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**Research Article****Astha- A Renaissance Child of Manju Kapoor's Married Woman****Dr. Naresh Sharma**

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**ARTICLE INFORMATION****ABSTRACT****Corresponding Author:**

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*This article emphatically points out the determined journey of Astha who fights the battle of her life in a patriarchal society and wins her battle after playing all her roles in a very calm and controlled manner*

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This article presents a protagonist of Manju Kapur's *Married Woman*, Astha who fights the battle of her existence in the patriarchal society. In such a society a woman is expected to be an ideal wife, a mother a house-maker with multifarious roles in the family. According to Indian tradition a woman must adore her husband in every possible respect. She must be meticulous about fulfilling the demands of her husband. At every stage of life, she is dependent on males in the form of any relation. The Indian woman has accepted these roles and performing them at the cost of her freedom and health. The reformist movements, economic independence and the impact of the western feminist movement brought about a significant change in the attitude and position of women in India and consequently some women writers began to voice their feelings freely through their writing.

Fiction became a powerful form of literary expression of their struggle to establish their identity and individuality. Some issues which were earlier considered as taboos are not boldly and openly taken up by woman writers. These writers of the last two decades of the previous century openly brought out the question of female sexuality. Woman was seen as a living human being who had equal rights than their male counterparts. The women bestirred themselves and struggled very hard to achieve equality with men in all the areas of life.

Women writings constitute a major part of Indian English literature. The libraries and book-shops are replete with the titles penned down by women writers. They portray women who struggle to establish their identity and individuality by waging a tireless battle against patriarchy and finally win the title of new women after resisting patriarchy. These writers provide a platform for discussion. The new ideology is reflected not only in the various political, economic and social movements but also in the literature that has been written during the last few decades. The Indian feminist writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri present some women protagonists who emerged as more strong and dynamite characters than male protagonists. Nayantara Sahgal lashes out at those who regard women as property and discourage individuality in them: *When I heard someone remark "we never allow our daughters to go out" or "I can't do that, my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar alien jargon. As if, I thought, women were property and not persons* (qtd. Dass 220)

Such type of awakening among women writers has immensely helped them to project a woman who is undergoing a change and trying passionately to establish his identity. Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, educated and class-oriented middle class women who are sensitive to the changing time and situations. They seek change within the cultural norms. Her women are caught in the whirlwind of asserting their individuality and the traditional role of a wife. But they compromise for the sake of domestic harmony. Nayantara Sahgal shows the need for a new morality in which women will be treated as equal to men and in this process she may be beating the drum of individual freedom. Her women believe in resolution and independence. Anita Desai goes for psychological exploration of her women protagonists who are lonely and sensitive. Although they suffer intensely yet they refuse to yield to the pressures. Arundhati Roy's novel *"The God of Small Things"* (1997) deals with the insult and abuse the women of society are subjected to. It is also a crusade and revolt against male chauvinism. Manju Kapur like Arundhati Roy, experiments with new themes such as gratification of sex from women's point of view and she also presents a new woman in the

garb of her female protagonists.

Manju Kapur shows women in search of their space which is their own and in the journey of searching the space, they cross all patriarchal thresholds. Her second novel, "A Married Woman" (2002) is about what happens when old customs lose their power and the woman no longer believes that her life should be determined in a narrow fashion. The protagonist of the novel Astha Vadera, undergoes profound changes against the backdrop of an India that is also evolving. Manju Kapur's pre-occupation with the female revolt against deep-rooted family values and the institution of the marriage is seen in "A Married Woman". In depicting the inner subtlety of women's mind, Kapur displays a very mature understanding of the female psyche. Obviously, Manju Kapur has also joined the caravan of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually resisting patriarchy has had a significant impact. In "A Married Woman", Kapur characterizes Astha, who gets transformed into a woman after her tireless and relentless struggle to achieve her desires. Astha, the protagonist of the novel challenges the patriarchal set up, breaks her silence and proves that she is the true and staunch follower of feminism. She belongs to a nuclear family and her story is set against the historical backdrop of Babri Masjid and Ram Janambhoomi controversy in the nineties, which generates emotional upheaval within Astha. The novel revolves around the issues of family life in traditional India, gender discrimination and an insatiable desire for individual growth. The novel faithfully mirrors the challenges of a woman faced in her personal professional, religious and political life.

