



Interrogating Family Relations Through Manju Kapur *A Married Woman*

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A Married Woman deals with the burning issues of the modern world. It is a real story of a young couple, whose married life starts and grows with the seeds of love and understanding. Though the protagonist is dragged into a physical relationship with another educated widow, she turns round the clock and reaches the starting point. The contentious issue of homosexuals is dealt in sensitive terms. In spite of the modern technological developments, all gay and lesbian relationships are far from social realities.

The main theme of the novel revolves round family sentiment, homosexual relationship, gender discrimination and political chaos. This paper concentrates how this novel shows the author's protest against woman's miserable experience. The novel is strikingly, straight forward story set between family and love, country and life. Hence, she permits the readers to frame an idea about the women's struggle against their opposite gender. Kapur is claimed as a wordsmith, as her narrative skeins together the different strands. Kapur systematically shows a process of development in Astha's life. Born in an orthodox family, she feels the care of her parents, enjoys her life with her husband, moves far from him, struggles to prove as a painter and a poet, becomes a social activist and develops lesbian relation with a woman.

Women cannot express some feelings which the society opposes. If she tries to put forward such aspirations, she will be labelled as feminist. The irony in Manju Kapur's heroines is they pay for their rebellion. They try to break out the traditional clutches and create a new path for them. Unfortunately this remains at theoretical levels. In reality after their bold struggle they lack courage and continue to patriarchal supremacy. Kapur's vision on experimenting on blending two controversial issues, the political turmoil on one hand and a woman's love for another woman on the other hand are really admirable. She sincerely shows the confession of a woman from a traditional family.

Indian middle class women were well portrayed by Manju Kapur. Their inner turmoil torments and sufferings in the patriarchal culture show how women suffer amidst the metropolitan cultures and globalised educational systems. Although Astha struggles for independence throughout her journey, ultimately she has to return to her family accepting her defeat. Her teenage love, love after marriage with Aijaz and her love with Pipee all couldn't bring about happiness in her life and finally she had to

accept the reality, her husband and her family. Mithu C. Banerjee said that the lesbian element gives relief to the readers when they are seriously involved in tensions of the country. The novel has a good balance of country's internal progress covering its strengths and weaknesses parallel to the women's emotional struggle and unrest.

Two different kinds of marriages were shown. One, an arranged marriage between Astha and Hemant, and the other love marriage between Pipeelika and Aijaz. Both seemed to be alike as far as the families were concerned. Astha had a complete and secured life but she struggled for self-identity and suffered when her husband was away on his business tours. But she was well cared by her family; much importance was given to her by her husband. Economically she was having a secured position. She had in-laws just above the stairs and mother to look after and care about her and her family. She had a job which gave her satisfaction to fulfil her desires as a painter and a writer. Pipee's mother had many apprehensions about Aijaz but he proved to be a lovable person. She was satisfied with her daughter's marriage. Even Aijaz's mother accepted Pipee as their daughter-in-law. They didn't leave her even after the death of Aijaz. Aijaz and Pipee also had a contended life, though it was for a short time. The author could balance both the marriages with pros and cons attached to the systems imbibed in it.

It's very difficult to retain the supremacy in the family, especially in Hindu families where the head of the family is male. The male dominated society naturally teaches the subordination of the female in the family systems. It was quiet easier for the women of the previous generations to come up with the family systems, which included the domination of the men by limiting the role of women as a dutiful daughter-in-law, mother and a kitchen maid. The women of those days did not think of individualism or liberty or self-reliance as the society which they lived in did not give them such ideas. As education has paved its way into the nook and corners of the society it has drastically brought about a change in the minds of the educated women in liberalizing themselves from the clutches of family tradition. Women are no more considered as aimless dependent women but are considered as women with self-identity and self-recognition.

Many writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Marakandaya, Manju Kapur have rightly set their path in delineating women characters as independent characters in the social and cultural life of family relations. Manju Kapur explores a totally different aspect of educating a girl in the novel. Like any other woman of her age Sita, Astha's mother, believed in the age old, traditional ways. She regularly prayed to God that her daughter, Astha should get a good husband. But Astha's father believed in the modern era.

He feels that it is the duty of every individual to mould their lives according to their wish. When it comes to daughters they need to empower themselves with education. So he always kept himself up dated about Astha's studies. Every father expects from his child that he or she should be more successful than himself. He also feels proud when the society recognises his/her talent. The best example can be the participation of the youth of today who are working in MNC's and earning more than their father's income. In the same way, he expected Astha to do the best to achieve his pipe dream.

He always encouraged her about her potentials, her flair for painting and her way with the words; he insisted that with a bit of practice in Mathematics, her weak point, she could sit for the competitive exams. Her father feels that a good job can fetch her independence. But the manipulation was another way of finding a good match for his daughter. When he is thinking in this direction, he may find a son-in-law from the same category. Thus, the final destination fixed for their daughter is marriage, only the perspectives in the attitudes of the parents differed. This patriarch, being a pen

pusher himself, shrewdly camouflages his real intentions, while encouraging his daughter to study hard. He never thinks beyond the boundary of marriage.

As the opening statement states “Astha was brought up properly” (1), her parents were included in all the parts of her life giving her good education, good health by taking her to regular walks, making her practice pranayamam, meditation and ultimately a good marital life. Astha’s mother was more observant about her teenage daughter. Astha was crazy about Bunty, a neighbouring boy in her teenage. Bunty was a student of the Defence Academy and when he moved to his academy after the vacation, Astha tries to continue her passion through letters. Bunty, not well aware of Astha’s love towards him replied her discussing his camps. These letters were caught by Astha’s cautious mother and she had to give up her first love.

