

## Elements of Lesbian Feminism in Manju Kapur's a Married Woman

**Arun B. Chavhan**

Assistant Professor

Dept. of English

Late Baburao Patil Arts & Science College, Hingoli

**Dr. Machhindra H. Khandagale**

Assistant Professor,

PG & Research Dept of English,

Dayanad College of Arts, Latur

### Abstract:

*Manju Kapur's A Married Woman is based on the institution of marriage and the women's uprising within the Indian Socio-cultural value system and patriarchal heterosexual society. The female revolt against the deep-rooted family is explored in depth throughout the novel. Manju Kapur vividly portrays the picture of a lonely life of a married woman. The novel questions the Indian value system and the foundation of the institution of marriage by showing the harsh reality of the homosexual identity of a woman. The novel is about Astha, a middle-class educated woman who marries a man chosen by her family. Manju Kapur aptly underlines the frustration of a married woman and her suppressed sexual identity and boldly portrays the lesbian intimacy and passionate love between Astha and Pipeelika. The novel ends with the separation of two women since they know that their lesbian relationship doesn't have any future, in this way the novel maintains its heteronormativity as both homosexual lovers choose a different path.*

**Key Words :** *Lesbian, Gender Identity, Homosexuality, Patriarchal, Heterosexual.*

**L**esbian feminism is a creative perspective and cultural movement that was most influential in the 70s and early 80. Lesbian feminism is a range of ideologies and movements that share a common goal: to establish, define and achieve equal social, cultural, personal and sexual rights for women, it also encourages and advocates lesbianism as the logical result of feminism. Lesbianism is a sexual attraction between women; female homosexuals are often called lesbians. In the words of lesbian feminist Sheila Jeffreys:

*“Lesbian feminism emerged as a result of two developments: lesbians within the WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) began to create a new, distinctively feminist lesbian politics, and lesbians in the GLF (Gay Liberation Front) left to join up with their sisters”.* (Kumar)

*Lesbian feminism tends to examine, argue and question for change against antiquated and*

*established gender roles in heterosexual society. Lesbian feminist literature exhibits characters and ideas that attempt to change the sexual identity of a woman through the written word. Some key writers and activists of lesbian feminism include Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, Audre Lorde Rich, Sheila, Shobha Dey, Manju Kapur etc.*

Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) is a story of a middle-class educated working woman in Delhi. Astha represents the post-modern Indian woman as a new transgressive figure who revolts against the restrictions and bondages of a patriarchal family and shows the courage to break the barrier in search of self-identity and emotional support. Astha searches for her identity and the purpose in her life rather than only being a housewife and mother. Manju Kapur illustrates the concept of love both prohibited and platonic even going as far as lesbianism. The author deals with this taboo subject very carefully without using the 'lesbian' word for Astha and Pipee in the novel. This lesbian

relationship provides Astha with a sense of security, a process of self-discovery and progress towards psychological liberation.

Since her childhood, Astha's parents are very protective towards her, as she is the only child and they always want that Astha should get a good husband for her happy married life. By the time Astha turns sixteen years of age, like a common teenage girl she often fantasizes about a handsome young man hugging her in his strong arms. She gets attracted to a young soldier Bunty who is a frequent visitor to her house. It was love at first sight and Astha can't stop herself from thinking about Bunty day and night. In this trance of attraction, she writes a few letters to Bunty at his Boarding School. After the exchange of a few letters, Astha's flirting suddenly comes to an end after her mother's intervention. In her college days, Astha gets emotionally and physically engaged with her classmate Rohan but this relationship doesn't last long and ends with her arranged marriage of Astha with Hemant.

Manju Kapoor successfully portrays fascinating glimpses of Aastha's struggle after marriage to find her place in a patriarchal environment. Astha represents the woman in patriarchal Indian society although financially independent but still exists between tradition and modernity. Soon after her marriage, Aastha loses faith in human nature. She finds it difficult to create mutual understanding with her husband, she makes efforts for showing her individuality to her Hemant for getting due respect from him, in the words of Manju Kapoor expressed in the novel "in the Indian domestic fare, wives have to dance to all sort of tunes of their husband." (44). After just a few months Aastha's married life gets dull, she keeps waiting all day long for the arrival of her husband from work.