"A Married Woman" presents how an educated young woman experiences marginalization in traditional social setup and struggles to carve a niche in her life according to her choice. The protagonist of the novel, Astha is born in a typical north Indian middle class Hindu family. She has a multi-disciplined personality and her development as a woman in a particular set up is entirely based on traditional culture norms. Manju Kapur shows about Astha's character that she never aspires to show back to her responsibilities in her roles as a wife, daughter and mother in a family. There is a special forte of Kapur's protagonists that they have an urge to do something exceptional and extraordinary and want to travel on untraveled paths. In spite of stringent traditional patriarchal norms, she embarks on a powerful physical relationship with a much younger woman and risks losing the acquisitions of her conventional marriage, which shows novelist's understanding of female sensitivity in women protagonists.

Manju Kapur depicts the nuclear family system as an innovation of early and mid-nineties. This makes the background of the story of Astha. The values, social issues like Ram Janmbhoomi – Babri Masjid also give a historical outlook to the plot of the novel. In the typical Indian social system every individual is associated with two families – one where he or she is born and other that of his or her in-laws. First is family of 'orientation' and second the family of 'procreation', same is the case of Manju Kapur's protagonist Astha. The religious controversy gives a tangible edge to the story to the upheaval of Astha. The entire novel revolves around family life, sexual relationships, gender-discrimination and besides the desires of peaceful coexistence and individual growth. The novel very faithfully describes the challenges faced by the woman in various spheres of life such as – personal, professional, religious and socio-cultural.

Astha, the protagonist of the novel is brought up in a typical middle class Hindu family where duty is emphasized, ambition is not allowed and obedience and self-control has got the family approval. These factors lead to a very compliant personality. Thus Astha is a new born woman in a patriarchal social set up which is based on Indian culture, ethos and norms. The opening lines of the novel describe the environment and social set up in which Astha was brought up. Her mother says: *Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable and unprotected* (1).

Although the female characters in the novel of Manju Kapur strive for their individual freedom and expression yet they very assiduously play their social roles i.e., roles as daughter, wives and mothers. Astha is the sensitive, energetic and dutiful daughter of an enlightened father "*who does not want his daughter to be like himself, dissatisfied and wasted*" (4).

Astha's father seems to be unhappy and dissatisfied but encourages his daughter to be like them on one hand and also different from them. He is presented as a man with passive outlook but over anxious about the studies of his daughter. He thinks that her future is in her hands and these hands should be strengthened from the very beginning. That is why he always tries to keep his daughter busy in studying books which will ultimately lay the strong foundation of her life. The parents of Astha are educated and do understand the value of education for their daughter. But Astha gives a deaf ear to the desire of her parents and expresses her penchant to drawing and painting all the time, despite the opposition of her parents who believe that there is no future in this field: *If she did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS, and find a good husband there* (3).

In a patriarchal setup, the girls are dictated and presided by their parents and marriage is considered an only achievement in such a setup. Astha's mother is loving and caring and encourages her on one hand and controlling and seeking fulfillment through Astha on the other. Her mother wanted to maintain a balance between freedom and discipline of the family guided by values. She neither imposes rigid controls on her daughter nor allows too much autonomy to her. The parents extend all kinds of support to her in every way. They strongly believed that a good academic performance would bring satisfaction as well as a sense of achievement to her and to them, and would get enough time to play and engage in other activities of her interest. For her education, Astha is excused from chores and responsibilities to concentrate maximum on her studies.

Astha is the pampered child of her parents and the parents imagine their future through her. She is the focus of their affection and expectations. She is exposed to various cultural and social lores which define her core identity and structure of her life-space. Astha being a semi-modern child, struggles, reacts, resists and consequently pushed into accepting the prescribed roles of her traditional life and her core identity of loving daughter. She undergoes a sort of apprenticeship in her parental home to help her do well in her future roles in the journey of life. In this respect, Manju Kapur shows the concern and life of those parents who want to inculcate all sorts of qualities in their only child.

