

Mother-Daughter Relationship in Manju Kapur's A Married Woman

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Abstract

Manju Kapur holds a prestigious position among the second generation of Indian English women novelists of the post-independence era. In her works, she concerns herself with the plight of urban, upper-middle-class, educated women and issues related to them. Self-discovery is an important theme in her novels. Judith K. Gardiner defines the term identity in these words, "The term identity itself is contradictory, meanings equality and distinctiveness, and its contradiction expand when it is applied to women" (Gardiner, 347). Her observation of life around her is acute. Her novels are feminist in tone and manner. All her novels deal with the dilemma faced by women in Indian society. She speaks of the middle class and has even earned many comparisons with Jane Austen for her portrayal of the middle class, often trapped in awkward situations and very sharp and chiseled idea of the feminine self. Even for the characterization that happened. Obviously it seems that her characterization is a neat depiction of the structure and fabric of the society.

Keywords: Encouragement, Lesbianism, Relationship, Autonomous & Quest.

ManjuKapur is an Indian novelist who was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She graduated from Miranda House University College for Women and did her MA in English from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and M.Phil. in English from Delhi University where she is Professor of English. She is a modern novelist who has five novels to her praise with a high degree of both critical and popular success Worldwide. She is one of the most acclaimed novelists of Indian writing in English (IWIE).

The title "Mother-Daughter Relationship in ManjuKapur's *A Married Woman*" is justified as it focuses on a central theme in the novel—the complex and multifaceted relationship between Astha, the protagonist, and her mother. This relationship is significant in shaping Astha's identity, values, and choices throughout the novel. At the heart of Astha's journey is her complicated relationship with her mother and how it shapes her understanding of herself as a woman. Astha's mother represents the traditional values and expectations of Indian society, particularly in regards to marriage and gender roles. She is critical of Astha's desires for independence and fulfillment outside of her marriage, and pressures her to prioritize her husband and children above all else. This creates a tension between Astha's desire for personal fulfillment and her sense of duty and obligation to her family. She is torn between wanting to follow her own dreams and ambitions and feeling guilty for doing so. Astha's relationship with her mother is further complicated by their different experiences as women. Her mother grew up in a time when women had fewer opportunities and were expected to be subservient to their husbands. Astha, on the other hand, has had more opportunities for education and career advancement, but still faces barriers and societal expectations that limit her choices. Throughout the novel, Astha struggles to reconcile her own desires with her mother's expectations, ultimately coming to a deeper understanding of herself and her place in the world. Through her experiences, she realizes the importance of self-discovery and acceptance, even in the face of societal pressures and expectations. Overall, *A Married Woman* explores the complex dynamics of mother-daughter relationships

in a traditional society, and how they shape the identities and experiences of women. It highlights the importance of self-discovery and self-acceptance, even in the face of societal pressure to conform.

Through her novel, Kapur seriously attempts to change society's perception of women. Until now, women have been portrayed either as symbols of sacrifice, denying themselves and their happiness, or as objects of sex and sensuality. In contrast to this established image of woman, she portrays woman as a human being and tries to convey her out of her patterns of sensuality and sexuality. Her effort is to break this image of a woman and present a picture of the real woman, who is standing on the threshold of ritual and modernity. According to Kakar,

“She believes that this pursuit of selfhood is an evolving process that takes her protagonist through a series of situations and tests. To the feminists the term compromise is unacceptable suggesting a cowardly surrender; but to most Indian women. It is the most acceptable accommodation of conflicting emotions of pressures satisfactory resolved” (Kakar 94).

Mother-Daughter Relationship in ManjuKapur's *A Married Woman* suggests an exploration of the complex and multifaceted relationship between a mother and her daughter within the context of ManjuKapur's novel *A Married Woman*. This novel, published in 2003, explores into the lives of Indian women, particularly focusing on the protagonist Astha, a middle-class, educated woman who grapples with her roles as a wife, mother, and individual in a traditional, patriarchal society. In this novel Kapur traces Astha's physical and emotional growth from a young girl to a middle-aged woman matured by experience. Bigotry over marriage, gender discrimination, homosexuality and religion weave the themes of this novel.

