

## IDENTITY CRISIS IN MANJU KAPUR'S *A MARRIED WOMAN*

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### ABSTRACT

*The realities of women's lives seem to be gaining greater significance day by day. Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and atrocities committed against women. Victims are those against whom atrocities have been committed in the name of culture, tradition, religion, social acceptance, hypocrisy and man's inhumanity towards fellow human beings. The importance of men and their superiority has been a part of Indian Social Mores for generations. Women have always been less important individuals. When a woman lives in a male dominated society obviously she undergoes many hardships. Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of suffering but stoic women eventually breaking the traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. Her female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the confines of a conservative society. In her novel 'A Married Woman' Manju Kapur brings forth those hard facts that will go a long way in demystifying marriage. The novel discussed the tragic tale of the middle class working women with Astha as the main heroine and Peepilika as the titular one. Astha imbibes middle class values and latter suffers from a sense of incompleteness in her married life. Through the personal private lives of these characters Manju Kapur exposes the existing tension and the oscillation of the self between the two state of mind. She gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her protagonists. This paper speaks about the problems faced by the protagonists of the novels to have an identity of their own.*

The realities of women's lives seem to be gaining greater significance day by day. Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and atrocities committed against women. Victimized women assert themselves in different ways according to their perception of right and wrong which itself undergoes a change, resulting in changed attitude towards morality and modalities of life which come to be called modern. Victims are those against whom atrocities have been committed in the name of culture, tradition, religion, social acceptance, hypocrisy and man's inhumanity towards fellow human beings. The importance of men and their superiority has been a part of Indian Social Mores for generations. Women have always been less important individuals. When a woman lives in a male dominated

society obviously she undergoes many hardships. Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of suffering but stoic women eventually breaking the traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. Her female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. Her novels explore the complex terrain of the Indian family and reveal many issues that are deep rooted within the family; the revolt against the age old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage; and lastly the women's struggle for her survival.

In her novel '*A Married Woman*' Manju Kapur brings forth those hard facts that will go a long way in demystifying marriage. The novel discussed the tragic tale of the middle class working women with Astha as the main heroine and Peepilika as the titular one. Astha imbibes middle class values and latter suffers from a sense of incompleteness in her married life. Through the personal private lives of these characters Manju Kapur exposes the existing tension and the oscillation of the self between the two state of mind. She gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her protagonists. The urge to lead their own lives and the impulse to galvanize them drive them ultimately to disappointment. This is a beautiful, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious turmoil in India. The story is really about how Astha changes from a unsure, college girl who has dreams of a mills and boons-type hero swooping in and carrying her away to a mature ,middle-aged woman who feels a little alienated in her marriage as time passes. This paper depicts how Astha has lost her identity and how until the end she was unable to find herself.

Astha, an educated, upper middle class, working Delhi woman is the protagonist in this novel. As a girl, she was brought up with large supplements of fear. She was her parent's only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage these were her parent's burdens. But like a common school going girl she often imagines of romantic and handsome young man holding in his strong manly embrace.

In her adolescent she falls in love with a boy of her age. Thinking of him day and night, she was unable to eat, sleep or study. This relationship is finished within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for higher studies. When she has fallen in love, for the first time she has lost her identity. Driven by a powerful physical relationship with a much younger woman, the main character of the novel risks losing the acquisitions of her conventional marriage and safe family.

Astha's marriage is settled with Hemant and soon she got fed up with her marriage life. Astha starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and her parents. Soon she becomes the mother for two children. 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 life.

Restlessness drives Astha 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” (227).

She pushes her frustrations aside, focuses on her duties as mother, wife and daughter. Her children, husband and increasingly – passionless marital sex take up her life. But the tensions continue to simmer, surfacing from time to time as paralyzing migraines. She 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 willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth”. (231)

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. She does not think that marriage is just a sex, rather it provides interest, togetherness and respect. Being torn between her duty and responsibility, faith and fact, public ethos and personal ethics she thinks,

“A tired woman cannot make good wives”

and she struggles for emotional freedom.

Astha meets the grieving widow of a Muslim protester whom she had admired and who died in the violence in Ayodhya. There follows a torrid affair between Astha and Pipeelika Khan: two women crossing social boundaries to find solace and understanding in each others arms. She feels great empathy to Peepilika and a powerful physical relationship is established between them. This relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. They both live

together and deep emotional attachment develops between them. Astha is in the verge of losing her conventional marriage. Peepilika leaves India to study in abroad and Astha returns back to her family.

In '*A Married Woman*', the second of her three novels, Manju Kapur frankly depicts the love affair between two women, but less attention has been paid to the historical and political context in which relationship develops. 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 the relationship with a man. The novel exposes the 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.

Manju Kapur present in her novel the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium for self expression. We see the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspire self reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond their husband and children. They are not silent rebels, but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. All protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle on their own. In spite of getting education and freedom the women protagonists of Manju Kapur's novels does not blossom into new women in the real sense. Though they dare to cross one patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are curbed and all they do is 'Adjust, Compromise and Adapt'. Through Astha, the central character in '*A Married Woman*', Kapur has revealed women have always been less important individuals.

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