Astha feels suffocated and finds herself hanging between tradition and modernity; between family and profession; culture and nature and more importantly between inclusion and exclusion. Although she is thoroughly conditioned to follow the traditional taboos of patriarchal society but she gradually grows up a conscious and a sentimental individual. She is totally dependent on her family for her social, emotional and economic security. Being a loving and pampered daughter and is ready to make adjustment in the later part of her life. She expects others to provide time and space for her. Education plays an important role in her life as she earns the degree of Bachelors Honors in English and an Master's degree. But her mother is not without

reservation about girls pursuing higher education. She feels, *"too much education encourages girls to be independent and wayward* (29).

The majority of the Indian families have same attitude towards education and the parents of Astha are not an exception. They strongly feel that education is very important for everyone as it liberates the individual from ignorance and makes people professionally competent. At the same time they feel that more education to a girl child may make her prone to violation of social rules and norms. They had orthodox notion that education for a girl child is a license for securing a good match for her. During her college times she develops infatuation for a boy called Bunty and then later on for Rohan, thus revolting against the oppressive nature of traditional and patriarchal Indian society. Where there are some limitations for a girl before marriage, it is clear from the novel that just like any other Indian girl, Astha also wants to see dreams and wishes to secure a comfortable life in which due importance is given to her feelings. But her love affairs disillusion her and very soon she takes them casually. She feels absolutely dejected when Rohan tells her that he is leaving town for better opportunities. Astha is scattered and mortified as she realizes that, *"he was waiting to take her home waiting to get rid of her"* (30).

Although Astha feels uprooted and disappointed by both their affairs and develops a feeling of insecurity and thus feels uncomfortable in such situations and thus avoids being friendly with boys. The novel gives a high degree of importance to the rituals associated with the marriage of a daughter. The cage of patriarchy has already started putting Astha inside it. Astha is never allowed to go beyond the traditional social norms which expect that a woman is supposed to accept her family's decision about marriage. Astha's parents had same kind of attitude and were anxious to arrange a good life partner for her. They were always in the hunt to find out a suitable companion for Astha, may be from an urban background but at the same time within the socio-cultural and caste boundaries. The parents of Astha cannot budge even for a second from the sacred obligation of social setup in this patriarchal society. The comprehensive search of parents ends with when, Hemant is chosen as the partner for Astha, who fits in the frame of their traditional norms, status, family and income.

In the process of selecting or deciding a life partner, Astha is never taken into confidence as the patriarchal setup believes that the decision of parents is final and binding upon girls. On the contrary, she is convinced that everything is done for her betterment. The parents of Astha were on the verge of their retirement from civil services and were eager to see their only child safely married before their retirement. Astha bluntly and rebelliously refuses every suitor until she meets Hemant whose time and education at university in the state has turned him into a broad-minded and a liberal thinker.

Manju Kapur elaborates the experience of Astha in her married life. She very clearly brings out the oppressive nature of patriarchal system that enjoys a particular identity upon a woman and more so for a married woman. Astha has some special dreams about love and for her marriage is nothing but romance and a passionate and caring relationship. She feels that marriage is a world surrounded by magic and fragrance, where rainbows abound, eyes speak and silence communes. She always craves for a husband, who is mature, educated, affectionate and always comes with pleasant surprises. She further imagines such world of marriage where there is no room for pain and sadness, no anguish but only trust, love and affection. In this way, Manju Kapur depicts her protagonist Astha's thought about marriage under the patriarchal and traditional norms.

After getting married, Astha is warmly accepted by the joint family of Hemant. They all share the feelings and emotions of each other although they live in their separate rooms. The parents of Hemant have their own floor while Hemant and Astha live on the ground floor. Astha very soon creates a space for herself in Hemant's family. Astha is perfectly happy with her conjugal life and soon finds herself, incorporated in to all the roles. She does everything expected of an ideal wife. She is totally devoted to her husband and parents-in-law:

*Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife. The time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was time spent in the service of love and marriage. Hemant's clothes are treated with reverence, sliding each shirt in his drawers and quarter centimeter out from the one above so they were easily visible, darning all the tiny holes in his socks, arranging his pants on cloth-wrapped hangers so there would be no crease* (43).