“Observer Reviews, *A Married Woman* is a well-balanced depiction of a country's inner development, its strength and its failures and the anguish at a woman's unrest, which is as complicated as the social and political upheaval going on around” ([Http: //books. guardian.co.uk/reviews/general fiction](http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/general-fiction))

This novel is the story of Astha, a married woman who clearly states that juggling with worldly responsibilities is not only tough but also boring at times. Julie Myerson review,

“This is a magnetically alert, deeply readable novel, written with a profound intelligence and a deceptively light touch” (<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review>)

It draws our attention to the controversial issue of same-sex relationships, and provides insight into the psyche of the individuals involved. It also depicts Astha's self-discovery in her sufferings as a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a mother, a teacher, a social worker and a gay-lesbian through Astha, Kapur portrays the dilemma of urban middle class dissatisfaction with their lives as they suffer from an identity crisis. The incompatibilities between Astha, the emotional and Hemant the practical one, the growing distance between the two on the one hand and the growing family responsibilities and the insensitive behavior of her mother and in-laws on the other, form the backdrop in which Astha first meets Aijaz, the founder of Street Theater Group. This meeting proves to be a turning point in Astha's life. Bored with her monotonous married life, and living with a husband who fails to understand her, Astha's life is filled with loneliness. She has always been taken for granted by everyone where she has never been appreciated for her genuine efforts to bind the family, please the husband and still feel guilty and unhappy. Astha involuntarily feels drawn towards Aijaz, a true secularist and emancipator both in his thinking and demeanor. He signs Astha the task of writing the script on the Ram Janambhoomi, Babri-Masjid issue and thus prompts her to think about the social, religion-political issue that has engulfed the entire country. Aijaz addressing Astha by her first name is significant in the following details,

“And from being indifferent to Aijaz, the single use of her name, created a pleasure in what she, unused to the ways of men outside marriage, saw as interest rather than a communication strategy” (*A Married Woman* 105).

Aastha feels flattered as she feels that Aijaz respects her for her real self, for him she is only Aastha, woman and human and not Aastha, wife, mother, daughter-in-law and teacher. He uplifts her from the mundane life of domesticity and inspires her to voice her opinion on issues troubling the nation. Aastha feels honored as for the first time she is valued for her existence. It is her unconscious attachment to Aijaz that makes her sensitive to communal issues. The incident in which Aijaz and his gang members are burnt alive in the van leaves her deeply shaken. This opens the doors of SampradayaMuktiManch (SMM) for her here her endeavors as a social worker and an artist begin. Hemant's anger when Aastha is completely immersed in SampradayaMuktiManch activities appears to be his intolerance of his wife sharing his attention as he links it to her attachment to Aijaz, which has indeed been the case.

Hemant did not take Aastha's decision lightly to attend the funeral procession and rally organized by the Communalism MuktiManch against communalism. Aastha's active involvement with the platform, her visit to Ayodhya to deliver a lecture on the controversial issue raises all eyebrows - Hemant, her mother and her mother-in-law. Kapur, time and again, describes the limitations set for a woman in her own characteristic way. Against all odds, Aastha travels to Ayodhya to fulfill her commitment. This physical journey to Ayodhya, against her family's wishes, becomes a journey that gradually tears her away from her family, not only physically but also mentally. This is where Pipeelika enters his life and an instant rapport is established between them. The relationship which started off as friendly gradually turns into a serious one. In Pipeelika, Aastha gets a true partner and vice versa. Gradually, a strong sexual bond develops between the two women. Aastha and Pipeelika have experienced loneliness in their respective lives. Their longing for love and unity results in each other. Author depicts the nuances of a lesbian relationship through the relationship that exists between Aastha and Pipeelika, without passing any judgment about it.

She gives us an insight into the minds of two women and their initiation into sexual relations with one woman. For Aastha and Pipeelika, lesbianism was a claim to belonging because it removed their sense of loneliness. Pipeelika respects faith, gives it an important place in his life and endows it with a sense of completeness. The relationship slowly moves to the next level, where the highly idealistic and unorthodox Pipeelika demands a commitment from Aastha. In terms of the general perception on homosexuality and the problems they face, Pipeelika's statements, “We have to struggle, for acceptance and the right to love as we feel.” (*A Married Woman* 237) Aastha's relationship with Pipeelika makes her imagine her life, her relationship with a woman, her children, her mother, her in-laws and her husband with a new, different perspective, one that is unconventional and devoid of guilt. This gives her character maturity and gives her the strength to face any situation in life, even with her husband Hemant's love affair and sexual indifference. Yes, Aastha has adopted a neutral attitude in her relationship with Pipeelika. Aastha was transformed from a dutiful, true and obedient wife to an indifferent creature as far as Hemant was concerned. The novelist attempts to reveal the psychology of individuals involved in gay and lesbian relationships through Aastha and Pipeelika. Pipeelika asks Aastha if Hemant suspects her of having an affair. Aastha's Answers:

"I don't know. I don't care."

"Does he suspect you are having an affair?"

"It's not the same thing."

"Why not?"

"You're a woman."

"And that makes you a faithful wife?"

"No. But it is different, surely."

"What you mean is you don't feel guilty."

