

## Life of a woman in Manju Kapur's *a married woman*

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### Abstract

Manju Kapur writes well and she has the power to make you keep reading. In previous book difficult daughter some years ago and that was more powerful than this one. A Married Woman on the other talks about the different phases in the life of the woman, pre and post marriage.

**Keywords:** woman: I laugh, I cry, I express, I hide, I love, I hate, I hate

### Introduction

'A Married Woman' is an honest and seductive story of love, passion, and attachment set at the time of political and religious turmoil in India. Driven by a powerful physical relationship with a much younger woman, the main character of the novel risks losing the acquisitions of her torrential marriage and safe family. The novel raises the controversial issue of homosexual relationship in a challenging way. After all gay and lesbian relationships are not mere fancies. This is getting more and more visible in modern societies though we may or may not accept it. Various elements of feminism are clearly visible in the novel 'A Married Woman', Astha faces biological subjugation in her relationship with the mother in the childhood and with husband in her married life. Her inability to buy an art piece in Goa exhibits her economic dependence inspite of being an earning member of the family. Her mother and father constantly remind her that she is vulnerable and unprotected and so is their liability. Later her husband and in-laws also make her realize that as a bride, wife and mother she is not independent and any act of her is challengeable is family life. All these circumstances force her to make a lesbian relationship with the widow of the man. She loves unconsciously.

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a sudden spurt in feminist writing in Indian English fiction. A group of Indian women novelists in their in between ness, hybridity of thought and multicultural, multi- lingual and multi- religious social dimensions have contextualized the women problems in general and middle- class and upper class women in particular. While the gynocritics think that too many women in too many countries speak the same language of silence, some Indian women novelists like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander and Manju Kapur have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. Manju Kapur, a Reader in English literature at Miranda House, University of Delhi, is the winner of the 1999 Common wealth Writers Prize for the socio-political scenario in our country with insight and precision. While her first novel is a family saga against the historical backdrop of partition,

her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) is a work of investigative reporting on the most controversial and political issue of the demolition of Babri Masjid and a woman's obsession with love and lesbianism. The novel is a kind of narrative on a woman's incompatible marriage and resultant frustration and the contemporary political turmoil in its historical context.

In the novel, Kapur has taken writing as a protest, a way of mapping from the point of a woman's experience. Kapur negotiates different issues emerging out of a socio- political upheaval in her country. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. As a writer of new generation in an atmosphere of the nation's socio-political flux, Kapur has recorded the truth in her narrative fiction. With a zeal to change the Indian male perception, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. She is shocked at the growth of fundamentalism and the rise of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish a paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity. Kapur describes this politics of genocide as an important fabric in India's unique experience of democracy. She is sincere and naive as a sociologist in exposing the bizarre paradox of rationality that underlines a sentiment of antipathy sheltered under political support and social approval. She resonates with her feminine assertion, hatred for violence, blood, death and ill-feeling in the name of God and religion, and her feminine assertions remain untouched by history, politics and human interpretations.

*A Married Woman* is a novel with a social purpose. It deals with three issues – reinterpretation of history, political ideologies and feminist views in the present context. The pointed references to life and delicate dealing with political activities of the time are presented with the historical backdrop of Babri Masjid- Ram Janmabhoomi episode. This gives the story a tangible shape with the articulation of emotional issues, communal hatred and women concerns. While the political backdrop is controversial and no conducive

