


## Analyze the Portrayal of Domestic Conflicts in Manju Kapur's Novel *A Married Woman*

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### ABSTRACT

This research specifically examines Kapur's literary works that expose the lack of harmony prevalent in Indian homes. Manju Kapur skilfully emphasizes the protagonist's familial difficulties in her stories. While women in general lack autonomy, educated women actively want to achieve it. Kapur's paintings exemplify the oppressive nature of traditional Indian culture towards women, restricting their autonomy and agency. Patriarchs and society exert significant influence over every element of women's life. Women's emotions, whatever of their nature, are dismissed and they are compelled to hide them. Due of this pressure, women have initiated a rebellion. Nevertheless, when Kapur's female characters are compelled to disobey their older family members, they have difficulties in managing the situation. The researcher's examination of each of Kapur's books is crucial in illustrating the characters' autonomy in decision-making. In the novel *A Married Woman*, the main character challenges traditional male-dominated standards and societal regulations to establish her uniqueness. However, this behaviour also creates complications in her personal life at home.

**Keywords:** *Domestic, Disharmony, Patriarchal and Oppresses, Married Woman, Manju Kapur.*

This paper examines the conflict that emerges in the lives of the characters in Manju Kapur's works. *A Married Woman* is a chronicle of a woman's incongruous marriage and the consequent exasperation, situated amongst the context of present political upheaval in ancient India. The work explores several profound concerns inside the family, such as defiance against long-standing customs, the quest for selfhood, challenges in marriage, and the fight for women's existence. Kapur, motivated by a determination to alter the patriarchal Indian society, portrays the hardships endured by her female main characters and their final successes. The

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main character in the novel confronts the potential risk of compromising the stability of her conventional marriage and solid family due to her strong physical attraction to a somewhat younger woman, thereby bringing up the controversial issue of homosexuality.

*A Married Woman* depicts the narrative of Astha, the sole child of conventional middle-class parents who prioritize her education and matrimony. Despite her mother's insistence on Astha being married, her father advocates for her to prioritize her studies and strive for a great job, leading an independent life. Astha is an amorous and youthful girl who aspires to have a marriage based on love. She develops romantic feelings for Bunty, a young man employed at a defence academy, while he is visiting his relatives on a holiday. Nevertheless, their romantic relationship derives to an end when Astha's mother restrains Bunty about meeting her daughter. Subsequently, during her time at college, Astha develops romantic feelings for Rohan and deceives her parents in order to rendezvous with him. She derives pleasure from a physical relationship with Rohan and aspires to wed him, but he forsakes her and departs the nation. Astha enrolls in an M.A. program in an attempt to erase him from her memory. During her last year of the school, her parents orchestrate a matrimonial proposal for her, and she consents to wed Hemant, a bank assistant manager with a foreign education and an MBA degree. They establish their residence in Vasant Vihar, an affluent neighbourhood in New Delhi. Astha is weary of the repetitiveness of her traditional married life and begins to teach, over her family's objections. Her father succumbs to cardiac distress, leaving her mother bereft and prompting her to see her regularly.

Following a period of two years since their marriage, Astha delivered a daughter named Anuradha. Hemant became fatigued with his employment at the bank and made the decision to embark on his entrepreneurial journey by establishing his own television manufacturing enterprise. He achieved success in his business endeavour and obtained a large number of orders from overseas, resulting in significant riches. Astha had a boy named Himanshu, but shortly thereafter, she started encountering stress as a result of her employment, domestic duties, and child-rearing obligations. She experienced persistent headaches and was hospitalized. After arriving home, she had a sense of loneliness and dissatisfaction since her husband, preoccupied with his professional affairs, was unable to empathize with her emotions. Astha sought comfort in composing poetry and drawing pictures, employing them to articulate her distress, sorrow, and hardship in diverse circumstances. Regrettably, Hemant persistently

derided her views and opinions. Astha's mother, who was widowed, devoted her time to reading The Gita and listening to preachers. Astha brought her children to her mother's house and found inspiration in the philosopher's profound insights on life. Astha's mother liquidated all her belongings and donated the resulting funds to Hemant without seeking Astha's input, leading to her feeling infuriated. In 1987, the principal of Astha's school invited Aijaz, the leader of a street theatrical troupe, to conduct a workshop on communalism. Astha and Aijaz first saw each other at this location, when Aijaz requested Astha to compose a screenplay addressing the contentious matter of Ramjanama Bhoomi and Babri Masjid, to be performed as a play at their school. Astha felt a feeling of worth from this duty, and she was attracted to Aijaz since he was the first guy to recognize and admire her talent.