By and by, Astha realizes that she is understanding, devoted and an ideal housewife, on the one hand, and a modern social, capable, who is managing her family and contributing to the husband's growth, on the other. Astha feels overjoyed with the feeling that *"she was considered responsible enough to share the family problems"* (43).

With the passage of time, Astha's experiences in marriage bring out the oppressive nature of patriarchal system. She starts feeling the married life is only nine day wonder. She finds a radical change in the attitude of everyone directly or indirectly concerned with her. After the birth of his two children, Hemant turns into a typical Indian from a liberal American. The free space she always looked for could not actualize in her life. Astha finds herself trapped in a suffocating traditional society, whose restrictions give an unwanted and unwilling turn to her life. Interference of mother-in-law and disapproval of her mother and strict vigil on every action of her by the family members makes the situation even worse.

Her devotion to the family of her parents-in-law is proved a one-sided affair for her. She somehow feels that she is taken for granted by one and all in the family. She even starts thinking that she was an unpaid servant to all the family members. She realizes that all husband needs her for is only *"a willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth"* (23).

Astha believes that love is necessary than other things in marriage and it should be based on a stable affection. The roles of a mother, wife and daughter need equal importance and maintaining this balance is quite difficult. Being a mother is somehow the purest and finest feeling that is inherited in all Indian women of the world at large.

Astha's experiences in marriage bring out the oppressive nature of patriarchal system that enjoin a particular identity upon a woman. By giving birth to a girl child she is made to feel *"socially inferior"* (79). In the typical and mindless middle class families, preference is given to the male child. In a way, mother adds to the level of maturity for Astha. The birth of a daughter creates an atmosphere of morning in the family which feels burdened. Astha is surprised at the reaction of her so-called modern and educated parents-in-law when they remain disturbed of Anuradha's birth. She feels barred from her own family because she gives birth to a daughter.

Anyhow, her first female child is accepted in the hope that the next child would be a son. The gender partiality in Indian society is quite prominent and on the same belief Hemant also declares that *"I want to have my son soon, declared Hemant, International Journal of Social Sciences Arts & Humanities*

looking emotional and manly at the same time, I want to be as much a part of his life as Papaji is of mine" (61). The importance of a male child is emphasized in almost all religions and societies, the reason may be that son stays with his parents for the whole life and thus a sense of security for the future is also occupied.

Fortunately, Astha is blessed with second child, a son named Himanshu and Astha is praised by one and all in the family and relations for bearing a son, the hopes for the future of the family. The mother of Astha says, "*The family is complete at last*" (68). The birth of a son secures a place for Astha in the inner circle of the family and consequently she is incorporated as an essential member of the family.

Astha makes all possible efforts to maintain a balance between her work and her family duties but in a patriarchal setup she receives unhappiness only. She does the duty of a mother very fairly and squarely because bearing and caring children is approximately like a full time job. While enduring stress, pain, anguish, torture and frustration in her marriage, she continues to inspire and mobilize her children towards the achievement and fulfillment of their dreams. As a result, Astha sometimes tends to be over-possessive of her children. She continually invests in her own self-development through her children and eventually she turns into a perfectionist. Many educated mothers like Astha, try to realize their own frustrated ambitions by insisting that their children make life-choices according to their wishes. In such a situation it is natural that Anaradha and Himanshu resent their mother's undue interference and control in their lives. She tries to keep herself busy in the household affairs like cooking, cleaning and caring for her two lovely children. Apart from this she had other responsibilities towards her husband and parents-in-law, which were more important than children. After a few years, she started having migraines and an ennui sit into her life. She cries for help, but Hemant replies firmly: *its woman's work. Hire somebody to help you, or quit your job. This is our son, the one you wanted so much, it's nice if we look after him together. Send him up to Mummy, if you can't manage.* (70).

Manju Kapur has very effectively and brilliantly presented the paradox in the life of modern Indian woman. Astha soon realizes that she is being gradually excluded by the children too as they reject her attempts to run their lives. Astha thinks of realizing her aspirations through her daughter. But her daughter complains that: *and now you have forgotten. You want me to be like you. I am not, but you don't care* (244).

