

Family is the Locus of Tension in Lesbian Relationship: A Study on Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is a modern Indo English woman writer. She has been dealing with the female issues in the Indian patriarchal society in her every novel. Kapur's concern with the female revolt against deep-rooted family values and the institution of marriage is shown clearly in her works. A Married Woman also deals with the same theme. The lesbian relationship is projected through the characters of Astha and Pipeelika in this novel. The novel exposes the familial relationship. Astha's lesbian relationship with Pipee is a derived expression of Astha's feminist initiative in a patriarchal structure. This paper is an attempt to project the lesbian relationship as portrayed by Manju Kapur within a domestic sphere and how she preserves heterosexism in the end. At last the lesbian relationship has to meet an end because of Astha's looking back to her family.

Keywords: lesbianism, married, relationship, family

Introduction

In the early 1990s out of gay and lesbian studies and feminist studies, Queer theory emerged. As there was no pro-gay fiction, most of the time the authors failed to recognize the complexities of queer issues. Homosexuality was considered as another form of evil. Gays and lesbians carve up a common refusal by heterosexist society. Their demand for freedom and equality was presented in a structured manner by some of post colonial Indian English writers in the end of 1991. A lesbian is a female homosexual. A female who experiences passionate love or sexual desirability to other females is called lesbian. The concept of 'lesbian' is a 20th century construct. Lesbians are often taken as anomalies that do not fit into the heterosexual family standard. The heroine of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* takes the uncommon path of lesbianism that is a socially unacceptable relationship in the Indian context. Projecting Astha as a lesbian Manju Kapur has posed a warning to male ego centralisms.

Post colonial novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur have focused on the plight of women. The women writers designed at depicting realistically Indian women's sense of frustration and their loneliness. A

Married Woman is the story of Astha an educated, upper middle class, working woman. Other than being a wife and mother, Astha longs for a purpose in her life. She was the single child of her parents. She was their future, their hope, and though she did not want them to protect her so carefully, they did. Astha's mother wished for a good husband for her daughter. Kapur explains her heroine's emotions "Tears surfaced, but she wouldn't act sorry, would rather die than show how unloved and misunderstood she felt" (Manju 2).

At her teenage she often imagines a romantic and handsome young man as her hero. It was then that she saw Bunty, a handsome solidier who frequently visited her house. She sent some letters to Bunty at his Boarding School. After an exchange of few letters, their love came to an abrupt end the day her mother smelt of it. When Astha was in college, she becomes expressively engaged with Rohan and they enjoy a physical relationship. This relationship is ended within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for further studies. Being caged by her middle class values she accepts her fate and goes for an arranged marriage with a foreign returned man Hemant who belongs to a bureaucrat family. After marriage, they settle down in Vashan Bihar, the posh colony of New Delhi. Astha had some infatuations of adolescent period like a romantic girl. But her ideas are turned into void. She has to begin a different life after marriage. Gradually Astha gets disheartened about human nature. She tried to make her husband recognize that she was an entity; she must get her due respect. In the Indian domestic field, "wives have to dance to all sorts of tunes of their husbands" (Manju 44). But Astha wanted to be different. She is "always adjusting to everybody's need" (Manju 227). She has to satisfy her husband and for pleasing him, she must be "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth" (Manju 231). Within a few months "her future suddenly seemed very pedestrian" (Manju 47). Dullness began to ruin her married life. She merged in the role of a wife, daughter and mother. She is marginalized in her own family. She tried to become free from strain and depression. She thinks of a good job, as "with good job comes independence"(4) Here Kapur draws the interesting glimpses into the working of a woman's mind as her effort to come to terms with her identity in a male dominated society. Astha, represents one such person who is in search of her soul mate. In quest of her identity, she builds many relationships with different persons.

Astha feels suffocation in her house as she has to lead her life in a pitiable condition. She joins a school to become independent. After a period of time, Astha meets Aijaz, a history lecturer. Aijaz always helps her, favours her in complicated situations and appreciates her for what she does. It is during one of her activities related to Manch she went to Ayodhya where she meets Pipeelika, the widow of Aijaz. Out of women's oppression and emotional starvation Astha and Pipeelika turn into lesbians for their self fulfillment and posing challenge to male chauvinism. Astha falls in love with Pipeelika. Pipeelika, a widow is a lonesome woman and Astha is made to feel lonely .Manju Kapur has made lesbianism a powerful element for the fulfilment of woman's emotional urge and sexual satisfaction.

