Chapter - 4

A Married Woman

A Married Woman is a second successful novel of Manju Kapur. It is the story of a well educated woman, Astha. The novelist has taken writing as a protest, a way of mapping from the point of a woman’s experience. Kapur negotiates different issues emerging out of a socio-political upheaval in her country.
Asthya is well brought girl by her parents. But, in an Indian family, a girl is a responsibility to parents. The first paragraph of the novel presents the fate of woman. Gigy J. Alex expresses –

‘Asthya was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable and unprotected. The infinite ways in which she could be harmed were not specified, but Asthya absorbed them through her skin, and ever after was drawn to the safe and secure’

For her, everything in her life goes perfectly according to the plans designed by others, whether it is her parents or husband or the society.’ [Alex, J. Gigy: 2012: 123]

Manju Kapur describes it with realistic words:

‘She was her parent’s only child. Her education, her character, her marriage, these were their burdens. She was their future, their hope, and though she didn’t want them to guard their precious treasure so carefully, they did, oh they did.’ [A Married Woman: 01]

It is a middle class family who spends their live for children, home and everything. The family of Astha also undergoes in a different situation. They have the dream of new house, their own house. But, the dream is costly for the middle class family. Manju Kapur prominently describes the middle class people with the following words:

‘They continued to worry. When would their housing society have land assigned to it, how many more years for the father to retire, how many more working years for the mother, how long before they had to leave this government house in the centre of Delhi, so convenient? Once the land was allotted, how much would it cost to build, how much did they have fixed deposits, in their provident funds, how much could they borrow, how much interest would they have to pay? After discussing all this, they allowed themselves, to dream a little.’ [7]
Asthah joins college education. Her father wishes that she should get education. At the adult age, she is attracted towards Bunty. Manju Kapur delicately describes the love in the adult age –

‘Day and night the thought of hi kept her inside churning; she was unable to eat, sleep, or study. Away from him her eyes felt dry and empty. Her ears only registered the sound of his voice. Her mind refused to take seriously anything that was not his face, his body, his feet, his hands, his clothes. She found temporary relief in sketching him, sketches that were invariably too bad to be mulled over.’ [8-9]

But, her first love disappears with the letter of Bunty. He reveals that he is unable to meet her further. Actually, Astha never reveals her love openly. But, now everything is finished. No one imagines the condition of Astha’s heart that aches inside –

The holidays passed Astha suffered daily. Neither drawing nor reading could engage her. Her heart felt like lead, her mind like stone.’ [14]

The family dreams about the plot which will be allotted through. Astha experiences the suffering of her own mother who spends her whole life for the family. Actually, through this, Manju Kapur expresses the ordinary Indian woman who has not her personal life. She has woven her dream with the family responsibility –

‘Asthah looked at her mother, at the sallow skin with liver markings, at the carelessly dyed hair, black and white, at the hands gnarled from a lifetime of housework, the veins standing out on the blacks, only fifty, despairing, shriveled, and old.’ [16]

Now, Astha is in college. Her mother focuses anxiously on the primary parental obligation. One day, her mother finds a suitor. She arranges the ‘bride searching ceremony’ without asking Astha. When Astha arrives, she is surprised with this and rejects to come out from bathroom. She locks herself in the bathroom and pain indulged in her heart –
'The mother finally gave up, leaving Astha collapsed against the bathroom door, tears falling, crying, crying for Bunty, crying for the lack of love in her barren life, crying because she didn’t want to see a dull stolid man in the drawing room who advertised for a wife and asked about sports.’ [21]

After getting this experience, Astha now engages herself in drawing. In her life, the new love arrives, Rohan, whom she loves deeply. They secretly meet each other and passionately love in a dark lonesome road. Manju Kapur passionately elaborates the love of Rohan and Astha –

‘She held the fists tensely out, slowly he moved his thumb around her wrist, stroking the closed hand open. He kissed the fingers, nails, palms, he felt the small hair on the back with his closed lips. Astha felt something flow inside her as she stared at his bent head. She had never been so aware of her body’s separate life before.’ [24]

