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PORTRAYAL OF NEW WOMAN IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL *A MARRIED WOMAN*

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Abstract

In this contemporary era, rapid changes take place in the socio-cultural and ethical values and norms of the society. In the traditional system, Indian society is organized around a gender division giving more space to male dominance. Right from the marriage, the bride's incorporation into the family begins. She wants to make a comfortable home for her husband. But despite her all efforts to devote herself sincerely to the wellbeing of the family, she often feels alienated. In the Modern Era things gets changed and women are equal to men. Manju Kapur, who has contributed a lot to the Indian literature in English, is a writer of international repute. With five critically acclaimed novels to her credit, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*. In her novel *A Married Woman* Astha undergoes a change against Indian society. She is a young woman brought up in middle class family in Delhi. Her quest for love remains in her life and it makes her as a new woman.

Key-Words

Dominance, Alienated, Quest, Incorporation, Critically.



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In the novels of men writers, the inner feelings of women are not shown as they are rarely experienced in their real life. The women writers give an innate picture of new emerging women and their sufferings. The main objective of women writers of the day is to present various roles played by women in the society and to bring the darkness of centuries of her life to light. Among these writers Manju Kapur plays prominent roles through her novels. Her works focus on women's physical, financial and emotional exploitation along with their psychological anguish. Women characters have been shown to be searching for identity and for self-awareness. A modern woman prefers to exercise her choice and break away from her all traumatic experiences. Women are now portrayed more active, more liberated in her thoughts and actions.

In this novel, Kapur has taken writing as protest in the woman's point of view. *A Married Woman* offers different images of woman. Astha is the protagonist of the novel. Other images are - Astha's mother - Sita and Pipeelika Trivedi. In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with different roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. The title of the novel implies that the novel and its characters centers upon the married woman, Astha. When compared to other women in this novel, Astha is completely different from her traditional counterpart and her character is matured one.

Astha is brought up in a traditional homely environment in a typical middle class family. The very first line of the novel states, "Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear" (*A Married Woman* 1).

Her orthodox mother wanted to inculcate the tradition, religious piety practiced through proper rituals. Her father is a bureaucrat. He is very much concerned with her education and wants to instill good habits, tastes and manner. Astha, the sensitive daughter of enlightened father

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and orthodox mother and becomes a housewife, teacher, painter, and a lesbian in her status of married woman. Due to an age factor she had her infatuation of adolescent love for Bunty, a boy of another colony and for Rohan who left her and goes to abroad for his further studies. She felt that all her longing will comes to an end when Hemant's proposal comes for her. He is an MBA, foreign-returned son of a bureaucrat. Astha's mental thinking is well captured by Manju Kapur:

Astha sat silent, twiddling her thumbs, staring down at her flat feet in their bathroom clippers. Had she known Rohan? Not really. And the soiled feeling she now associated with that interlude came over her again. (*A Married Woman* 33)

Kapur beautifully depicts the power struggles that emerge to the couple's relationship. But she is compelled to be an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. She has carved out of an independent life of the woman. She has a different life after her marriage with Hemant. After a birth of two children Anuradha and Himanshu brings comfort in her life. After her son birth everyone in the family and also in society treats her in good manner. Though she doesn't like the gender-discrimination, we have to accept the facts happening in our society. She started realizing that she has sacrificed her own identity for the sake of her family. She is always under the pressure of work and suffocating herself in daily activities. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to be a mother and father for her children. Astha thinks that married woman's are treated as unpaid servants for their family. She feels that she always torn between her own thoughts and family responsibilities.

She keeps herself busy in school while Hemant remains busy with his work. Still she feels for her poor condition though she is a teacher in the status of married woman and mother. Manju kapur tries to say that woman should be treated equal with their partners. Women must have their equal status like men in the socio-economic set of our society. Their relation starts to sour day by day as Manju Kapur Writes:

Astha's desire receded. She felt cold, dreary and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day, thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was a criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. (*A Married Woman* 50)

When Astha goes to holiday with her family she has a bad experience of Hemant. Hemant all the time counts money and expenses. Hemant is very dominating in his behavior which makes her discomfort. Her position was like catalyst whose presence is never noticed and absence makes a difference. Astha likes to have a break from her dependence with Hermant and she wants to proceeds on her path with all human status. Astha starts liking Aijaz when he comes to her school for The Street Theatre Group to hold workshop on their premises. They both started working together. The next day, headline of the news paper is like this -Theatre Group Burned Alive in Van. For Astha destiny plays as a game changer. Again she finds herself lonely. She sets out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. She finds a good companion in Pipeelika.

Pipee is a widow of Aijaz. She becomes attracted towards Pipeelika, a Muslim's wife and a professor daughter. Both of them fulfill female bonding in passionate and intense fantasies of love making. In her shattered family life she prefers this is an antidote to masochism offering homage to her conventional morality. They forget their personal torment in this feminine habit. While the

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lesbian attempts drag Pipeelika to the world of forgetfulness. Astha takes a sweet revenge on her husband. Astha is Kapur's New Woman, "conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for her, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes".

The greatest strength of this novel lies in the author's concern for a girl who moulds herself in completely new environment with new set of rules and regards it as the only permanent fact of her existence. She believes that Ram is a scared name and has his sacred place in myth, history, tradition and belief of Indians. Astha believes that:

The Hindu religion is wide, is deep, capable of endless interpretations. Anybody can get anything they want from it, ritual, and stories, thoughts that sustain. (85)

But at the end Astha makes up her mind when Hemant suffers a heart attack. She returns home to serve her family and husband. But at her back she always thinks of Pipee. She stops herself from making a lesbian relationship with Pipee. And at last Pipee goes to US to follow her Ph.D. In her novel, Manju kapur exposes the realities, anxieties, depressions and dangers.

Manju kapur suggests that women will never tolerate inequality, injustice and discrimination like earlier traditional families in India. The women assess their status in every moment if they find the difference they will break the traditional customs and religions to withhold their self identity.

Astha changes a lot from the beginning to the end of the novel. Her journey from childhood to womanhood is portrayed very carefully. Manju kapur has brings out the struggles and life of married woman and again bring back her in a routine life. As she involves herself in lesbian relationship she becomes one of the rarest characters in Indian English literature to tread on a path which is never treaded by anyone. It's exploring a hidden aspect of women passionate life is defined by comfort level without social sanctions.

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