

Lesbian Sexuality in A Married Woman

Suksham Ahluwalia

Associate Professor , Department of English

Arya College Ludhiana

Abstract :

The Female Protagonist of A Married Woman, Astha takes a diverse, secure and protected path of rebellion against male chauvinism. She neither breaks herself nor becomes violent rather she turns into more severe attack on the traditional customs of socio-cultural set up of established patriarchal system in turning herself to lesbianism. She defies male chauvinism of her husband on the one hand while on the other she pleases the emotions of womanhood in her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika.

Keywords : Lesbianism, Emotional Urge and Rebellion Attitude

Manju Kapur's Novel A Married Woman was a sensation after its publication because Lesbian sexuality is explained by Kapur as an intense instinctive desire to seek and elsewhere individually and collectively in the case of chiefly women who feel a gap, a vacuum in their life inspite of being involved in all the activities of day-to-day life, social, marital, cultural, domestic and much other things. Kapur lays bare the feelings of Astha whose vacuum in life is filled by Pipee's intense love for her. Without her everything looks empty and meaningless to the extent that she finds herself reduced to a mere straw in the presence of Hemant:

When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that very reason it was soothing to be with. Her body was his, when they made love it was Pipee's face Astha saw, her hands she felt. She accepted the misery of this dislocation as her due for being a faithless wife.¹

Hence, Manju Kapur's Astha, the protagonist of A Married Woman is different. She turns to lesbian questing for emotional fulfillment and challenging the ego-centricism of her husband, who looks for heterosexual love even outside marriage for her self-fulfillment and handles sex

like drinking water. Astha is unusual even from Virmati of Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* who transgresses social code having married the man of her choice against the desires of her mother like Ammu of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Saru of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Being cheated and dominated by their husbands these women fight and rebel against their suppression. In their emotional upheavals they don't bend down to surmount rather break the rules of society.

Astha, the female protagonist of *A Married Women* who seeks for freedom, transgresses the traditional concept of women's subservience and patience like the holy cow. Only economic freedom is not enough for them. Socio-religious culture has to accept their individuality. Here, Kapur attempts to present quite a new facet of a married woman. They feel the pleasure of a different love:

They were standing. Slowly Pipee put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back, on the beginning spread of her hips. Gently she undid her blouse hooks, and her bra, looking at her face she did so and slowly she continued, feeling her back with her palm, coming round up towards her breasts, feeling their softness, especially where the nipples were, feeling them again and again, in no hurry to reach any conclusion. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breaths, close together and mingled. In the small bedroom, Astha tense with nervousness. She was afraid, yet there was no going back. Sensing how she felt, Pipee took her time, touching every crevice of her body with her mouth. The sweaty patches of her armpits with small stiff hair beginning to poke out, the soft fold flesh where the arm joined the torso, the hard bony part behind her ears, the deep crease between her buttocks, the hairiness between her thighs. In between they talked, the talk of discovery and attraction, of the history of a three month relationship, the teasing and pleasure of an intimacy that was complete and absolute, expressed through minds as much as bodies. Afterwards Astha felt strange, making love to a woman took getting used to. And it also felt strange, making love to a friend instead of an adversary.²

Despite her parent's effort to confine Astha to the boundary of tradition and culture, Astha has shown the sign much earlier, that she can't be caged. When her mother invites a man

to visit their home, Astha refuses to meet that man. Moreover, she has physical relationship with Rohan whom she meets in the final year of her college. Indian culture does not accept the girl's physical relationship with boy before marriage. Astha defies it and crosses the boundaries and limitations of society. She defies every fetter of her traditional family as well as the values of conventional India. In the beginning she indulges in love affairs which as per Indian tradition are considered illegitimate. Her first love affair is with Bunt, an army cadet at NDA, Kharakvasala. It is broken as Astha's mother interferes. Her second love affair is with Rohan. In this affair she crosses the boundaries and limitations of society by enjoying physical relationship with Rohan. However, this affair also ends as Rohan goes to Oxford for further studies.

