

THEME OF LOVE IN MANJU KAPUR'S *A MARRIED WOMAN*

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur is one of the distinguished contemporary Indian women novelists in English. The present paper is an attempt at a critical examination in the novel of Manju Kapur's A Married Woman. The paper tries to explore the themes of love found in her. The paper depicts futile struggle of urban woman from the patriarchal family. The woman's sense of betrayal in love, marriage and extra marital affairs is dealt with in the narrative of Astha. On the basis of analysis of cause and effect of her struggle, an inference shall be made on the message implicit in her narrative. Paper explains that his love for her remains intact and proves it by making love to her with great interest.

Keywords: Marriage, love, Identity, satisfaction, male- domination, Patriarchy, tradition.

Introduction:

Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won the 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, best first book, Europe and South Asia. Manju Kapur is a post- colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Manju Kapur is the author of four novels. Her first, *Difficult Daughters*, won the Commonwealth Prize for First Novels (Eurasia Section) and was a number one bestseller in India. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was called 'fluent and witty' in the *Independent*, while her third, *Home*, was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in the *Sunday Times*. Her most recent novel, *The Immigrant*, has been longlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. She lives in New Delhi. Kapur has depicted a modern character in *Astha* who falls in love two boys and with one woman. The sense of independence in woman is reflected in such a libertine attitude. She is the only daughter of her parents. When she attains sixteen years of age, her parents are on the verge of old age and retirement from their service. Thus they exhibit their worries about her education, employment and wedding.

She who is brought up in this sort of environment feels fed up with the notions of arranged marriage, female status in family and the society

It is at this juncture, she happens to come across a boy of Pandara Road Colony. His name is Bunty whose family lives in a big house with a large garden and a roomy verandah. He pursues his studies in National Defence Academy in Kharakvasala. As Bundy's younger sister is a student in Astha's school, his parents keep in touch with her parents through visits. When Bunty has returned home for holidays, Astha sees and falls for him at once. Her love for him at first sight is presented in the novel thus: "Then the day dawned, the day Asta saw Bunty. Bunty the beautiful, Bunty whose face never left her, Bunty whose slightest word, look and gesture she spent hours nursing to death". (*A Married Woman*, 32)

Since Bundy has been a boarding student during his education both in school and in college, he has got acquaintance with few people in Delhi. Hence, his stay during the vacation at home becomes a matter of boredom. In order to pass his time, he accompanies his sister who visits Astha time and again. It is noticed that Bundy is attracted towards Astha in the course of time. On learning Astha's passion for Bundy, her friend, Gayatri, suggests her that their love should become active. She should become intimate with Bundy by way of taking him to theatres for watching movies. She is able to do so by obtaining permission from Bundy's father. However, he returns to his Academy as his holidays are over. She tries to be in touch with him through letters. Her first letter is replied by him after a few weeks informing her that he is too preoccupied with the course activities to write to her back as soon as he has received her letter. Unfortunately, her mother detects her letter correspondence with him. It is an experience of painful humiliation for Astha. She knows that her father has lied to her. During his earlier visit to Delhi, it was said that Bundy had few people since he had been a boarding student in school and college. But his father has stated that he has got so many friends and relatives to see during this visit.

While Astha returns home, she recollects Bundy's letters in which he has expressed his love and fondness for her. She is in utter confusion without being able to understand as why he is neglecting her now. When his holidays are over, he returns to his Academy without showing minimum courtesy of meeting her. She learns the reason for his indifferent behaviour from Bundy after one year. She is shocked to know that her mother has played the mischief to break their friendship. He has clarified the reason for his negligence towards in his letter which is summed up in the narrative thus: A year later, when the pain was less, and college had made her feel more a woman of the world, she wrote, a light casual letter, 'What happened?' He wrote back, 'I though you knew. Your mother visited us the very night I arrived and told my father that I was distracting you from your studies. At the same time she asked him what my intentions were. My father thought it better if we had nothing to do with each other. Why create complications? I wish you well in life. Yours sincerely, Bundy.' (A Married Woman, 15) Astha feels that she faces shame twice after reading his letter. On one hand, she becomes irritated about her mother's interference in her love with Bundy and disappointed with Bundy who has complied with her mother's instruction without expressing his interest in his love with Astha. She feels that she is not only deprived of her independence but also deceived by her mother and lover. Thus Astha's first experience of love comes to the end.

Astha and Aijaz: Besides, another unexpected incident takes place in her school which plays the most crucial role to separate Astha from her married life. He principal invites The Street Theatre Group to hold a workshop on their premises during the break between the final examinations in March and the opening of the new school year in April. She assigns the responsibility of coordinating with Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the founder of The Street Theatre Group, who is going to hold the workshop in the school. Aijaz is actually a history lecturer with an immense knowledge of drama. In addition to writing and performing his own plays, he adapts the plays of Brecht, Shakespeare and Greek tragedies into Hindi for his street performance. He is a popular social activist through the street plays. Amar Nath Prasad observes in this context: "Women are no longer flowers of the pot for only decoration; rather they are fragrant flowers of the open garden diffusing aroma to all corners, braving the storms and rains." (Gunjan 98)

