

FEMINIST TREND IN MANJU KAPUR'S *A MARRIED WOMAN***Dr. M. Rashmi,**

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Abstract

Kapur, in her works, defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. Feminism in India can be understood in its relation with the concept of marriage. Marriage is an institution in India which unites male and female to live together as husband and wife. Marriage is a pious institution which flourishes all over the India, right from the beginning of civilization and culture. For instance, Simon de Beauvoir writes about marriage in *The Second Sex*: "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by society" (445). In the modern India, this great institution of marriage is on the verge of alteration which is reflected in the novel, *A Married Woman*. Astha, the protagonist, complains to Hemant about children spend more time with their grand parents, he responds if the age old parents are happy being with children; let them spend together. Kapur highlights the feeling of loneliness, isolation and restlessness of Astha's mind. Astha is a woman who seeks a space of her own and enjoys her life within the house as well as outside the world. She becomes politically active and begins to attend the meetings. Now she devotes herself to a cause beyond family.

Key Words; Feminism; Cultural; Marriage Identity.

ManjuKapur, born on 25th October 1948, is brought up in an affluent family of Dalmia's. She got married with Gun Nidhi Dalmia, a business man, gifted with four children namely Katyayani, Amba, Maya and Agastya. She studied her M.A English from Halifax University, Canada and M.Phil from Delhi University. Kapur, in her works, defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong, glorified female heroes, and has presented the Indian woman as facing the very real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. Kapur bears the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male-centered Indian society at large.

The history of feminism is divided into three waves of feminism. The first-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity from 1830 to 1920 in the United Kingdom and the United State. It primarily focuses on gaining the right of women's suffrage. The term "first-wave" is not used during that time but is instead coined retroactively after the term second-wave feminism begins to be used to describe a newer feminist movement.

Second-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s. It was connected with independence and greater political action to improve women's rights. This movement is connected with the issue of economic equality between the genders and addressed the rights of female minorities. The developments lead to explicit campaigns and groups, and some feminists go further to argue that heterosexual relationships automatically subordinated women, and that the only true independence could come in lesbian relationship. In the article, "Feminist Movement an Introduction" Bhasker A Shukla says "The second wave is sometimes linked with radical feminist theory" (3).

Socialist or Marxist feminism is a powerful strand of the second wave during the late 1960s and 1970s particularly in Britain. It sought to extend Marxism analyses of class into a woman's history of their material and economic oppression, and describes how the family and women's domestic labour are constructed by and reproduce the sexual division of labour. In *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker point out "Like other male forms of history, Marxism had ignored much of women's experience and activity and Marxist feminism's primary task was to open up the complex relations between gender and economy" (125).

Third wave feminism is a feminist movement that began in the early 1990s. While second-wave feminism largely focuses on the inclusion of women in traditionally male dominated areas, third-wave feminism seeks to challenge and expand common definitions of gender and equality. Traits of third-wave feminism include queer theory, women-of-colour consciousness, post-colonialism, critical theory and new feminist theory. In particular, a post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is often, though not always, central to third wave feminism. It focuses on equality between the sexes.

Feminism in India can be understood in its relation with the concept of marriage. Marriage is an institution in India which unites male and female to live together as husband and wife. Marriage is a pious institution which flourishes all over the India, right from the beginning

of civilization and culture. For instance, Simon de Beauvoir writes about marriage in *The Second Sex*: “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by society” (445). Western critics regard marriage as a bondage and according to them, there is no role of emotional attachment or psychological bindings. In this regard Simon De Beauvoir remarks in *The Second Sex*:

There is an unanimous agreement that getting a husband or in some cases a ‘protector’ - is for her (woman) the most important of undertakings. She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold; she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master. (352)

In India, the institution of marriage has provided for the society’s needs for love, security and children. It has been seen that marriage is quite essential for human society because its legality and religiousness bring moral values in society.

In the modern India, this great institution of marriage is on the verge of alteration which is reflected in the novel, *A Married Woman*. Astha, the protagonist, complains to Hemant about children spend more time with their grant parents, he responds if the age old parents are happy being with children; let them spend together. Kapur highlights the feeling of loneliness, isolation and restlessness of Astha’s mind. Thus Astha claims: “What about me? As it is when I am in school Himanshu is upstairs. When I come home I want the children. I hardly have you, I should have them. Tears came to her eyes. More tears for Astha, poor thing” (78). Hemant does not have any idea about what Astha expects from him, he always thinks about his own needs and about the needs of his parents. Hence marriage becomes a burden and boring affair for Astha.

Astha gets a new identity as a teacher at St. Anthony’s school. She likes to transform her occupation of house wife to a working woman. She feels “Life was shaping up nicely, with her mind and heart gainfully employed” (48). At the same time, she tries to keep a balance between inner and outer spheres. Simone de Beauvoir beautifully portrays the practical problems of a working woman in *The Second Sex*:

Thus the independent woman of today is torn between her professional interests and the problems of her sexual life; it is difficult for her to strike a balance between the two; if she does, it is at the price of concessions and sacrifices which require her to be in a constant state of tension. (705)

She performs the role of a dutiful wife by serving her husband as every Indian wife does. Above this, she also engages at other work like kitchen, washing clothes and arranges them. Kapur delineates through the protagonist Astha, the position of a wife considers as subservient to her husband. Astha expresses her daily activities as follows: "Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, taking off his shoes, pulling off his socks feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet" (50).