Astha is a new woman who is aware of her intelligence and talent and strives hard to gain dignity and individuality. She believes in the dictum of *tit for tat*. Astha denies identity to her children just like she was herself denied by Hemant. She desperately holds on to the status of 'mother' as it is the only signifier that gives her some sense of relief and fulfillment. She willingly accepts indifference from all corners and relations. She uses her pastime of painting as release and fiercely guards her private creative sphere to retain her individuality.

Gradually, her creative works begin to get recognition and Astha becomes economically independent and she works as a teacher in a school. She is a new woman, talented enough and wishes to carve a niche for herself, if not in her family, then at least in the professional world. Her job in the school provides her a sense of achievement. She enjoys the privilege of being considered an intelligent and favorite teacher of students. In the school, she has grown to be the "*Principal's right-hand woman, appreciated and valued for one tenth the work she did at home, and paid for it too. Her salary meant she didn't have to ask Hemant for every little rupee she spent*" (72).

Her job of teacher was only a part-time work but her primary duty always remained to look after the family. Her sacrifice for home, husband, children and social tradition had swallowed her talent. Consequently, she had to sacrifice her job as her husband expressed his irritation at her household duties. She is the only member of the house whose life and actions are decided by others. Her impression that "*with good job comes independence*" (14) is proved wrong and her accomplishments "*seemed very pedestrian*" (47) when compared to the achievements of her husband.

Being educated, Astha feels that the traditional way of life is not adequate to absorb all of her energies in the traditional social structure "*Astha was a wife, mother, sister-in-law, and daughter-in-law*" (160). Her emotions are trampled upon on every occasion. She is neither restricted to the house nor permitted to realize her aspirations fully. Her authority lies in managing the house, children and husband. But after sometime she is unable to bear the suffocation of the house. She cries: *I am thirty-six. I need to be independent. I am always adjusting to everybody else's needs* (227). She is caught in the quagmire of duty and responsibility and passionately struggles for freedom.

Astha's frustration makes her mad with rage. She tried to adjust with the circumstances, but all in vain. She performed all roles with perfect skill and energy. She never annoyed anyone and suppressed her desires for the family and willingly became a puppet in the hands of everybody. She was always at beck and call for her parents-in-law. But even then she felt absolutely dissatisfied with her traditional role and needed a necessary outlet. The controversy of Babri Masjid was raging and Astha saw a ray of hope and got attracted towards social activism. She hoped that it was an appropriate platform to resist patriarchy and a new woman starts taking birth.

It was her circumstances which ensured her involvement in political movement against patriarchal system. Astha desires to break from the "dependence syndrome" and proceeds on the path of complete human status. Her active participation in the movement poses a great threat to Hemant and his male superiority. This movement brings an adequate degree of empowerment and a sense of confidence and achievement in Astha. It was the oppressive patriarchal system which forced her to participate in the social movement.

Her participation in the movement makes her aware of her inner self and now she refuses to be a victim in the hands of her in-laws and children. Suffering and bitter realization necessitates her to emerge as a fighter against the back-drop of Babri-Masjid-Ram Janambhumi movement. She emerges out as a new woman after crossing the barriers of patriarchy. She is wholeheartedly drawn towards the social protest and adopts this route as an escape from the boredom and emptiness of her life. Moreover, it makes her more rationale and humane.

Astha feels awfully shocked at the facts of history bring shamelessly twisted and people being not so much particular and careful of Rama's principals but much worried about claiming the exact spot of his birthplace. The new Astha believes that Ram is a sacred name and has his permanent and immortal name in myth, history, tradition, belief and in the life and heart of the Indians. She believes that "*the Hindu religion ..... is wide is deep, capable of endless interpretation. Anybody can get anything they want from it, ritual stories, thought that sustain*" (185).

After taking an active part in the movement, Astha experiences two sets of feelings simultaneously. On the one hand, she feels a sense of joy, pride and respect and also a feeling of affirmation. The movement also taught her that she could be the architect of her own fate. Moreover it earned a sense of dignity for her. On the other hand, she felt that in order to make the building of movement, she has used the bricks of her family's emotions.

Astha's experiences in the movement make her judicious and she develops a philosophical outlook. Now, she is eligible enough to understand public sentiments, their beliefs and political interpretations in her rebellious self and spits the venom at the barefoot pilgrims moving towards Ayodhya to become martyrs. She thinks that, "*intolerance is the real enemy of India's multicultural and multi-religious society*" (192) which needs political correctness and ethical orientation.