Astha participates in the workshop with her two children. As many as thirty-two children register their names for the workshop and Aijaz manages them alone without the help of Astha. Astha remains aloof from him at the beginning and feels annoyed with his way of conducting the workshop by giving the history of drama. He has chosen the subject of BabriMasjid - Ram Janambhoomi controversy for the workshop. He surprises her by addressing her by her name and assigns her the job of preparing a working script on Babri Masjid. Though she refuses at the beginning, he persuades her and thus she visits India International centre for collecting information on Babri Masjid. She repeatedly tells Astha that "the real meaning and worth of a woman lies in getting married happily and having children and serving husband as a god." (Kavita 75) Astha faces obstacle from her husband for preparing the script. He is biased in the politics about the Babri Masjid. He condemns the Muslims in this issue for their claim of the Masjid which according to him is an abandoned mosque. He accuses the Government as being in favour of the Muslims. He interrogates her as why she has been associated with the script which is not her field. She feels that her husband discourages her involvement in the workshop. In the subsequent days, she happens to work together with Aijaz very closely. It pays way for her to develop admiration for her. It suggests that Astha seeks love outside her marriage. Her feelings are described like this:

At night, lying in bed, she drifted off to sleep with thoughts of Aijaz and the days ahead. Astha loved looking at Aijaz on stage, allowing herself frequent covert glances. He was of medium height, his body compact. His face was the clear delicate luminous brown of freshly rained-on earth. His lips were a darker brown than his skin, and his eyes were black and narrow. While working he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, allowing to view at her leisure his round strong arms, hairless, smooth and muscular. He had prematurely grey hair, which, thick and springy, fell about his face and neck in ways that suggested a good barber. He must be vain of his hair, thought Astha, knowing how attractive the grey made a young face look." (A Married Woman, 112-13)

However, her dream does not come true. She learns later that he is going around a woman called Pipeelika working in an NGO. Later, he goes to Ayodhya to perform street play to create awareness about the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi controversy among the people. When he is involved in his performance, the

fundamentalists assassinate him. Thus her dream of loving Aijaz remains unfilled. Astha feels that her husband is negligent about her. She struggles within her to come out of the frustration with her life with Hemant. She associates herself with the social organizations, which protest against the act of fundamentalists in killing Aijaz. She represents the whole woman race, the changing Indian society where the upper-middle-class educated woman who, although financially independent, is still facing the problem of adjustment between the old and the new, between appearance and reality and between theory and practice. It explores the space of such women through Astha and boldly presents a new perspective. (Gunjan 97)

During their honeymoon, Astha experiences that her husband is very fond of her. He exhibits his deep passion and love for her throughout their journey to Kashmir. He keeps touching her and caressing her in various ways during their travel by the plane and make their first love in a houseboat on Dal Lake. They wander around the tourist spot of Srinagar hand in hand. Astha enquires him as why he has not chosen an American girl though he was in the USA for so many years. He clarifies his decision by stating that he has always intended to marry an innocent, unspoilt and simple girl. They return to Delhi after their honeymoon in Kashmir. Astha notices that Hemant continues to shower his passionate love on her. They indulge in courtship several times a day with mutual affection. She experiences new excitements and enjoyment in her married life with Hemant and thus she feels that she has come to understand what life is all about only after her marriage with Hemant. Bhagabat Nayak notes in this regard thus: "her real story of love and marriage started with Hemant." (*A Married Woman*, 127)

At this juncture, she decides to take up a job in order to overcome the boredom she undergoes while her husband is away in his office. She finds job opportunities in the schools in which 10+2 system has been newly introduced. Her in-laws and husband give their approval for her to join At Anthony's School where she is offered the job. At the same time, he father retires from his service and after six months he dies of heart attack. Her mother is motivated to pursue the path of spiritualism. She had to control herself from becoming a mother during the first two years of her married life as her husband did not want child for some time. In the mean time, Astha longs to have a bay. Subsequently, she becomes pregnant

and gives birth to a baby girl. She is christened Anuradha.

Astha experiences a sense of contentment when she becomes a mother. She feels astonishment when she breastfeeds her just born child and excitement when her husband drinks milk from her breasts in order to relieve the pressure. She is very happy with her husband who cooperates with her to raise the child. In the mean time, Hemant makes preparation to build a house worth rupees one crore. Hemant also decides to quit his job in the bank and to start his own business in manufacturing televisions in Uttar Pradesh. Accordingly, he gets a plot in the Electronic City of Noida. Astha is impressed by Hemant's personality in executing the plan of his new business.

Conclusion:

Astha feels disappointed with her husband on two accounts. Firstly, he fails to share with her the responsibility of taking care of their children. Secondly, he remains indifferent to her mother's decision to go Rishikesh. She feels that if he had asked to stay with them, she would not have gone there. It is explained in the novel as follows: Astha paused. Subsequently, she observes that her husband seldom talks with her about the business, the house, their daughter and themselves nowadays. It gives her reasons to think that his attitude to her is changed. When she enquires him in this regard, he clarifies that he is too busy with his business to find time for spending with her discussing such matters. He explains that his love for her remains intact and proves it by making love to her with great interest. As a result, she realizes that she is wrong to mistake him that he has become indifferent to her.

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