Being a postmodern woman both Astha and Pipeelika revolt against the inequality, injustice and discrimination meted at domestic and social sphere. By turning herself to lesbianism Astha challenges male chauvinism and satisfies emotions of womanhood in her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika. To evaluate the lesbian characteristic of the novel, Simone de Beauvoir defines a lesbian: “Homosexuality for woman is one attempt among others to reconcile her autonomy with the passivity of her flesh. And if nature is invoked, it could be said that every woman is naturally homosexual. The lesbian is characterized simply by her refusal of the male and her preference for feminine flesh” (Simone 431). Manju Kapur perfectly shows the lesbian girls’ behaviour. Pipee expresses her sexual curiosity in Astha and Astha never opposes her which shows her yearning for the sex from the same gender.

In this novel Manju Kapur has honestly defied social system of marriage in which women are bound to play passive role in in-law’s house. They have to accept the conventional views of male members of the family whether they like them or not. In this novel Astha falls in love with Pipee; and this becomes a cause of new damages between Astha and her husband Hemant. Pipee is given more importance than Hemant. In spite of having numerous relationships, she keeps peeping out her marital status into the land of illegal relations. Astha wishes to break her dependence on others and advances on the path of full human status that poses a warning to Hemant and his male superiority. She finds herself trapped between the demands of modern developing society and restraints of ancient biases. She sets out on her pursuit for a more significant life in her lesbian relationship. She canonizes and remarks on her feminine sensibility, by raising the social issues associated to women. Astha feels mesmerized after meeting Pipee. She maintains all her directions, and acts thus. Pipee makes her feel that away from her home where she can lead a fuller life. Pipee seems to be sympathetic to Astha more than Hemant. Astha is instigated to indulge in the new relationship with her, “There was no aphrodisiac more powerful than talking, no seduction more effective than curiosity.”(Manju 218). Astha’s change from a gentle and hopeful bride to a ragged wife and her meeting with Pipee made her understand the other state of woman in her household distress leading her to an immoral consciousness of lesbian love rationalizing her outdated decency. She feels satisfied around the arms of Pipee. Pipee seems to be more understanding, loving and caring than her husband. Therefore they established a physical relationship and they become restless if they don’t meet for one day. Such relationship between them becomes the cause of clashes between Astha and Hemant. However, their relationship fights against man’s approach and his dominance by exhibiting their pursuit for freedom as well as asserting self independence in a male dominated society. Astha refuses to become close with Hemant after finding a condom in his bag and shows more interest in Pipee. At the same time, she avoids being together with him on any concern as he is indifferent of her emotions. On the other side, Pipee brainwashes her that true love cannot be felt at physical level only but it should guarantee union of souls, emotions and ideas. Thus, she realises, “men were so pathetic, so fucked up themselves, they only

understood the physical, and in this way she felt soothed" (Manju 219). When Hemant wishes to make love with her, Astha says, "Do I have to give it just because you are my husband? Unless I feel close to you I can't- I am not a sex object, you have others for that" (Manju 224).

In an Indian society a woman's voice against her husband and in-laws would lead her to total isolation from social constructs and leave her to the place where she would have no refuge. She is bound to be enduring and sacrificing wife without the care of her personal necessities. Manju Kapur has challenged such long-established views of Indian society, having turned Astha to lesbianism. Kapur aims at a Married Woman's passion for another woman and makes lesbianism a powerful factor for the fulfillment of woman's emotional urge and sexual pleasure. Lesbianism gives as much enjoyment to women as heterosexual intercourse. Having realized women's subjugation and emotional starvation like Astha and Pipeelika the novelist has turned them into lesbians. Both are victims of violence. If there is any violence whether domestic or social, women are more affected in our society. Pipeelika has lost everything after the death of her husband. Now she has nothing to lose. Manju Kapur has recommended in her novel *A Married Woman* that post modern women will never endure inequality. Now the women judge their status in each and every moment and if they find any discrimination, they are very quick to their feminine allegation and assert their identity breaking traditions. They break the traditional laws. Astha does the same when she understands that her husband is lacking in fulfilling her emotion and passion. Hemant has never realized and valued her deeper self to be loved.

