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**GRT**

**MANJU KAPUR'S "A MARRIED WOMAN": A STUDY OF  
WOMAN'S STRUGGLE  
FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY IN INDIAN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY**



**M. Sasikala**

**Research Scholar, Department of English, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. &  
Assistant Professor, K.C.S Kasi Nadar College of Arts and Science, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.**

**ABSTRACT:**

**M**anjuKapur is a great novelist in the field of Indian Writing in English. She always gives importance to the women characters in her novel who struggle to liberate themselves from Cultural Conflict, Identity Crisis and Patriarchal domination. The present paper highlights the women's quest for identity in a patriarchal social set up of Indian family. Her novel is strongly a protest against every cruelty committed on women in the name of religion and morality.

**KEY WORDS:** Cultural Identity, Patriarchal, Family, Liberation.

**INTRODUCTION:**

ManjuKapur is one among the famous women novelists of Indian writing in English. She is a professor of English in Delhi University. Her experience in teaching makes her to write the feelings and conditions of women minutely. So far she has written five novels. In all these five novels she has explored different themes with different women characters where they livesomewhere in India. But all these characters reflect on the Indian women in different perspectives.



"In the last quarter of the 20th century there has been a tendency to live an independent life. A desire for liberation has played an important role in changing the structure of family"(Sharma 113).

Astha is the protagonist of ManjuKapur's "A Married Woman". She is a typical upper middle-class family girl. She is the only daughter of her parents. According to her parents,"her education, her character, her breath, her marriage, these were their burdens" (AMW 1).

Her parents feel that if she gets married their responsibilities will be over. In India women are always treated as burden to their parents. Her parents have brought her up properly. From her early life, Astha is not allowed to act on her own will. She is fascinated by Bunty during her school day, who is a son of her family friend. But immediately with the interruption of her mother, it has been stopped. But Bunty does not take it seriously like Astha. He does not even understand the feeling of her. In his last letter, he writes to Astha,"My father thought it better if we had nothing to do with each other. Why create

complications? I wish you well in life" (AMW 7).

After her break up with Bunty, Astha encounters Rohan, a University boy. But their relationship doesn't continue for a long time. Rohan abandons Astha and leaves abroad. She realizes that, ... free from voices, free from everything except the terrible things she was feeling, because Rohan didn't love her, Rohan had lied to her. Rohan was what her mother had been warning her about since she was old enough to be warned, and how pleased she would be to know she had been right all along (AMW 31).

This is the second bitter experience she receives from the male society. Later she is married to Hemant, the foreign returned son of a bureaucrat living in the posh colony of New Delhi. After marriage, Astha settles with Hemant and leads her life happily. She fully involves herself as a daughter-in-law to her in-laws and good wife to her husband.

But slowly Astha realizes that she is something like a doll in the hands of Hemant even in sex. She is forced to behave according to his wish. This shows the patriarchal mind –set of Hemant. One day when he suggests her to wear sexy clothes, she asks, "What do you think I am? A whore?" (AMW 44) After few months, she starts to feel the dullness in her new life and starts to go for a job as teacher though she wants to be a journalist. But this idea is also denied by her husband and he suggests that, "Journalists have to stay out late. We must see about a teaching job. You read quite a lot" (AMW 47).

This brings in another conflict between them which she has to accept though she doesn't like. After her father's death, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a girl child Anuradha. One day Hemant says, "I want to have my son soon" (AMW 61). But this shocks Astha and rage fills her and questions how he knows that they may have a son. Hemant replies, "Of course we will have a son and if we don't we needn't stop at two" (AMW 61).

Child bearing becomes the other problem which Astha has to face. In India a boy child is something precious and considered as a prestigious one. Though Hemant foreign return, he too is particular about this thought. But she firmly replies, "It is not in our hands, at least not in mine. It is 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" (AMW 61).

After the construction of new house, Hemant starts a business by selling TV. But at the same time, his attitude towards Astha is also changed. Astha conceives again, Hemant is particular about a boy baby. Even her mother-in-law hires a pundit to come and do pujas. Finally Astha gives birth to a boy baby.

"Astha was officially declared the mother of a son. Her status rose, and she pushed from her mind thoughts of what might have happened had she been unable to do her duty" (AMW 69). When Hemant is asked to take care of the child by Astha during evening, He replies, "It's woman's work" (AMW 70).

This depicts the patriarchal way of life. When Astha's mother wants to leave to Rishikesh, she wants to clear her belonging. Astha becomes angry when she came to know that her father's books are donated to library without her knowledge.

At the school where she is working, Astha meets Aijaz, a man who own a street Theatre Group. He is also a history teacher who comes to her school to conduct workshop during holidays. The school Principal requests her to assist him. But Hemant doesn't like her commitment during the holidays. Hemant discourages her by saying that she must need some experience to write the script. This hurts her badly. Though Astha yearns for appreciation of her creativity in both her script and drawing, she fails to get it from him. On the other hand Aijaz encourages her. She gradually fascinates on Aijaz. "Astha's involvement with the street Theatre Group lends fuel to the fire of her quest for identity" (Sharma 184).

One day Astha comes to know that Aijaz along with nine others are burnt alive during their performance of their Street Play on a controversial topic. She is shocked. She participates in rally and protests against his cruel murder though her in-laws and husband don't like it. She further wants to go to Ayodhya to participate in social activity. But Hemant does not like to send her to such activities. He says, "As my wife, you think it proper to run around, abandoning home, leaving the children to the servants?" (AMW 188).

But she undertakes her trip and there she meets Pipeelika, wife of Aijaz. With Pipee, Astha sees her life in different angle. She gets her identity through Pipeelika.

Astha's association with Pipee gives a new dimension to her quest of identity. Pipee comes to Delhi and spends time with Astha. A powerful emotional relation develops between them despite offences from her husband and children. Astha falls in love with her. A strong sexual relationship is established between them within a few meeting. Astha spends more and more time with her and enjoys her company (Sharma 185).

Pipee expects total commitment from Astha. But Astha is in different situation. Unlike Pipee, who doesn't have any responsibility, Astha has a family and especially her two precious children. She is in dilemma. On one hand, she has Pipeelika who opens a new life to her. On another hand, she has her family from whom she gets bitter experience. She has to sacrifice either one of them. But finally Pipeelika get the scholarship in the United States. After the departure of Pipee, Astha feels isolated. She feels something miserable again to enter into her routine life:

Mechanically she changed, brushed her teeth, put cream on, got into her side of the bed, pulled the sheet up, and turning to the very edge lay absolutely still. Motion of any kind was painful to her. Her mind, heart and body felt numb (AMW 307).

In the novel, "A Married Woman", ManjuKapur portrays the character of Astha who searches for her identity in Patriarchal set-up of society.

Tradition in Indian society is so strong that a woman of average capability fails to break them and get out of them to make a separate identity of her own. She makes her attempts, she covers some distance but ultimately she returns to the four walls of her family to lead the life of slavery and servitude in the patriarchal set up. She is progressive and conscious of her rights, but she quickly compromises to the fact that a woman's real position lies within the family unit which she must sustain and protect and not ignore or neglect due to the false notion of being "liberated". In this sense Astha is not only the face of the new woman of our time but also the real woman of our time (Sharma 185).

ManjuKapur depicts how Astha endeavours to find an identity for her own in the midst of male domination in the Patriarchal society.

### Abbreviation

AMW – A Married Woman

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258/34 Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra  
Contact-9595359435  
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