The parents-in-law of Astha and particularly her mother-in-law and her husband are totally against her participation in the movement. When Astha packs her bags for Ayodhya, she bluntly remarks that, "*there is no need to leave your family and roam about like a homeless woman on the streets of some strange city. You don't care about your children and husband. But they are very good they will say nothing*" (186). Astha also tries to direct her husband's attention towards social reform and to participate enthusiastically in social life and movements, but all in vain. On the contrary he says: "*You seem to forget your place as a decent family woman is in the home and not in the streets*" (172). Such activities of Kapur's protagonists depict the feminist development of women under the patriarchal norms and traditions.

Astha feels that her energy will never get an outlet in the traditional social structure which has narrow and traditional ways of life. Her participation in the movement gave her internal satisfaction and due to this reason, she disregards her parent-in-laws and her husband. She struggles for her inclusion in the family and demands equal rights and equal place in the family. Her life had already become synonym of sacrifice and craved for a change. She is choked with the ideal of Indian womanhood and says: "*Excuse me, stop the juggernaut and let me off. I have had enough*" (168).

Certainly, the voice of a new woman, Astha, neglected and dissatisfied, feels that life is already very short and she has already given up everything to please others. There was something missing which she wanted. Her in-laws were responsible for all her woes. Her in-laws and husband had crossed all the limits to torture her. As a result, she feels frustrated and disgusted with her traditional role as a wife and indulges in a lesbian relationship with Pipeelika, where she realizes inner worth. She starts realizing the beauty of her character and even her problems and migraines stop bothering her. Such type of relationships adds colors in her life it was reciprocal too.

Astha feels upset to think that she is only a sex machine for her husband. She has lost her real self which she could see through Pipee's desire and affection. Her partner became a mirror through which she could see her real self. She is made to feel beautiful by her partner. Earlier a commodity, now she transforms into a human being with a sense of dignity, self-confidence and self-esteem. Most importantly, her migraines suddenly stop and she heaves a sigh of relief by becoming a healthy and vibrant individual again. She is a creative painter again and her paintings start getting recognition. It is Pipee who inspires her and also motivates her to hold an exhibition of her works.

Both Astha and Pipeelika share their rich and difficult inner life with each other, and bonding against male tyranny making them confident of their claim to gain strength for women's liberation. Finally, in the role of a new woman Astha follows Pipee to the world of forgetfulness and passion. Thus, Astha takes a sweet and clever revenge on her husband who has to reap the harvest of wrongs done to Astha. Both Astha and Pipeelika had become integral parts of each other and there is strong and passionate union between them. The narrator tells: "*they had been skin to skin, mind on mind with nothing in between*" (303).

This is also a new and horrible development in the relation of Astha's life against the traditional patriarchal system and lesbian relationship is not considered a legal relationship in the society.

The path of lesbianism is often taken by women as a desirable option to the conservative norms of sexual relationships. Both Astha and Pipeelika fulfill their female bonding in passionate and intense fantasies of love making with their overwhelmed bodies and sexy mouths. Astha takes it as a natural human urge to fulfil the important element of pleasure in sexual action.

In Manju Kapur's "A Married Woman" lesbianism is a product of situation. Astha and Pipeelika are the victims of social oppression. Astha is the victim of patriarchy whereas Pipeelika of communal riots. They want to design their individual lives in their own way without any feeling of guilt and remorse. The lesbian relationship between them is a natural urge and it is healthy and constructive as it did not harm anybody. Astha does not feel guilty conscience, as she had not violated any social and moral law. But on the other hand Pipee had an axe to grind and used Astha as a sex object and as a tool of feeding her ego. Astha feels rejected by Pipee as she has been rejected by Rohan and Bunty.

Meanwhile, Pipee qualifies the GFF exams and leaves for USA to do her Ph.D, leaving Astha in an emotional vacuum as if: "*her mind heart and body felt numb ..... She felt stretched, thin, thin across the globe*" (307). In this way, Astha is again left at the crossroads, uncertain, where to go. She had already shown back to her husband and children. Astha painfully realizes that their love was only a nightmare, a temporary attraction. She thinks that, "*But we both have our own lives. She has chosen large horizons, it's her life, and this is mine*" (298). Astha tried to create a relation of belongingness but it ended up to be temporary and short-lived.