Outwardly, she seems to be quite satisfied with her job as a teacher and as a mother of two children. However, when one peeps into her mind, becomes aware of the undercurrent of resentment against the treatment of the inferior sex. After the first baby is born Hemant helps her to look after the baby. He shares the burden of it and he is quite liberal in his views. But in the course of time, Hemant attitude changes. He does not treat Astha equally. Astha objects to it and pleads:

*"Surely equals could relate better than master and slave."*³

Astha's participation in the workshop begins her journey of breaking all the boundaries of conjugal life one by one. She meets Aijaz there in the workshop and her old instinct of searching for love arises here. Even though she is a mother of a son and a daughter, she is fascinated by the dynamic nature of Aijaz. The beginning of Astha's rebellion against conforming to norms starts when she starts taking interest in conceiving a play about the Babri Masjid and its troubles. She meets like-minded people and drifts off into the world of activism. She is enraged all the more when her family members express their anti-attitudes to her activism. She inadvertently falls in love with Pip. Initially their relationship has friendship as a base but as time passes it deepens something more. According to Sushila Singh, ManjuKapur,

*"Seems to suggest that a married woman's job is not to complete wifing, child bearing and housekeeping but to do something more."*⁴

Astha responds against men's insensitive behavior towards women's dilemma. She walks against traditional attitude of traditional society that woman should be like earth. She should hold and live with the burden of the family and react strictly according to the conventional norms of the society. She should not open the mouth against the harassments imposed on her by her husband or her in laws because religion does not permit her to disclose the matter against her husband and her in-laws, however atrocious they maybe. She can't take up her personal injustices. The expression of her personal injustices is believed to be the breaking of transitional norms. The women like untouchables and other marginals of the society are marginalized against in the conservation of society. Women and untouchables have no place in their system of success and survival. Whosoever disobeys is bound to face rejection. But the heroine of the novel Astha pooh-poohs the conventional views of the society. She anchors her personal identity ignoring the traditionalist thoughts of her family. According to her view, "*Religion is a choice as much as other thing*"⁵. She rebels against her husband for her self-satisfaction challenging conventional barriers. She turns to Pipeelika a Hindu Brahmin girl who has married Aijaz Akhar.

In this way, Astha takes a diverse, secure and protected path of rebellion against male chauvinism. She neither breaks herself nor becomes violent rather she turns into more severe attack on the traditional customs of socio-cultural set up of established patriarchal system in turning herself to lesbianism. She defies male chauvinism of her husband on the one hand while on the other she pleases the emotions of womanhood in her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika. "*Slowly Pipee, put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back [...] feeling her back with the palm. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breaths, close together and mingled*"⁶. Manju Kapur projects a married woman's a passion for another woman and creates lesbianism a powerful component for the fulfillment of woman's emotional urge and sexual satisfaction. Having understood women's tyranny and emotional hunger like Astha and Pipeelika the novelist has put them into the lesbian trace for their self-fulfillment. Both are victims: one is the victim of household violence; the other is the victim of societal violence and becomes a widow when her husband dies in a riot. If there is any violence whether household or social, women are more pulverized in our society. After the death of her husband Pipeelika has lost everything she had. Now

nothing is left to her to lose. But she doesn't lose her heart. Astha also unlike Manisha in Anita Desai's *The Voices in the City* does not like survival and passive suffering. She does not make a suicidal attempt like Manisha. But she is more rebel for her rights.

Hence, In this novel ManjuKapur has shown that change in the norms of conventional patriarchal system is important for women's rights and their individuality. Inter caste and inter religious marriage reduce the women from traditional restrictions. They are always in search of their individuality. Postmodern women can't bear sex suppression and subjugation. They want co-existence and equal handling in socio-political aspects of life. They would not bear social or domestic aggression. Social or religious matters should not interfere with their individuality. If their individuality is defied they would challenge the whole system.

References :

1. Singh, Sushila. *Recent Trends in Feminist Thought, Indian Woman Novelist*, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige, 1991, p. 287.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 231
3. Nayak, Bhagwat. *Feminine Assertions in ManjuKapur: A Social Ethical perspective*, *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, Vol. XLI, 2003-04, P.148.
4. Singh, Sushila. *Recent Trends in Feminist Thought, Indian Woman Novelist*, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige, 1991, p. 65.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 89
6. *Ibid.*, p. 230 – 231