She thinks and experiences the true love. She is deeply involved in the love of Rohan. She thinks –

‘All she wanted was for him to start so that the world could fall away, and she is lost. This is love, she told herself no wonder they talk so much about it.’ [25]

Asthा writes diary. She also writes about sharing all the love experience which she had in the company of Rohan. Her mother reads the diary and gets annoyed. Actually, the parents are unaware about the love affair of Astha. Though Astha is brought up in a traditional family, she commits the mistake. Her parents decide –

‘The second was that Astha’s parents took on annoying interest in her reading matter. Her father began diligently to bring her books of moral and intellectual substance. ‘You need a sense of your cultural background,’ said the bureaucrat. ‘Of what made this country great. Know your artistic heritage, since your interest lies there.’
Her mother decided that the virtues of tradition needed to be made more explicit. ‘Our Shashtras teach us how to live. You will learn from the Gita, the Vedas, and the Upanishads.’ [27-28]

Asthā and Rohan both engage in love affair. They spend nights together. But the fate of Astha is different. Rohan decides to go abroad for further education. Hence, Astha thinks that it is an end of her second love. The novelist sensitively elaborates the plight of Astha –

‘Asthā felt hopeless. She sat in silence, next to this boy whom she had thought she knew. The hands that he had used on her body were now clenched around her heart, slowly squeezing, slowly hurting.’ [30]

The writer deliberately expresses the emotional attitude of Astha and the condition of woman at the teenage love. She elaborates the drastic plight of Indian woman –

‘All through third year her classmates had been busy preparing for competitive exams or like Rohan, applying for higher studies abroad. Those not in this category had married and disappeared, to be heard of occasionally, moving around with husband, and later baby, stamped with the marks of confirmed adulthood. [32]

But, Astha’s family decides that she should get married. Actually, marriage is the ultimate destiny of a girl. Spending a single life is not acceptable in the traditional Indian family. Astha’s parent choose a suitable suitor i.e. Hemant for Astha. It is an arranged marriage. Both the family decides the day of marriage. Manju Kapur here has described that in Indian society the woman is made only to fulfill the needs of family. After getting married, the suffering of woman starts. The day of the marriage arrives and her mother tells the secret which every mother unfolds to daughter –

‘Today you are getting married and leaving for your new home,’ she murmured, tears in her eyes, while relatives clustered and consoled, speaking of the necessity of this moment, the pain of a mother at
parting the joy of a mother at her duty successfully completed. These murmurs fluttered around Astha, who, restless and ill at ease, waited for the action to begin.’ [36]

The new life of Astha begins. Though she has a drastic experience of life, now she is married. The novelist deliberately handles the situation of Astha. She asserts that the fate of woman as she gets married is decided by her destiny. Though the woman is a home maker, she is inferior in the family. Astha is going to experience the same –

‘A deep seed of happiness settled in the pit of her stomach, she was married she didn’t have to be the focus of her parent’s anxieties any longer. She was now a homemaker in her own right, a grown woman, experiencing her first plane ride.’ [37]

She is married now and has an experience of a grown up housewife. But the memory of Rohan always reminds her of her love. Every time, she thinks about her first love for Rohan. She is in confusion whether to hide the reality of her sin or to reveal it to Hemant –

‘Rohan’s face bending over hers arose before Astha’s eyes. Had she been virgin? Unlike Hemant, she was not sure. She decided to forget the whole business, after all now she was definitely not one, and what was the point of thinking about the past?’ [41]

Now, back in Delhi, Astha finds herself engaged in household duties. She becomes a perfect Indian woman. But, her charm of new married life is over and she experiences the dullness of routine life. Actually, the novelist here describes that the Indian woman is dependent on male. She lives only to fulfill the need of husband. Astha also experiences the same –

‘A few months and dullness began to taint Astha’s new life. What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come home? Her in-laws were not demanding, for the house work they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free time to be restless in.’ [46]
For escaping this aloneness and dullness, Astha decides to join the school. The novelist explains that the family decides which job Astha should occupy. There is no freedom to have the interested job. Eventually, she grabs the job of a school teacher. It is the new life of Astha as an independent woman –

