

## TRADITION AND AUTONOMY IN MANJU KAPUR'S A MARRIED WOMAN

**Jalaja Mary T M**

Reg: No: 18223014012009

Research Scholar

PG & Research Department of English

AnnaiVelankanni College,

Tholayavattam

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar, University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli)

[jalajamary90@gmail.com](mailto:jalajamary90@gmail.com), 9597635021

and

**Dr F Meena Theresa**

Associate professor

PG & Research Department of English

AnnaiVelankanni College,

Tholayavattam

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar, University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli)

India

### **Abstract:**

*This paper reflects the women under patriarchal pressure and control who are subjected to social expulsion. They are more discriminated and are biased in lieu of their sex. The lives of women who live and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society are also dealt by the writer. The budding of new women in ManjuKapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will can be seen in her novels. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspire for self-reliance through education. They nurture the shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken determined and action-oriented women. All protagonists in her novel do not depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own. Though they dare to cross the patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are curbed and all they do is adjust, compromise and adapt.*

**Keywords :** Tradition, Marriage, Education, Adjustment

According to Indian tradition, marriage plays an important role in men and women. After marriage most of the women are suppressed by her family members. Women are expected to obey their husbands and their in-laws. She should keep her in-laws in the position of her parents. Women are expected to take full responsibility of a family immediately after marriage. She should be a good mother to her children and a truthful wife to her husband and also kind-hearted to her in-laws. In the joint families, all the family members such as cousins, co-sisters etc. Women are expected to tackle problems in their married life. So, she should have the capacity to overcome all the troubles and run the family smoothly. Marriage does not deal with the life or a view of one person. It deals with the opinions of both men and women. Khalil Gibran, the Lebanese artist, poet and writer, says about marriage as:

Love one another but make not a bond of love; Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow( 89 )

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. The female protagonists of the Indian novels are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is through their individual struggle with family and society, they plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women.

ManjuKapur, an Indian writer and professor of literature in Delhi University. She was born in 1948 in Amritsar. Kapur graduated from the Miranda House University College for women and went on to take an MA at Dalhousie University in Halifax. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won her the Commonwealth Prize for first novels in 1999. Her other novels *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant and Custody* were highly acclaimed and very successful among readers and critics. Her novels furnish the whole range of attitude towards the importance of tradition. Her female protagonists are mostly educated and try to establish their own identity. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them.

Marriage of educated women in ManjuKapur's *A Married Woman* are of three types: love marriage, arranged marriage and love - cum - arranged marriage. In *A Married Woman* arranged marriage can be seen in the marriage between Astha and Hemant and love marriage can be seen between Pipee and Aijaz Khan. Both the women have been involved in pre - marital relationship before they get married. However, Astha does not marry the same person with whom she has had pre - marital relationship. On the other hand, Pipee marries the same person with whom she has had pre - marital relationship. The traditional women would find it difficult to accept this notion of pre - marital relationship. However, there is a difference between Astha's marriage and Pipee's marriage. Astha marries at the age of twenty two whereas Pipee marries at the late age of twenty nine. Indian tradition believes that the arranged marriages are long lasting compared to love marriages. This seems to be proved in this novel as Astha's marriage continues whereas Pipee's husband dies in the middle of her married life.

The protagonist of this novel Astha has a boy friend Rohan in her college. She is in love with him and wishes to marry him. She does not like arranged marriage. But, Astha's mother chooses a boy for Astha and asks him to come and see her daughter. Since Astha does not like arranged marriage she tells the boy openly that she is not interested in this kind of marriage arrangement. Moreover, she has had physical relationship with her boy friend. After their physical relationship, Rohan plans to go abroad for higher education. Therefore, Astha joins MA. In her final year, she is engaged to Hemant, who considers marriage as a sacred thing. He marries Astha with a lot of hope after coming back to India with his MBA degree from the United States of America. Due to unavoidable circumstances, Astha marries Hemant. Hemant has married Astha wholeheartedly thinking that she is a perfect match for him. The only mistake he does is that he does not ask her whether she is interested in marrying him or not. He assumes that like any other traditional woman she accepts any proposal her parents bring for her. However, he is interested in marrying Astha to have control over her. He must have seen the relationships such as pre-marital, extra - marital, homosexual and lesbian relationships while he lived in the United States of America. He believes that in India women rarely fall a prey to other or bad relation. That is precisely why he wants to marry an Indian girl like Astha and not an American. He also believes in Indian tradition and customs of married life in order to protect his supremacy:

One could ask why should he marry only an Indian? Why cannot he marry an American? Is it because Indian women may be subjected to any kind of adjustment? Is it because Indian women do not question the way the Americans do? Is it because he wants to show his supremacy over his wife, which he cannot do with an American woman? ( AMW40 )

Astha, even after marriage with Hemant, does not forget the time she spent with her boy friend Rohan. Even in her intercourse with her husband, she still thinks of her former lover Rohan. It is a general tendency that human mind records certain select moments. Astha's mind has recorded the happy moments

of her relationship with Rohan. Although Hemant looks after her very well, she is not able to forget the happy moments of her teenage. In general, a girl of eighteen years old is considered a teenager. But, according to philosophers there is nothing like teenager. On the other hand, psychologists divide a person's life into childhood, teenage and adulthood. Therefore, before a girl is to be married, it is the responsibility of both the girl and the parents to have talk with them. Otherwise, the marriage will end up in an unhappy marriage.

On the other hand, there is another thing that makes Astha turn away or pay less attention to her husband. Hemant insists on her to wear certain dresses that she does not like. He may want his wife to appear sexy. There may not be a problem to have this kind of desire. But he has to convince her and then fulfill his desire if his wife does not like otherwise he has to leave the matter. Instead, he should not force or insist on her wearing the dress he likes which she does not like. Moreover, Hemant has the influence of sexual manuals. The days are gone when women obliged whatever the husband desired, and satisfied his desires. Now, the women are educated. Astha has done her M.A. and Pipee has been doing her Ph.D. Women are conscious of the latest developments. They have self-respect in the present days. They do not bow down to everything that the husband wants. Hemant marries Astha with the idea that he can get what he wants from her. But Astha does not oblige to his wishes. He also distances himself from his wife and daughter when he starts his own business of manufacturing black and white television in partnership with his sisters.

Meanwhile, Astha has had no interest in working after her marriage. But, her mother-in-law suggests her to take up a teaching job, while Astha is not interested in doing any job. This is again related to her unhappiness. The job of teaching is imposed on her. This is again not a good sign. Hemant does not say anything; in other words, he supports his mother. Hemant also involves himself in construction business with his sisters. After this business, he starts a television company on his own. When he is busy with his business, he naturally has no time to spend with his family. There is a communication gap between Astha and Hemant. At this point, Hemant and Astha have a second child that is a boy, Himanshu. The attitude of Hemant completely changes. There are serious problems between them. Hemant is proud of being a father of a son. Earlier he was not that affectionate because she delivered a girl. Robert S. Gnanamony opines in one of his articles that,

Manju Kapur gently digs at the Indian attitude of preferring a baby-boy to a baby-girl in the novel. When her daughter Anuradha was four, Astha conceived again. Her mother brought in a poojari to perform a special to propitiate the gods to grant them a boy for Astha. However, Astha thought that the baby was going to be another girl. Hemant encouraged Astha saying that they could try again until we get a son. (68)

After the birth of Himanshu, his attitude completely changes. As the stress falls on Astha she develops a severe headache. She is asked to give up her job. She disagrees with Hemant because she feels hard to stay at home without doing anything. Astha finds happiness in teaching her students. However, teaching is not Astha's ultimate career. She is a good painter. She has earned a lot of money through her paintings. Her talent is recognized when she paints and sells her painting at an exorbitant price. "I thought of starting in 1528, you know when Mir Baqi decrees that a mosque be built at the highest point in Ayodhya in the name of his most noble ruler Emperor Babur, a brief two-line scene" (110).

On the other hand, Pipee is an educated woman who marries Aijaz out of love. Pipee's father is no more when she marries Aijaz. She has only her widowed mother. At the time of her marriage Pipee is already twenty-nine years old and has no father and her brother is abroad. Thus, she justifies her decision to marry Aijaz as she says: "... I am almost twenty-nine, you've always said you want to see me married, now is your chance. I'm not going to find anyone else. He's intelligent, sensitive, socially committed, history lecturer, a theatre activist" (118). She also says that her mother cannot find a bridegroom for her by paying dowry. Thus, Pipee marries a Muslim in a love marriage against her widowed mother's wishes. Only the friends of both sides attend and witness their marriage. However, Pipee goes

against her widowed mother's wish on two counts. Look at the conversation between Pipee and her mother:

".... Her mother was horrified when she learnt of her engagement .

'You can do this , she told her daughter

" Why not ? You're the one who is always going on about me getting married"

" But not to a Muslim .