for the secularists, the demolition of Babri Masjid adds substance to the novel. The main ideas conceived in the novel are based on family life, sexual relationship, gender discrimination, socio-political upheaval and the desire for peaceful co-existence. The purpose of the novelist seems to be uni-dimensional with the idea of love what can really drive a woman into such a relationship. In her interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur says, "It is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man". The novel exposes the domestic terrain where woman explores the space in her domestic relationship. Kapur has remained very truthful in presenting the women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio-political levels"<sup>6</sup>. Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the Woman's Question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy of the Indian society varies ...and therefore ... stream of feminism grounded in reality. Kapur the socialist conveys the message that communal riot is a terrible disease that kills God in man and commits murder in the cathedral while Kapur the feminist refers to three forms of mysogyny, sexism or discrimination against women, patriarchy or male supremacy at institutional and individual level, and phallocentrism or discrimination at the conceptual level. She desires to prove through her woman protagonist that "A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-reliant and rational having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense. She seems to bring out the implicit fallacy in Aristotle's dictum, "Man is a social animal", in the present socio-cultural context of India in which people fail to realize the futility of violence, and the necessity of peaceful co-existence for all. She apprehends the approach of an apocalyptic social climate with the rise of the fundamentalists and fanatics in nation's spurious politics who take religion to be ultra-patriotic. Like *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* "has a sophisticated plot". The story of love is honest. Set at a time of political and religious upheaval it is narrated with sympathy and intelligence for anyone who has known life's responsibilities. The novel is a sincere confession of a woman about her personality cult in the personal allegory of a bad marriage. Astha the sensitive daughter of an enlightened father and orthodox mother has grown in a middle-class educated family in South Delhi and becomes a housewife, teacher, painter, and a lesbian in her status of a married woman she fights for her self-assertions. Unlike many unmarried girls she had her infatuations of adolescent love for Bunt, a boy of another colony and for Rohan who left for overseas for a better career. But her real story of love and marriage started with Hemant, the son of a successful government official in Delhi. Soon after marriage, Astha gets disillusioned about human nature in general and politics of the country in particular. She is fed up with the politicians who, in the guise of democrats and socialists, attempt to organize different yatras for their vote banks under the pseudo-secular banner of national unity. On the other hand, these yatras have become inauspicious for the nation. Sharing her feelings "we should

struggle with her, agonize together with her about her choices, and weep with her once she's made them". Astha's family affairs are not good and nothing is right with her. Hemant doesn't prove a suitable boy nor she becomes a desirable daughter-in-law in her in-law's house. In the Kosher world of *Saas bahu* social dynamics, she does not want only to be heavily sindoor, bejeweled and walk around the tulsi plant every morning and offer a mandatory pooja. As a married woman she becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of "mother and father" for her children. This denies her self-fulfillment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Discontentment leads her to defiance and restlessness. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life. Restlessness drives her to enjoy absolute loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom.

In the midst of a family and its vast minefield of income, expenditure, rights, responsibilities, knowledge, discontent, restlessness and dependency, Astha enjoys the fate of the poorest. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and "always adjusting to everybody's needs"<sup>7</sup>. Astha understands a married woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She feels for herself that "A willingly body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth"<sup>8</sup>, are the necessary prerequisites of a married woman. She contemplates marriage a terrible decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of rage, pain and indecision. Judging the male impression of woman she thinks that a married woman is an object of "mind fucking"<sup>9</sup>. She does not think "marriage is just sex"<sup>10</sup> rather it provides interest, togetherness and respect. Being torn between her duty and responsibility, faith and fact, history and contemporaneity, public ethos and personal ethics she thinks "a tired woman cannot make good wives"<sup>11</sup> and struggles for an emotional freedom from the scourge of the nation. She develops psychosomatic symptoms of stress and depression balancing between existing and living. Astha's slow discovery of her differences with her husband, her change from a tender and hopeful bride to a battered wife and her meeting with Pipeelika Trivedi lead her to realize the other state of woman in their "familiar distress"<sup>12</sup>. This leads her to an immoral, rather amoral, guilt consciousness of lesbian love rationalizing her outmoded morality. Being marginalized by the affluence of her family, vicious social atmosphere, sheer hysteria of communalism and quarrel of two communities for god over a small thing, she is disillusioned in the empirical study of man's nature and his framing of social values. There is the evolution of a romantic fantasy in her lesbophobic imagination for her definition and self-reliance.

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