Astha realizes that she has to accept the fact that her relations are temporary and short-lived. Finally, she stands alone without any love and support from any corner. She is caught in the web of unpleasant surroundings. Astha has now three options or choices before her. These choices are; return to her parental home, return to social activism and to create a new individual home for herself. Her husband, in-laws and children have already started realizing her importance and they felt that they were incomplete without her and honestly felt that her existence is essential for their sustenance and growth. They were feeling emotionally drained. Astha also realizes that her house is the only place for support, security and the only place for her inner and outer development. Finally, Astha returns to her house in the capacity of a new woman who made everybody realize that their existence is meaningless without her.

All these circumstances mould Astha into a new woman who is now the darling of her husband and children. She succeeds in creating a new environment in her home and also succeeds in creating a personalized world of a wholesome nature. Now she also contributes in the decision-making in family matters and her voice is equally heard – the strong voice of a new woman. She has also the liberty to choose her paths and tread on them independently, without any pressure from any corner.

Astha is aware of her capabilities and intelligence and her talents needed a platform for a purposeful and dignified life. She is a committed learner and learns even at most traumatic moments. Her meeting with Aijaz, the founder of street theatre group gave a new and sure turn to her life, who encouraged and established her as a successful painter. This new turn converted her from a domestic servant to a social activist. She does come back to her family, but in the capacity of a new woman and moreover after making the realization to her family members that they do not exist without her. From the corner, Astha came to the middle with a different outlook and a different image. She reacted assertively and when her husband declared that he wanted to have a son soon, she reacted rationally and asked: *How do you know, we will have a son? It is not in our hands, at least not in mine. It's the man's chromosome that decides the sex, and with two sisters in your family, it may be a girl. I have read about these things* (61).

Astha is a new woman who can well guess about her talent and intelligence which required a dignified and purposeful life for which she strives very hard and consequently emerges into a new woman with a different outlook.

Through trials and tribulations of Astha, Manju Kapur has very effectively presented the life of modern Indian woman and also how she can carve a permanent niche for herself in a patriarchal society. In her novel, "A Married Woman", the novelist tries to bring home the fact that owing to her dreary and hectic schedule at her residence which forced her to spread her wings which were earlier closed. Astha now refuses to 'adjust' in the family. Her domestic life provides a platform to her to free herself from monotonous and slavish life. Now she could prove her mettle in various vistas open to her. She even used patriarchy as a cannon fodder and kept on drawing sketches with soft pencils and colored charcoal that Hemant got her from Japan. She should paint lakes in Kashmir instead of mice, birds and cages. *"May be one day she could do something with her art, but now her school and herself were audience enough"* (82).

The controversy of Ram Janam Bhoomi and Babri Masjid provided a platform to Astha to prove her mettle and it also helped her to come out of darkness. After the movement, Astha turns out to be an enthusiastic and determined social worker and takes active part in all the activities of the Sampradayakta Mukti Demonstration. It was also an opportunity for Astha to realize her quest for recognition and self-realization. Finally, through this movement, Astha turns out to be a dare-devil and her role of a new woman overwhelms all and sundry which makes them introspect.

Unlike Astha, there are some female characters who remain passive and willingly accept the regime of patriarchy and fall prey to the centuries-old traditions related to women. Astha's mother, Sita and her sister-in-law, Sangeeta belong to this category. Astha's mother, Sita is a traditionalist. Despite being, well-educated, she adheres to the old traditions and considers marriage as the ultimate purpose of a woman's life. She wanted Astha to follow her traditional footsteps. Whenever Astha resists patriarchal setup, Sita gets infuriated and admonishes her for poking her nose in these affairs. She tells Astha that women must not interfere in some particular areas, which constitute the domain of the male. She is even abhorrent to Astha's involvement in social organizations. She frequently advises Astha to shun such activities which can create barriers in her duties as a wife and a mother. Likewise, Astha's sister-in-laws Sangeeta is treated like a dumb-driven cattle. She remains a puppet throughout her life and feels no sense of identity as a free and respectable woman. Astha and Sangeeta are emblematic of the subjugated Indian women.