Aijaz's workshop on communalism fostered a stronger bond between Astha and Aijaz, prompting her to contemplate him and the continuous socio-political endeavours that would shape her future passion. Nevertheless, she saw that, as a married woman, it was inappropriate for her to entertain such thoughts with an unfamiliar individual. One day, Hemant came across a news item detailing the brutal homicide of Aijaz and his theatrical troupe during a performance centred around the Babri Masjid Ram Janambhoomi issue. Astha was taken aback and filled with sorrow at hearing the news, but Hemant disapproved of her response. She participated in Aijaz's funeral procession and thereafter engaged in demonstrations advocating for justice. She ultimately became a member of the social organization Sampradayakta Mukti Manch.

The committee unanimously resolved that painters should contribute their artworks for an exhibition that is committed to promoting worker solidarity and secularism. Astha consented to engage in painting for the Manch and subsequently got actively involved in its endeavours. Although she neglected her home duties, she dedicated herself to painting and achieved success by making a painting that was sold for ten thousand rupees, which she then contributed to the Manch. Her artwork garnered her social acclaim. Astha sought her husband's consent to utilize the upper-level chamber, although he refused her entreaty. Hemant and Astha decided to celebrate their anniversary by travelling to Goa. Hemant not only utilized her funds, but also declined to purchase a container that Astha wanted. Astha disregarded the constraints imposed by her husband and mother-in-law and ventured to Ayodhya, abandoning her house and duties, as part of her involvement with the Manch. She delivered a speech to the residents of Ayodhya and had a meeting with Pipeelika, who is Aijaz's spouse. Astha exerted much effort to meet

and converse with Pipee upon discovering that Pipee was Aijaz's spouse. They explored other locales and temples throughout their voyage, ultimately forging a novel bond known as a lesbian partnership. Displeased, Astha discovered contentment in the embrace of Pipee. Both individuals were quite eager to encounter one another. Simultaneously, she refrained from engaging with Hemant on any matter due to his apathy and lack of comprehension towards her feelings. Astha made a fervent and anxious attempt to attend their clandestine rendezvous. Occasionally, she experienced delays because there were no available automobiles or due to a bandh, which irritated Pipee. Pipee's patience wore thin, prompting her to suggest that Astha purchase an automobile for herself in order to alleviate her difficulties. Astha, deeply enamoured with her, diligently adhered to her every word and directive.

Astha requested Hemant to get a new automobile just for her, but he harboured suspicions that an external influence was instilling such notions inside her. Pipee strongly urged Astha to go on the Ekta Yatra, a three-week journey from south to north, while leaving her house and children behind. Pipeelika extended an invitation for her to reside with her. Pipee desired Astha to disclose the clandestine nature of their connection to her family and, if feasible, to distance herself from a family that shown indifference towards her well-being. If she possessed the ability to do so, she would have the capacity to lead her life according to her own preferences, and they would have the opportunity to coexist, relishing their partnership for the entirety of their existence. Astha was on the verge of making a crucial life decision with Hemant when she received a letter from Ajay, Pipee's sibling residing in America. He provided financial support for Pipee to pursue a Ph.D. at an American university. Pipee notified Astha of her intended departure for her Ph.D., leaving Astha both surprised and perplexed. Subsequently, Hemant experienced chest trouble due to his excessive workload, causing Astha to shift her focus towards him. She diligently attended to Hemant's health, ensuring his nutrition and exercise were well-managed. She travelled to America with the purpose of assisting her spouse in his recuperation. Even in the presence of Pipee, she consistently harboured concerns for her children. Her entire existence centred around her family. Pipee was the one who needed a partner who would be available for work on a full-time basis. Astha saw that their relationship had become tense as Pipee pursued her own path by moving overseas to get her Ph.D. While there was mutual affection between them, Astha's life would be the one to experience the consequences if she chose to be with Pipee.

In December, the news of the Babri Masjid being demolished was flashing on the TV. After this, a curfew was raised all over the world. She declared to Astha that: “When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth?” (1). As per her words, Astha gets married to Hemant and leads a happy life for some period. gradually, Astha becomes increasingly disillusioned with her new life, and a sense of monotony permeates her existence. She thinks:

“What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come home? Her in-laws were not demanding, for the housework they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free time to be restless in”. (46)

As time passes, Astha starts feeling neglected and unimportant in Hemant’s life. She thinks that her sacrifices and hard work are not appreciated, and that Hemant is no longer the same person she fell in love with. Her inner conflict between her love for Hemant and her desire for independence and recognition as a working woman intensifies. Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* portrays the challenges faced by women who try to balance their personal and professional lives in a patriarchal society. Astha’s character highlights the struggle of women who try to break free from traditional gender roles and expectations while facing resistance and disapproval from their families and society.