' He's sweet . So what if he's a Muslim.

Her mother clicked her tongue. "They marry four times." (117)

Firstly, her widowed mother does not want Pipee to have a love marriage. Secondly, the mother does not want her marry a muslim, which is going to be an inter religious marriage. In general, inter - caste marriages are considered to be better than inter - religious marriages. However, Pipee does not abide by her mother's words. The novelist says:

It was in September 1998 that the marriage between Aijaz Akhtar Khan and Pipee Trivedi was solemnized in Tees Hazari. The bride and groom paid for their own wedding, the whole thing came to five hundred rupees. No relatives were present from either side, a colleague of Aijaz and Neeraj acted as witnesses, while the theatre crowd, a few of Aijaz's colleagues, and the staff of Ujjala, later gathered at Karim's to complete the celebratory aspects. ( 127 )

Astha and Pipee are attracted towards each other physically. They are attracted to each other? because Pipee is a widow, therefore, she is a lonely woman and Astha is made to feel lonely because her husband is busy with his business. Business husbands have always created problems for their wives because they do not pay much attention to the family and ignore spending time with the family members. Pipee seems to be very selfish and lures Astha into a lesbian relationship. Astha is also equally responsible for her lured state. Because she is not happy with her husband. However, on the part of Pipee it is a deliberate attempt. She has no business to drag Astha into relationship just because there are differences between the husband and the wife. Pipee even goes to an extent in commanding what way and how Astha would lead her life. Astha replies Pipee when Pipee says that she is not taken care by Astha as;

How can you say that? Just the other day I spent I spent the whole evening with you, I went home at twelve, I told endless lies'. 'Who asked you to tell lies? I didn't. Don't you see, Ant, I want an end to all this deception. My whole life is a fabric of lies, "said Astha sadly, " you are the one true thing, I have". ( 243 )

Pipee tries to dictate terms to Astha. Astha even starts telling lies to her husband in order to continue her relationship with him. It suggests that the relationship and understanding between Hemant and Astha have been shattered. On the other hand, Pipee commands over Astha and questions the relationship between a husband and wife. Pipee leads a lonely life. She has to have a companion. Therefore, she tries to break the relationship between them. Hemant is definitely responsible. He ignores his family and his wife's needs. Hence, he is responsible for the break of relationship. Fortunately or unfortunately, Hemant develops heartache and the attitude and attention of Astha diverts and she pays attention to her husband. The heartache in Hemant is a blessing in disguise to the relationship and marriage of Hemant and Astha. Manju Kapur says:

Astha spent a lot of time about herself. Was she a traditional wife as Pipee had alleged? She flinched at the idea, but she was certainly doing what devoted wives did, putting a great deal of effort into protecting their husband's insides. When she saw him tired, afraid, depressed at having to change, unprepared mentally for he had betrayal of his body, she felt sorry for him, and wanted to help him live. She told herself it was for the children, but sometimes she wondered bleakly at the nature of bond between them. ( 284 )

Thus is proved that the arranged marriage lasts long and the love marriage turns to be a disaster. Astha has begun teaching in a school just after her marriage. Her job demands that she should get up early so as to reach her workplace on time. She had exercises to correct, lessons to prepare, but because she is still very much in love with Hemant, she looks forward to spend the evenings in his company. On the other hand, Hemant comes late, and complains about his boss when he fails to achieve his targets and in general

expresses his dissatisfaction with everything. These criticism leaves her "-- 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" ( 50 ). When Astha is pregnant for the second time, everyone hopes for the birth of a son. Though she declares to the foetus that she would love the child be it a boy or a girl, she is very tensed and troubled. " When Astha's son was finally born she felt a gratitude as profound as it was shamed ... Her status rose...she was fulfilled" ( 68 ). The remarks of the visitors on her having a complete family made her feel that she had partaken of the archetypal experiences marked out for the female race ( 69 ). Astha has never forgotten Himanshu's first smile. " It lived on in her memory, a link between a male and her that was joyous, simple and unproblematic. So what if it was with her two - month son ( 69 ). On the other hand, between Anuradha's birth and Himanshu's, Hemant changed from being an all - American father to being an all Indian one. He refuses to help with Himanshu's upbringing. In connection with his business he has to travel abroad four times a year. This leaves Astha to cope single handedly with her problems such as - children, job, and house. Astha toys with the idea of resigning but does not wish to do so ... she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs ( 72 ).