In "A Married Woman", Manju Kapur's presentation of modern Indian woman is not submissive but as assertive and commendable. The tireless efforts of Astha to realize her self-identity converts her into a new woman. Her social activism also helps in self-discovery:

*Brothers and sisters', she started, "In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brothers, and children. In history, many things are not clear, the same thing that is right for one person is wrong for another, and it is difficult to decide our path of action. We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering, unnecessary and continuous suffering. When we look to righting wrongs committed hundreds of years ago, we look to the past. But that past cannot feed us, clothe us or give us security. History cannot be righted easily, but lives are lost easily, pain and trauma of women and children come easily. Tomorrow your sacrifice will have been forgotten because the duty of life is towards the living* (197-198).

Patriarchal society was responsible for turning her from an orthodox Astha into a new woman.

During the course of action once, Astha was awfully pained to learn about the donation of her father's books to the library as her mother remarked that the books have swallowed the space of the house. Astha passionately wanted to preserve some of her father's books as part of her memory, but her desire remained unfulfilled. Even the mother of Astha could not understand her: *"It is Hemant's house and he said there was no room. Then who am I? The Tenant", ask Astha* (87). It is a very significant question about the place of woman in her own house. It is shameful, ironical and even ridiculous that a woman, who is a wife, a mother and the only house-maker cannot call her home, her own. Before marriage, it was her father's and after marriage, it was her husband's. Being a staunch traditional woman, Astha's mother always supported Hemant.

Astha's anger erupts in various ways. Her desire for equality, self-respect and independence bestirs her and she starts weaving the web of her existence with determination. She gets attracted to Aijaz Akhtar. He becomes instrumental in realizing her dreams in painting. It is this new Astha who musters courage to cross the patriarchal threshold under the patronage of Aijaz and the first step was in the form of Ekta Yatra, which she could have never started without coming into the contact of Aijaz. Astha also took part in the street Theatre group which made her politically enlightened.

The second step was through Pipeelika, a social worker and the wife of Aijaz Akhtar who was a widower earlier. Astha needs her as a support to her new found independence and Pipee needs her to find her own self and moreover it was a stopgap arrangement for her to fill the void that her husband had created. Now Astha was being exploited by a woman. These setbacks give her enough courage to rise up and participate in the social movement.

Manju Kapur openly advocates the rights of women, but also keeps the values of Indian middle class families intact. Although Astha is unhappy with her married life, she won't go for a divorce. She has lesbian love with Pipee but looks to her husband for security and comfort. She strongly protests against her husband's dominance, challenges the social taboos and social norms but gives in ultimately. She makes a compromise realizing that it is the only course open to her to save her marriage. She has deliberately made the choice and it makes a difference. Obviously, Manju Kapur shows the new woman as a product of the inevitable transformation taking place in society.

In Manju Kapur's novels, the new woman refuses to play second fiddle to her husband. She openly resists patriarchal set up and in this process emerges out a new woman, a title not given to her, rather earned by her through resistance. They grapple with significant issues like motherhood, mothering, marriage and marginalization, women in various roles as wife, sister and friend and above all as human beings. Thematically, the novel belongs to the genre of bildungsroman as the protagonist, Astha passes through a phase of growth, self-discovery, alienation and a conflict of generations which elevates her from innocence to knowledge, from immaturity to a certain amount of understanding of human motives, whims and fancies. The departure of Pipee was a blessing in disguise for Astha. The novel ends with Astha changing her dress and brushing her teeth and getting into her side of the bed. She wants to sleep so that she could forget all that is unusual.

The Indian woman as depicted in "A Married Woman" is representative of the transitory phase of Indian society, torn by the traditional values of patriarchal society, the country's heritage and the modern, liberal values imbibed from the west. Man-woman relationship and equation has also been re-defined. The protagonist in the novel aspires, attempts and strives to be her true and independent self. A simple woman is replaced by a new woman. Manju Kapur portrays a woman who has become aware of the biased attitude of her husband. She also stands for the modern emancipated woman, asserting her individuality by challenging the patriarchy, social taboos and destructive social norms. The journey of the protagonist is a journey from innocence to experience and social action.

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