The novel also sheds light on the issues of gender inequality and the unequal distribution of labor within the household. Despite being a working woman, Astha continues to perform all the household chores and is expected to prioritize her roles as a wife and mother over her career. Overall, *A Married Woman* provides a poignant commentary on the complexities of married life and the struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies. The novel highlights the need for societal change and gender equality, where women can pursue their aspirations and dreams without being judged or held back by societal norms and expectations. Therefore:

“Between Anuradha’s birth and Himanshu’s, Hemant changed from being an all-American father to being an all Indian one. After he came home the last thing he wished to bother about was taking care of a child... ‘it’s woman’s work,’ said Hemant firmly. Hire somebody to help you or quit your job” (70).

Hemant’s refusal to help with Himanshu’s upbringing created disharmony in his and Astha’s marital life. Sharma and Maheshwari describe Astha’s plight in their article “Women in Quest

for Sexual Freedom and Emancipation in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*”, stating that “as *A Married Woman*, she becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate-thinking husband compels her to play the role of ‘mother and father’ for her children” (143). This deprives Astha of satisfaction and ultimately results in the breakdown of the institution of marriage. She must independently handle the various obligations and responsibilities associated with being a wife, mother, daughter, and teacher, without any assistance from Hemant. In addition, Hemant accuses her of mismanagement, incompetence, and extravagance. Occasionally, she contemplates retiring from her work due to the overwhelming responsibility of managing everything herself. The novelist describes how “between her marriage and the birth of her children, 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).

Amidst the complex dynamics of a family’s extensive financial resources, spending habits, entitlements, obligations, awareness, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and reliance, Astha finds herself experiencing the same destiny as the most impoverished member. She feels overwhelmed by the increasing demands of her family and is constantly under pressure to work. She believes that the position of a married woman within the family is consistently influenced by her husband, and she acknowledges that her children spend a greater amount of time with their grandparents. The absence of comprehension from her spouse and the nonexistence of her offspring engenders sentiments of solitude, seclusion, and unease within her psyche. Bhagabat Nayak characterizes Astha’s mind as agitated, compelling her to seek solace in complete solitude, feeling trapped by the obligations imposed by her family, experiencing a subtle form of oppression, and longing for liberation.

Astha gradually resorts to composing poetry as a means to articulate her distress and sense of isolation. She depicts the arduous and oppressive existence of a woman who is trapped without appreciation or a sense of self via her poetry and artwork. The language employed in her poetry is characterized by its indirectness, yet it effectively conveys her experiences in a ceaseless manner. The sole respite from her anguish is her poetry, which she has nurtured from her early adolescence. Following the completion of over two hundred poems, Astha started the process of rewriting and transcribing them using a compact and practical typewriter that Hemant acquired from the United States. She aspires to have her poetry published, but to her

disappointment, Hemant interprets them as only exposing her frustrations and lacking diversity and adaptability. When she confronts him about not helping her with publication, she becomes tense and exclaims, “Yes, you did, you did, and you did. But now it’s all changed, and I want to bang my head against the wall because you never understand anything. I thought you might help me decide what to do with them” (81). Ironically, Hemant comments that Astha’s poems may give the impression that she is not happy, which eventually leads to her ceasing writing altogether.

At school, Aijaz asks Astha to write a script about communal problems for a drama to be staged. Astha’s children participated in the performance, and all parents came to enjoy the show. However, when Hemant watches the performance, he dislikes the way Astha has written the script and harshly criticizes her. He discourages her, saying, “Please. Keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching. All this doesn’t suit you,” (116). Hemant’s negative remark hurts Astha deeply. Despite this, she finds expression and refuge in painting, as noted by Joya Chakravarthy in *A Study of Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*: “Astha asserts her identity through the paintings she makes. Art is a refuge for her; she struggles to express herself and put her thoughts on canvas” (201).

Hemant also urges Astha to give up her job, as he feels that she neglects her family responsibilities and spends all her time painting, which does not bring in enough money. He tells her that she cannot do everything and should leave her job if she insists on painting. He shouts, “It seems not. You can’t do everything. Leave your job if you insist on painting. It never brought in enough money to justify your going out of the house,” (148). Despite Hemant’s words, Astha pays no heed to them and wishes to make enough money from her paintings to rent her own studio someday. She requests her sister-in-law Sangeeta’s room as her painting space, but Hemant denies her request, citing that the room belongs to Sangeeta, who does not tolerate others using it. This refusal disappoints Astha, and she expresses her feelings of disappointment.