When Astha was in college she was once again attracted to Rohan. But unfortunately her second love was also a failure as Rohan was a materialistic man. Astha was well aware of Rohan’s attitude that he didn’t really love her, but only wanted to pass his time with her. As Astha was a good writer and a painter she penned all her feelings in a diary which was found by her mother and she had to escape saying it was a story that she had been writing for a magazine.

Astha’s mother was so keen about her daughter’s marriage. Every Sunday, her duty was to look at the matrimonial columns and enquire about the bride grooms. Astha, who was not interested in arranged marriage, did not respond to the match that her mother had arranged for her without the knowledge of her father. After Astha had joined her post graduation course, she got a proposal from the Vadera’s family for their only son Hemant, a foreign returned M.B.A. Her father gave importance to his daughter’s opinion as she was the one who is going to be with him for the rest of her life.

Her mother was worried about her father’s retirement and she forced her daughter to marry Hemant Vadera. But Astha had already become independent in her thoughts and ideas considered her father as the best reliable person to judge the match. Astha’s prudent father was too conscious of the match. He weighed the pros and cons regarding the family’s history. When he had realized the weight was on the positive side, he didn’t find any reason to object. A good match for typical Indian traditional parents, foreign returned son-in-law, and who works in a bank. Hindus believe that men who love and take care of their parents will certainly love their wife. Even Hemant was proved to be the right match for Astha as he returned from US only for the sake of his parents, which is highly unimaginable in today’s circumstances.

Whatever apprehensions the family had in mind, finally Astha got married in the hot month of June. At last the middle class parents, who wanted their daughter to be well-settled, could fulfil the task. Of course they have successfully completed their duty of their wholesome life. Hemant and Astha was a happy couple, enjoying the pleasures of their life. Though Astha was not at first interested in job, her husband, mother-in-law and mother gave her freedom to fulfil her dreams as her excellent academic talent need to be honoured. She started her career as a teacher for the twelfth standard students.

Astha, who was brought up well and sent to a well-reputed family, was well respected even in the school she worked. In spite of her pregnancy she continued her job. After Anuradha, the first child was born they could settle well by building a spacious house of their own before the retirement of her father-in-law. On the other side Astha’s poor parents who were very careful about their future could only buy 280yards near Trans Jamuna, a not yet established colony. So they had to search for a rented house and within a year after shifting into it, Astha’s father died of cardiac arrest leaving his wife Sita alone to sail in the ocean.

Astha well cared for her mother and wanted her to stay with them. She feels Hemant’s intervention into their family matters would make her mother feel comfortable, but Sita was quite self

respective and did not like to stay with her daughter's family. She turns to a devotional life transforming into a new Sita leading the rest of her life in tranquillity in Rishikesh. When Astha finds it difficult, her mother consoles her saying it's not good on her part to stay with her daughter's family and Astha bursts out saying "I wish you wouldn't be so stick-in-the-mud, Ma. Why didn't you have a son to look after you when you were old, if you cannot take anything from a daughter? Why did you stop with me?" (85)

Astha, a truly loving child concerned about her mother feels worried about her, but later she realizes the intensity of her mother's words as she could understand Hemant could never become a son but can only be a son-in-law. She feels happy when she visits her mother in Rishikesh, her intention was to relieve her mother from the religious influence but she could finally understand that she was the person who needed to be rescued and saved not her mother, who was happy understanding the real essence of life. Astha's parents were disciplined and thoughtful throughout their life and could lead a secured and peaceful life without causing any trouble to their only daughter, Astha.

Astha was lucky to receive the affection of her in-laws as well as Hemant. But the time has brought about some changes in Astha's life. When Anuradha was born Hemant was quite positive about having a female child. When Astha's mother hopes they should have a son for carrying the name of the Vadera's, he sardonically remarks with his westernized influence there is no difference between a boy and a girl, whoever they are to be cared by the parents. In the same he treats his daughter with good care and personal attention.

When Astha conceived for the second time, her husband was so anxious of having a male child and makes his mother to perform some puja everyday, which makes Astha nervous. She doesn't have any discrimination between a male and a female child for she feels irrespective of the gender they are her own blood. Luckily Himanshu was born relieving the entire family from tension. Otherwise Astha was horrified at his feelings he said to Astha she need not look at these things negatively and spoil her health. As every problem has a solution, may be they can try again for a son.

The responsibilities of Astha in the school sometimes made her to sacrifice her own time at home. When the principal Ms Dubey invited the Street Theatre Group, she was forced to accept volunteering the students during her holidays. Though she did not like it she was not having any other alternative other than convincing Anuradha and Himanshu to take along with her. Hemant had arranged his time to spend with his family in their vacation which became impossible as Astha had no choice. It's a universal problem which is commonly seen in many families, where husband and wife are busy with their own activities. None would like to compromise and make their relations worse than ever. At last Hemant had to adjust and finally Astha involved herself in the historical street play.

As Manju Kapur is a versatile genius in mixing up the historical facts with the portrayals of her realistic characters, she brings up the issue of Babri Masjid. Aijaz, a history lecturer and social reformist attracts Astha by involving her in the historical aspect of the play, which was neither her subject nor her area of interest. When Hemant expresses the same, she feels he was humiliating and under estimating her potentials. She leaves Himanshu in the upstairs and with the help of Anuradha explores the history of the play. Even after the show Astha could not forget Aijaz, though she hadn't heard from him after the play except that he was behind a girl who was working for the NGO's.

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