Astha has to manage every duties and responsibilities of a wife, mother daughter, daughter-in-law and teacher without getting any help from Hemant. Above this, Hemant often blames his wife for mismanagement, incapability and wastefulness as well. He asks Astha "Why can't you train these servants properly?" (72). Sometimes she feels like resigning from school because of her responsibilities. Therefore Kapur describes Astha's feelings:

Astha was now virtually a single mother. Beleaguered by job, small children and house, she sometimes toyed with the idea of resigning from school, but between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had children, she too had changed from being a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs. (71-72)

Astha is upset when Hemant refuses to keep her father's books with them he makes the decision to donate it to a library. Astha claims to her mother for agreeing his words but her mother added, "It is Hemant's house and he said there was no room."(87). Astha's wrath with her husband, Hemant, is unmeasurable as has not consulted her before taking up any decision. She expects equality but Hemant plays the role of prominent position in the family. She wonders, "Then who am I? The tenant? We could have found room, we could have built book shelves, done something, we could at least have discussed it" (87). Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* "This has always been a man's world" (Beauvoir 93) is true to a woman who has to live according to the decisions made by man. In "A Quest for Identity and Self Independence in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*", Reena Sanasam says, "Through the protagonist Astha, Manju Kapur reveals that woman still upholds the position of inferiority in spite of her quest for equality and a worthy member of the patriarchal society" (4).

Kapur highlights the disappointed life of Astha who live in bondage with no gratitude and how she overcomes the struggle in life. Astha expresses her feelings in poetry form. In the book, *Radical Feminism and Women's Writing*, Chandra Nisha Singh says: "The gradual shift from the

Sita-type wife to the dissatisfaction wife is significant in the evolution of the equality-conscious independent woman” (65). Through Astha’s poems and paintings she portrays her anguish, grief and suffering in various situations:

She wrote about love, rejection, desire and longing. The language was oblique, but it was her own experience endlessly replayed.

Writing alleviated the heaviness within her, a heaviness she found hard to deal with. Discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led to argument, distance, and greater misery. In the struggle to express herself she found temporary relief. (79)

When Hemant reads the poems of Astha, he is upset to see the images of the poem. She uses the images in her writings, “Good heavens, Az, there are all about cages and birds, and mice, and suffering in situations that are not even clear. There is not one happy poem here” (81). They symbolically reflect Astha’s inchoate feelings of despair and alienation. In *Feminist Explorations*, Dr. Priyanka Vaidya says “Hemant sees her emotions in the poem as an attack on male hegemony” (70).

Astha’s father died suddenly soon after his daughter’s marriage. Her widowed status makes her very pious and takes the decision of shifting to an ashram in Rishikesh. So Astha’s mother hands over the money to Hemant, something which enrages the daughter. Astha’s Mother says:

‘Dear child? said Astha’s mother, who was in Delhi for the signing of the papers, ‘I have given Hemant part of the proceeds of the house.

‘Why? The money is for you, Ma. ‘I don’t need so much. You can consider this your father’s legacy’.

‘They why give it to Hemant?’ asked Astha bridling.

‘Why not? He is a man, he knows about money. He will invest it for you and the children. I have discussed the whole thing with him. (97)

Such attitude of Astha’s mother exhibits woman regards as a subordinated figure of a man. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes: “However respected she may be, she is subordinate, secondary, parasitic” (475). Kapur realistically portrays Astha is a woman of today who raises voice for equal treatment with man in society. In ‘Marriage, Tradition and Autonomy: The Quest for Self-Discovery in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*,’ Anita Balakrishnan says:

This reveals an important theme, the asymmetry of power within the marriage with Astha having virtually no control over her own inheritance. She is poised for rebellion, a symbolic separation from traditional social and familiar frameworks, when she meets Aijaz Khan, a theatre activist. (109)

The social activist, Aijaz encourages Astha to write a script on the Babri Masjid issue. He appreciates her writing and writing skills. This friendship gives Astha with a glimpse of an alternate life, one is not structured by dominance and subordination.

Astha actively participates in the street theatre group leads her to the quest for identity. Aijaz, a founder of such theatre group, encourages Astha's social spirit and socializes her thoughts. She also finds new taste engaging in social issues. She does not obtain such appreciation from her husband even if he knows his wife is a writer as well as painter.

Astha is deeply involved in workshop organized by the theatre group despite of her husband's annoyance. During the workshop, a tender feeling develops between Astha and Aijaz. On the other hand, Aijaz and his troupe members are dragged and murdered while performing a play on Babri Masjid Ram Janambhoomi controversy. The death of Aijaz motivates and leads Astha to emerge as a social activist and starts taking part in allies for justice, in spite of much resistance from her husband and in-laws. Besides this, Astha is busy in painting for the donation of an exhibition set up in memory of the street theatre group.

Hemant tells Astha to give up her job as she gives more time on painting and nothing else. She even forgets to do the responsibilities of a family. He blames Astha, her working not at all brought sufficient money. It is true that Astha seeks for self independence and self fulfillment and expresses "I want something of my own" (148). She wishes to make money out of her painting in order to rent her own studio one day. Like Woolf quotes in "Professions for Women", "... The room is your own" (51). Astha also says "I need more space (156) and asks his sister's room so that she can work perfectly. But Hemant refuses to give her demand. Thus Astha becomes very angry and says:

Astha vowed bitterly to earn enough money to rent her own studio one day. In the meantime if there was no area available to her, she would try and make do with the wide ranges inside her head. Constantly reminded of the space nobody thought enough of her to give, she became very bad tempered during

interruptions. Finally she steeled herself, she shut the door, and if disturbed too often locked it. In this way a certain uneasy privacy was granted her. (157)

Astha is a woman who seeks a space of her own and enjoys her life within the house as well as outside the world. She becomes politically active and begins to attend the meetings. Now she devotes herself to a cause beyond family.

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