Gradually headaches begin to attack Astha until the doctors advise an operation of her nose. For four days she is in hospital and during this period Hemant is very caring. Returning home she realizes that the children have spend more time with the grandparents than with her. She feels lonely, but her complaint to Hemant is in vain because he too complains of loneliness saying that she devotes time to her children and her work and not to him.

Gradually Astha turns to write poetry and this alleviates the heaviness within her. But Hemant thinks these emotional outpouring as "positively neurotic " ( 81 ) and fears that people might think that Astha is unhappy. She gives up writing and begins sketching and drawing after all "nobody could put two and two together about painting ..."( 87 ). When Astha's father dies, her mother comes under the influence of a Swami and shifts to his Ashram in Rishikesh, where she finds peace and solace. She sells off the property in Delhi and gives a part of the proceeds of the sale to Hemant. Astha does not approve of this and she expresses her displeasure to her mother and husband Astha craves for understanding, but it is a craving in vain.

Astha comes for a short time under the influence of Aijaz Akhtar Khan and his Street Theatre Group which leads her to have a lesbian relationship with Aijaz's wife, Pipeelika, after Aijaz's death. During the summer holiday Mrs. Dubey, the Principal of the school where Astha teaches, has invited Aijaz to teach the nuances of play production to the children. Astha has been put on duty much to her family's displeasure. Aijaz asks her to write a script highlighting the Babri Masjid - Ram Janmabhoomi discord. With the help of her daughter Anuradha, Astha begins to browse through the library books and make notes. Aijaz is charming, intelligent and appreciative of Astha's talents and this serves to bring them closer.

Astha switches her mind to the demands of Aijaz and the theatre and she gives expression to her creativity only to realize that Hemant does not appreciate her involvement in the theatre activities. Not only is the script written by her, she also does the sketches and Aijaz is immensely pleased with her work. This appreciation brings a glow of happiness on her face. Astha does not want to cross the threshold of her married life. She does not want any other man. Manju Kapur hints at the point that Hemant had not been more appreciative of and sensitive to his wife's needs. If he had done so, Astha would have felt a more complete woman. But Hemant is so egoistical and dogmatic that Astha knows that this boat cannot be rocked however much she may try. Hemant, who doesn't like the title of the play "Bahri Masjid Fact, Fiction and you", tells her in the course of the play " Please, keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching All this doesn't suit you" ( 116 ). After the production of the play, Astha has little to do with Aijaz. But deep within the core of her heart, Astha cherishes the moments spent in his company Astha takes care of her children and home but she is denied the loving companionship of her husband.

Girls are told right from their childhood that they must get married, and the husbands, home is their rightful place.

Moreover, Astha realizes the futility of her sexual relationship with Pipeelika even though she is in love with her. But Astha is willing to leave her husband and family and this complicates matters, though Astha continues to meet Pipeelika. Thus, it becomes clear that Pipeelika has been using Astha to serve her own needs. Even Reshana Singh exploits Astha's artistic skills for the benefit of the SampradayaktaMuktiManch. Astha is torn between her feelings for Aijaz and her desire to do something to save the nation from further senseless killings and so agrees to paint for the Manch. Astha's desires to assert herself, even at the cost of her health also. Every now and then she gets headaches and these headaches make the situation more intolerable. When she gets involved with Pipeelika, she tastes a facet of life which unknown to her till now. It is significant that before meeting Pipeelika, Astha has a dream wherein she is with Aijaz. As her paintings increase Astha realizes that she requires more space. But her husband refuses to allow her the use of his sisterSangeeta's room on the rooftop. "Astha vowed bitterly to earn enough money to rent her own studio one day ( 157 ).

Astha hopes that her husband might buy her paintings to show his love and affection, but she knew this was impossible, and that people who expect the impossible are setting themselves up for misery and Astha would rather die than be such a pathetic woman. She hoped she would get famous and then may be Hemant would display something that she had painted and Hemant's friend, banker or associate would be impressed by it and ask to meet her. Astha hopes for some note of appreciation from her husband, but her hope fails which makes her faithless woman. The novel ends with Pipeelika leaving for the USA to do her Ph.Das suggested by her brother who sponsors her. Astha sees her off at the airport and returns to the fold of her family. ManjaKapur finally says "Love is made up of needs, security ... the way people talk of love is very deceptive, it leads to disappointment in many ways and that is why in my books I am always keen to show what happens after you get married " ( 81 ) .

#### **References**

- Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: IndianInk, 2002. Print  
Chandra, Subhash. "A Married Women, Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Content." *Lesbianism and India* 14 (2006)