And yes, I don't feel guilty" (*A Married Woman* 253).

Their relationship flourished for about a year. It takes such a serious turn that Aastha is ready to give up her marriage, family and children for Pipeelika's love, however, Pipeelika's enrollment for a Ph.D. The failure of the program and faith in the United States to completely abandon their children and break the bonds of their traditional marriage resulted in a tragic end to this relationship. Pipeelika moves to the United States and Aastha returns to her family, her husband and her children, while,

"Her mind, heart and body felt numb - It continued like this for days. She felt stretched thin, thin across the globe" (*A Married Woman* 307).

Aastha's relationship with Pipeelika is however based on true love and longing and although it is a prelude to her search for herself, it begins to become conventional the moment commitment demands enter into it. Initially, this gives space to both the women, but slowly, like any traditional relationship, the identities of the individuals involved begin to be consumed and a long series of disagreements ensue, which eventually leads to a final break-up. Lesbianism empowers Aastha, gives her a new vision, inspires her, celebrates her spirit, draws a line of demarcation between the conventional and the unconventional, the acceptable and the unacceptable, firmly nurtures and establishes the artist in her. Despite all these elements, the demands that this relationship imposes leave Faith broken and lonely. Kapur indirectly tries to convince the readers that Lesbianism is as normal as any other relationship and is based on the same principles of love, respect, understanding, commitment and certain expectations.

In *A Married Woman*, Kapur combines the dual themes of marriage and politics with the theme of Lesbianism. Thus, she becomes the first Indian English novelist to draw attention to women's longing for lesbianism. She moves beyond the conventionally accepted domain of marriage and depicts sexual orientation and indulging in pseudo-sexual relations with Pipeelika, another woman of faith, for the satisfaction of her passion. As observed by BhagavataNayaka:

"*A Married Woman* conforms to the rules of lesbianism and gay theories, and explores a hidden aspect of a woman's passionate life as defined by comfort levels without societal sanctions. Thus, the novel has broken a new ground in the genre of Indian English fiction of modern times" (Nayak 234-235).

Gay and lesbian relationships have become a reality of contemporary modern society. Acceptable or not, they are appearing more and more nowadays. The New Woman in Aastha seeks revenge for the insults inflicted on her by her estranged, tyrannical husband. Hemant does not suspect Aastha's relationship with Pipeelika as a threat to his marriage and treats it as mere time passes between the women. Ironically, Aastha justifies Hemant's words as shown in the following lines:

"Women, always mind-fucking'-Listening upon listening fucking upon fucking. In full view" Later, Aastha retaliates: "Hemant should be pleased said Aastha to her lover, he says women are always mind-fucking. They both laughed at the wife's revenge" (*A Married Woman* 232).

In her interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur states,

"It is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man." (Interviewed by Nivedita Mukherjee: *The Sunday Statesman*) Soon after marriage, Aastha becomes disillusioned about human nature in general and the country's politics in particular. Bored in her prosperous new home, school becomes the only place where Aastha feels content. She begins to discover her potential and we see a new woman emerging in her. She dismisses Hemant's idea that "he should quit because, 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" (*A Married Woman* 72).

Her female characters are often caught between the traditional and the modern, her personal needs as well as her familial prospect. She tried to bring out one or the other women-centric issues in almost all her novels, though she never claimed to be a feminist novelist, but a feminist custom is very evident. She tried to reveal the hidden secrets through her female heroines which perhaps only a woman can possess, for which these traits are generally not easily accepted in the society.

In conclusion, the quest for self-discovery and the mother-daughter relationship are two interconnected concepts that can have a profound impact on an individual's life. The journey of self-discovery can help individuals understand themselves better and find meaning and purpose in their lives. At the same time, a healthy and supportive mother-daughter relationship can provide a foundation for a strong sense of self and identity. Both concepts are important and can help individuals navigate the complexities of life with greater clarity and confidence. Her novel displays a mature understanding of the female-psyche. She takes into account the various issues that surround women in their political, social, cultural and domestic spheres. Her narrative takes into account the female search for identity and struggle; she has to cement her place as a person. The traditional feminine virtues and grace are so deeply ingrained in the psyche of a woman that she hardly gets any encouragement to develop her independent personality. That is why it becomes very difficult for her to reach self-realization and a sense of her own identity. The various relationships that surround the woman provide her with an image without any personal identity of her own. Kapur's novels reflect her protagonists' uneasiness in their desperate need to find themselves. Her novels covertly convey the message that a new woman is emerging in the Indian society. The need of the hour is to acknowledge her for her mettle, perspective, tolerance, perseverance and all those qualities that set her apart from her male counterpart and give her the rightful place she deserves.

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