Hemant is very lovable and caring. Returning home, she realizes that the children spend more time with the grandparents than with her. She feels lonely, but her complaint to Hemant is in vain because he too complains of loneliness stating that she spends most of her time with children and profession and not him. Astha starts writing poetry and this alleviates the pressure within her. However, Hemant understands these emotional outbursts as "positively neurotic" (81) and fears that people might think that Astha is unhappy. She gives up writing and starts sketching and drawing, after all, "nobody could put two and two together about painting ..." (87).

When Astha's father expires, her mother is influenced by a Swami and moves to his Ashram in Rishikesh - there she finds solace and peace. She sold her property in Delhi and gave a part of the proceeds of the sale to Heman. Astha disapproves of this and she displeased in a couched language only to be snubbed by her husband and mother. After some time, Astha comes under the influence of Aijaz Akhtar Khan and his Street Theatre Group. It is consequential that she starts a lesbian relationship with Aijaz's wife, Pipeelika after Aijaz's death. During the summer holidays Mrs. Dubey, the principal of the school where Astha teaches, has invited Aijaz to teach the nuances of play production to the children. Astha has been put on duty much to her family's displeasure. Aijaz asks her to write a script accentuating the Babri Masjid RamJanma bhoomi issue. With the help of her daughter Anuradha, Astha learns to browse through the library books and make notes. Her efforts are satirized by Hemant, but this only serves to strengthen her effort. Aijaz is elegant, and intelligent and recognizes

Astha and this serves to bring them more intimate. Astha feels, “suddenly her life seemed less constricted” (115). Astha never wants to cross the limit of her married life: “...she does not want any other man.” After the production of the play, Astha has little to do with Aijaz. But deep within the core of her heart, she cherishes the moments spent in his company. Once he touches her knee this sudden touch sends a wave of sensation in her. Later on, during a communal riot her friend Aijaz Khan dies. Astha feels it in her heart. When Aijaz dies, she cannot prevent her tears and sentiments.

Kapur has admirably depicted the angst, irritation, and struggle of the Indian middle-class a woman who is at a loss to condemn social traditions. Although she tries her best to affirm her place in family and society, she reaches nowhere due to her moral disproportions and unnatural dreams of being in communion with Pipee, the widow of Aijaz Khan. After the death of Aijaz, she meets his widow-wife Pipee who becomes a source of pleasure to her. She is committed to an affair with Pipee. She takes notice of whatever Pipee tells. Astha and Pipee, both are living under the illusion of making themselves liberated from male domination but when their liberation is weighed on the scale of morality, ethics, values, and care for family peace, they stand nowhere. But the fact is, Astha is enthralled by Pipee. They understand each other, feel for each other, and stand for each other. During their pilgrimage to Ayodhya, their bond becomes stronger. Astha lays bare her lacerated breast before Pipee to which she applies the ointment of sympathy. Despite all opposition, she leaves her children and family and goes on Ekta Yatra to Kanya Kumari from Kashmir with Pipee.

During their yatra, Astha gets to know of Pipee’s lesbian affairs with a few other women like Sameera and Neeraj. Pipee’s demanding passion and her past affairs disappoint her. She is trapped in a terrible dilemma, whether she should stay in the sheltered existence provided by family and tradition or she should run for her freedom. A Married Woman presents another form of relationship - no force, no tricks, just plain love. Both Astha and Pipee love each other and their physical intimacy is proof of that. The reader feels for them as they make each other’s life joyous and trust each other with utmost love till the situations to them of Kapur’s novels enable us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against male discrimination. While reading the novel, one gets the impression that a woman’s life is like the life of a nation that is passing through trials and tribulations.

In portraying the inner struggle of a woman’s mind, Kapur reveals a mature understanding of the female psyche. Most of all, Kapur attempts to fuse the personal with the external. She speaks as someone who has lived through the tumult of the communal notes, which in some way affected the lives of all Indians. They are major historical incidents and Kapur has intertwined their understanding into the lives of Astha and Pipee. She presents an India which is relevant both to those who stayed on in their country to face the aggression of Western influences and aggravated competition, and also those who opted to perceive the nation from Western climes. Yet, occasionally Kapur’s interpretation of a lesbian relationship sometimes distracts the reader from the pressures of the situation and the core emotions of the characters.

However, A Married Woman is a well-balanced portrayal of a nation’s inherent progress - its failures and its strengths and the angst of a woman’s uproar, which is, as complicated as the political and social revolution going on around her. Kapur has restricted women with enthusiasm and appears to propose that a married woman’s duty is not as a babysitter and housekeeper but to do something more. Through Astha, Kapur offers a facade challenge to patriarchal attitudes, social organization, and control mechanisms through her inherent capacity as an individual and her dream to accomplish personal recognition. In the gynocentric struggle for liberation, Astha strives for the togetherness of the family as a unit.

Neither as a flag waver nor as a patriot, she is wholly aware that venality, brutality, and hypocrisy are engraved on the ponderous soul of every fanatic Indian, Indian democracy has become a holy cow in a socio-political predicament, and the benefits it yields are used and abused at will by a diluted politics.

Thus, *A Married Woman* explores the mysterious facet of a woman's passionate life as defined by comfort levels without societal sanctions. Kapur discusses logically between events, plucking out interesting emotional developments and constantly making her tale exciting and engaging. This is not a work to rival the might of such Indian masters, but there is much here to like and enjoy. Kapur's delicate writing depicts human relations and their social context with great sensibility and close attention to the details of daily life. Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaks traditional boundaries. has had a significant impact. The finite dimension of the relationship between man and woman has been prescribed by man and not by woman. Her limits have been imposed on her by a man who is ruled by mastery-motive. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons. Very often this acceptance is not congruent with the reality that lies underneath. Modern women prefer to exercise their choice and break away from their traumatic experiences. Women are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view, and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in words.

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