‘The peripherals of her world now stretched to include many school girls. Life was shaping up nicely with her mind and heart gainfully employed.’ [48]

The new job creates the distance between Astha and Hemant. Actually, Hemant is busy in his work and he neglects Astha, whereas, Astha desires the support of Hemant. She wishes that Hemant should take care of her requisites, but all her wishes vanish. Hemant never understands her situation –

‘Asthà’s desire receded. She felt cold, dreary, and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was criminal destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness.’ [50]

Meanwhile, Astha’s parents move to the new flat. At least, they have their own house. Astha is also satisfied that her parents have the good place to spend their remaining life in a good place. But, the fate is different and Astha’s suffrage evokes with the death of her father –

‘They had been in the new flat a little over a year when one evening after dinner he complained of a slight chest pain. That night he died in his sleep. Through the period of shock and mourning, Astha and her mother clung to each other.’ [54]

Hemant gives supports to Astha. He always says to Astha that she should grow up and give up the old fashioned thinking. He says –

‘You can’t be so old fashioned.’ Remonstrated the progressive husband. This is like villagers marry, impregnate wife, pack of children. No, no sweetheart, we need to be by ourselves. Time enough
for these responsibilities later. With a young wife one can afford to wait.’ [56]

A斯塔 and Hemant have a girl child named, Anuradha. But, Hemant wanted a son. He becomes desperate for this. This is the first time that Astha notices the desperate attitude of Hemant for boy –

‘I want to have my son soon. Declared Hemant, looking emotional and manly at the same time. ‘I want to be as much a part of his life as papaji is of mine.’ [61]

Manju Kapur here describes the male importance in the family. The educated family of Hemant is still desperate of male child. Her mother also wishes of grandson. She says –

‘You are still such an innocent what people say and what they do are two different things. Besides why is Hemant working so hard? For whom, if not his son? [67]

Manju Kapur describes that not only Hemant, but the other members in the family are also desperate about the male child. The novelist elaborates the craveness of male child in the family –

‘But she was not allowed to forget that everybody, her colleagues, her in-laws, her husband’s friends’ wives, her mother, the cook, the gardener and the part time help all had an opinion about her baby’s gender and that almost universal opinion was that it would be a son and heir.’ [68]

Afterwards, the family contents with the birth of male child. Astha then notices that the behaviour of the family is changed. The family takes much care of baby boy rather than Anuradha. The novelist has expressed the gender discrimination in the Indian family. The girl child is always neglected in the family. Much attention is given to the male child rather than girl. The family of Hemant also is given much care of baby boy. The discrimination was described by Manju Kapur –

A Ph.D. Thesis, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad
‘The naming ceremony of the boy was carried out on a much grander scale than Anuradha.’ [68]

Meanwhile, Astha struggles between the nourishing and taking care of child and household duties and her job. She has headache. Though she is in a ruined condition, Hemant is busy in his work. She desperately needs Hemant. But he is unable to give enough time to Astha. She agitatedly says –

‘Yes, you did, you did, 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 in deciding what to do with them,’ she said tense and calm.’ [81]

Kapur gives the key idea of the novel and the Indian mind-set through one of the letters addressed to Astha by her mother –

‘...... to keep a relationship going I should ignore the dark side, i.e., weakness of a person. Accept without condition if you want to live in peace. Any relationship can be beautiful if you nurture it. In time of difficulty don’t lose heart. Freedom from all complexes is essential. Don’t assert your ego- don’t argue. Employ wisdom to solve the problem. You are committed to ME says Lord Krishna.’ [Alex, J. Gigy: 2012: 124]

A斯塔’s mother, a widow, now decides to spend her remaining life at Haridwar Ashram. Actually, Astha needs her mother’s support, but she rejects Astha’s wish. Astha tells Hemant to dissuade her mother. But, he is not much interested in it. She thinks that her mother’s wish is correct. It would not be good to settle with her in a house of Hemant –