In the quest for identity Kapur represents Astha's personality who engages in a constant negotiation of her desires and religious identity. Aastha goes to Ayodhya to protest against the proposed demolition of Barbari Masjid where she meets Pipeelika Trivedi-Khan who is a sociologist and works for a Delhi NGO. After a very close friendship, they both get emotionally and physically attracted to each other. The death of Pipee's husband Eijaz acts as a catalyst for her to

develop interests other than social activities; she gets into a relationship with Aastha that rises out of both women's emotional need to connect with each other. The lesbian couple creates their own world within the larger traditional mainstream heterosexual society, in the moments of their heightened lesbian intimacy; they are not the mothers, wives or property of patriarchal society but an individual self who is the owner of their sexuality and body. Kumar observes:

*Manju Kapoor has exposed a woman's passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance. With Passion to revolutionize the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the trauma of her female protagonist from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. (Kumar 165)*

Astha finds solace in the lesbian relationship with Pipee having chosen an alternative form of sexual identity willingly, as Judith Butler argues, "to destabilize the entire system of sex regulation that undoes binary apposition such as gay/straight" (Stuart 345). Instead of downgrading her to the hands of her husband, she starts exploring her substantive sexual identity. Aastha wants to break her dependence on her husband's male superiority by exploring a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. Pipee understands her feelings more than her husband and makes her feel that she can explore life and search for new dimensions of her personality. Aastha and Pipee's relationship rebels against male superiority by exhibiting self-independence and a quest for freedom in a male-dominated heterosexual society. At the same time, Astha avoids physical relationship with her husband as he is so indifferent and lacks understanding of her emotions and feelings. When Hemant tries to get close to her, she tells him:

*"Do I have to give you 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. (224).*

Astha faces a conflict between the responsibilities and the roles of wife, mother and lover; she gets trapped in a dilemma whether she should continue her relationship with Pipee or she should fulfill her duties and responsibilities towards her family. Pipee requests Astha to leave her husband and children and come away with her. Astha tells Pipee:

*I love you, you know how much you mean 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 relationship, But I had not foreseen...I am sorry I am not like you. (242)*

In the end, the journey of Aastha and Pipee's relationship reaches nowhere, ultimately Aastha returns to her family as she knows that their homosexual relationship has no future together. Kapur vividly displays an Indian patriarchal and heterosexual society where tradition and rules are so strong that women fail to get out of such restrictions and bondages. Aastha starts living again mechanically in an emotional vacuum as if "her mind heart and body felt numb. It continued like this for days. Aastha sinks into a stupor, desensitized to the immediate surroundings of her home." (307). Lesbians are considered as an outsider who does not fit into the patriarchal and heterosexual family paradigm. Pharr explains

*"To be a lesbian is to be perceived as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman identified" (Pharr 18)*

Indian patriarchal society allows women to enjoy their sexuality and body only within the paradigm of heterosexual intimacy bound by the ties of marriage. Kapoor aptly shows the reality of marriage in a traditional society where a woman has to efface her personality and surrender her existence. The female protagonist of the novel Aastha rejects the bandages and restrictions of bound society and challenges the masculine heterosexual power structures which have rejected and invalidated homosexuality. Manju Kapur constructs a femino-centric protest against the homophobic and hetero-centric Patriarchal society.

**References:**

1. Hoogland, Renee C. *lesbian configuration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.
2. Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: India Ink 2002
3. Kumar, Ashok. "Social Web and Cry of the Self: A Critical Analysis of Manju Kapur's *A Married Women*." Prasad, Amar Nath. *New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English* Vol. 4. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2008. 163-164.
4. Malik, Seema. *Crossing Patriarchal Threshold: Glimpses of the Incipient New Woman in Manju Kapur*. *Indian Writing in English*. Ed. Rajul Bhargava. Jaipur: Rawat, 2002. 17, 184
5. Mishra, Binod. *Travails of Self Identity: Indian Writing in English* (@202.54.26.120) on Monday, oct 2006:36:22 EDT 2003, email [/mj@egoli.uni.net.za/](mailto:mj@egoli.uni.net.za)
6. Verma, Anuradha. "Manju Kapur's *Aastha: A Married Woman*." *New Perspectives on Indian English Writings*. Ed. Malti Agarwal. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (p) Ltd, 2007. 51-56