Manju Kapur reveals through the protagonist Astha that women still hold the position of inferiority despite their pursuit of equality and being a worthy member of patriarchal society. When Hemant decides to donate Astha’s father’s books to a library, she feels emotional and protests against it. Although Astha’s mother agrees with Hemant’s decision, “she reminds Astha that it’s Hemant’s house and he has the right to make the final decision” (87). Astha

demands equal consideration in every decision-making process in the family, but most decisions are made by men, and women are given the least consideration. She questions her mother's decision to sell her property and give some of the money to Hemant, as it was her father's money and she has the right to use it.

However, Hemant refuses to discuss the matter with her. "Verma argues that for Astha, marital life means participating in all activities and discussing all issues with her husband, but for Hemant, it is solely a physical relationship" (56). Astha is hurt when neither her mother nor her husband considers her as an equal. "She tries to make Hemant understand that she is not dependent and deserves to have access to their financial situation, but he misunderstands her request" (99). She realizes she must pay for her trip to Goa herself and finds herself feeling like a slave who lives life according to others' instructions. While there, "she sees an antique silver box that she falls in love with, but when she asks Hemant for permission to buy it, he responds with a hurtful tone, saying that she cannot afford it, and that her earnings will only pay for their holiday" (165).

Astha realizes that men in the family decide how money is spent, not women. Although she earns money, she cannot enjoy financial freedom and must ask for permission from men, especially her husband, to buy the things she wants. Her frustration and anger make her aggressive, but the presence of her children calms her. However, this attitude leads to a feeling of guilt, negativity, and lack of self-esteem, making it difficult for her to face life's challenges (145). The memory of the silver box haunts Astha, reminding her of Hemant's refusal and causing her to become disinterested in her married life. She feels trapped, like a helpless bird living life according to her master's instructions, with Hemant controlling the destiny of her life. Although she revolts against the male-dominated society, she is not like other women who tolerate the injustice. Astha fights against this oppression and demands equal freedom. There is no doubt that Hemant's:

"Astha likes to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses in threat to Hemant and his male superiority. Although, she finds herself trapped between the pressure of the modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases she set out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship". (134).

Astha finds comfort in Pipeelika, as she suffers due to her husband's neglect towards her. Eventually, she falls in love with Pipeelika, finding satisfaction in her company. One day,



Astha's friends discuss how women are being divorced after marriages, especially those who marry men settled abroad. Astha strongly reacts to the inhuman and selfish attitude of men who use women and discard them when they lose interest. She criticizes men's careless attitude towards women and vows to protest this selfish and light attitude of men towards women. She is tired of her frequent sacrifices for her family and finds it difficult to share her feelings with colleagues who have stable relationships with their husbands.

Astha strongly criticizes the marriage system that victimizes women and shows compassion for men. She believes that marriage is for the happiness of both partners, but it often becomes a source of injustice and endless suffering for women. She suggests it is better not to marry than endure an unhappy and unbearable marriage. Although she is discontented, she cannot gather the courage to break her marital relationship. Her restlessness and anxiety lead her to defiance and isolation. She yearns for a fulfilled life, but her choices ultimately ruin her happiness and mental peace.

Pipeelika suggests Astha buy a car to gain independence from her husband's dominance. Although her intentions may not be pure, Astha follows her every word and request, leading to a conflict with her husband. She demands a new car, which Hemant refuses, arguing that they already have a car that she can use. This refusal infuriates Astha, and she feels ignored and disrespected by her husband. Then, Astha contemplates leaving her traditional family life and marriage to be with Pipeelika. Nevertheless, Pipeelika receives correspondence from her sibling, Ajay, who currently resides in the United States. The letter refers to Pipeelika's sponsorship of her enrolment in a Ph.D. program at an American university. Pipeelika notifies Astha about her departure from India to pursue further education in America. This news disheartens Astha and comes to the realization that she cannot forsake her conventional family lifestyle. Astha and Pipeelika finally reach a mutual agreement and discover their individual paths, acknowledging that they cannot have a future as a couple. Astha is faced with a dilemma as she grapples with her desire for autonomy and her responsibilities to her family. She acknowledges that her children are the primary focus of her life and acknowledges her conventional and societal obligations as Hemant's wife.

Finally, she understands that her relationship with Hemant reflects power rather than love. While she desires more attention from her husband and wants to be included in decision-

making processes, Hemant ignores her requests, causing her to feel suffocated in their relationship.

On the whole, Astha tries to find pleasure and happiness outside of her marriage, seeking solace in the arms of her lesbian partner, Pipeelika. However, she eventually realizes that her marriage is essential, and she must maintain harmony in her relationship with Hemant. She understands that their relationship requires compromise and effort to maintain peace and happiness. Despite her challenges, Astha grows and learns to navigate her marriage and her desire for independence.

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