Her relationship with Pipeelika gives a new turn to her pursuit for identity and self completion. There is a clash between the roles and responsibilities of a wife, mother, daughter in law and that of a lover. Astha is also trapped in problem between her craving for freedom and her obligations toward family, whether she should stay within the conventional family or she should run away for self independence. But, Astha realizes a large part of her life belongs to her children and understands her customary and social responsibility as the wife of Hemant. Therefore she feels, "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant's wife" (Manju 231). On the other side, Pipee tries to detach Astha from her husband who never understands her in order to give a full dedication to her love. Astha wants to move these two passages keeping in equilibrium side by side, without giving up either one of them. But at last as a wife and mother of two children, Astha tells Pipee, "I love you, you know how much you meant to me, I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can't abandon my family, I can't. Maybe I should not have looked for my happiness, but I can't help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had not foreseen...I'm sorry I am not like you" (Manju 242).

The women behaviour has been very strongly observed and presented by Manju Kapur in her works. In the present novel, of course Astha has crossed the conventional boundary of woman throughout her life, but this time in her relationship with Pipee she does not want to cross the perimeter. In all her life she has enjoyed a variety of relationships and has matured through various experiences. Astha has realized that, Pipee is leading her own life in her own way with her going foreign for her Ph. D. Pipee wants a full time partner. Though they both love each other it will be Astha's life which gets affected if she chooses to be with Pipee. Astha cannot make up her mind clear for choosing either family of Pipeelika. She does not want that Pipee will go to America .she is torn between two choices. Manju Kapur projects the turmoil in Astha's mind by locating the background against the consequences of of Hindu-Muslim conflict over the issue of Babri Masjid in Ayodya. However Astha has realized that still Hemant had the power to affect her. This time Astha's judgment of return to her family and not to desert it is not enforced upon her; it is her own choice which she as an adult woman chooses. Pipee always tries to feel her that she has to go away from her family, and tries to ascertain in her mind that she can lead her own way. At the end, Astha takes her final decision.

Conclusion

Lesbians are often considered as anomalies that do not fit into the heterosexual family standard. . Hemant disapproves Astha's relation with Pipee because Pipee is a Muslim by the virtue of her dead husband's last name .By challenging Pipee's work through his classification of all social activists as "those types" Hemant fights to ascertain his supremacy and magnitude in Astha's life. Hemant tries to represent social workers as an opportunistic group of people, who use social work for raising money for them, rather than for a superior purpose. However, even though Hemant's opposition to Astha and Pipee's relationship, Astha finds an extraordinary potency in a same sex relationship, and uses that potency to her improvement. Astha discovers her own inventive sovereignty through Pipee's support. Pipee suggests Astha, "Have an exhibition, do something of your own" (Manju 269). She urges Astha to leave her family and come away with her, unable to comprehend Astha's conflicts in spite of the subjugation that Astha faces at home. Pipee and Astha complaint against this image in their ways. The most important thing is their journey of self-discovery toward psychological freedom. Though the heroines take the uncommon path of lesbianism hitherto a taboo and socially unacceptable relationship in the Indian context, the only problem in their relationship is family. At last, Astha comes back to her family and tries to readjust herself in ancient traditions. Astha now thinks as a married woman and leaves Pipee for Hemant and for the happy family.

Now it is good news for lesbians and gays that I the Supreme Court recently give the verdict that Sectuion 377 is illogical and arbitrary. LGBT Community has same rights and thay possesses equal rights as of any ordinary citizen under the constitution. "Criminalizing

gay sex is irrational and indefensible," said Chief Justice Dipak Misra, who headed the five judge bench hearing the controversial case of Section 377. After that it can be hoped that LGBT community will face minimum problem from family or society. Or there will be fewer problems than that they have to face before.

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