‘Once or twice Astha asked Hemant, won’t you go and see her, convince her that her place is with us?’ but Hemant was clearly not concerned enough for action. Astha’s suspicion hardened may be her mother was right. It would not be so good for her to live with her daughter. She wished she had a house that was more clearly hers.’ [89]
The thought of isolation hoards in the mind of Astha. She thinks that there is no space for her in the house of Hemant. She is merely dead furniture in the house. She is just like a maid to serve for her master. Her husband has no care about her wishes. Afterwards, Astha decides to visit Haridwar, where her mother is in good condition. When she meets Swamiji and hears his speech, she realizes that she is also in the need of guidance of Swamiji. His words create spell that catch the attention of people. Astha too is fascinated with his words –

‘We protect our feet with shoe, we protect our body with clothes. We cannot be harmed by the stones in our paths, nor by the sun or the rain that falls on us. Similarly, those who have achieved self realization are contented in all circumstances. The troubles they encounter on their journey through life cannot hurt them.’ [96]

Meanwhile, the school of Astha decides to perform a drama. Astha wishes that Anuradha should help her. But, she wishes to go abroad. Astha is surprised that a small girl wishes to go to abroad even she herself never thinks so. But, Hemant thinks the same and says –

‘We are not talking about you. If parents can afford to show their children the world, why not?’ said Hemant. ‘This is the eighties, we are not deprived Indian any longer.’ [102]

Even Hemant’s thought to go abroad surprises Astha. She thinks that there is no respect for her in the family. Hemant always criticizes the attitude of Astha. He thinks that Astha is merely a housewife and she has no sense of new thinking. The novelist elaborates that the thinking of Hemant is common in Indian society. In the family, woman is always considered inferior than male.

Actually, Astha hopes about equality in the family. She thinks that Hemant should take equal responsibility of the family. But, Hemant thinks like a traditional male dominant–

‘Asthा believes in equality to take equal share in taking care of the family. She never wants to feel dependent. She believes that equals could relate
better than a master and slave. Her recurring migraine attack is yet another leitmotif employed by the author to highlight the struggling self of Astha.’ [Op.cit: 125]

Meanwhile, Astha joins Aijaz on a workshop. She meets Aijaz who gives responsibility of script writing to Astha. She has to work on the communal crises at Ayodhya. Astha is surprised that Aijaz has much confidence about her. Actually, she thinks that her husband has never believed on her like Aijaz –

‘Suddenly, she was the Babri Masjid expert and this she felt was Aijaz’s doing he who was the history teacher, allowing her to parade her knowledge when surely his own was greater.’ [113]

Asta is attracted towards Aijaz. He gives the proper status to Astha, which Hemant had never given to her. Hemant has male attitude to consider a wife like servant. Secretly, she likes the attitude of Aijaz. But, she is married, a mother of two children, having this type of feeling:

‘What did it mean, did he like her, did he want to have an affair with her, why hadn’t she responded, but she was a married, with two children and those rights before her eyes.’ [114]

The feeling of this arises in the mind of Astha. Actually, she feels solitude in the company of Hemant. In the Indian context, the love affair of married woman is never accepted by society. But, the feeling of Astha is a result of her solitude life. The story progresses with the appearance of the character Pipeelika Trivedi. She is in love with Aijaz. Pipeelika’s mother is worried because Aijaz is a Muslim. Pipeelika thinks only of Aijaz rather than his community. She says:

‘He is not a heap of dung, you know. Besides I am almost twenty-nine, you’ve always said you want to see me married, now is your chance. I’m not going to find anyone else. He’s intelligent, sensitive, socially committed, a history lecturer, a theatre activist, but
all you can see is a Muslim who is going to both divorce me and marry four times.’ [118]

Actually, the social condition is difficult for Aijaz and Pipeelika. In Indian society, the communal bond is rigid. They never accept the marriage of two different religions. Hence, the mother of Pipeelika is worried about the future of her daughter. But Pipeelika says –

‘Ma! Hey will be his children too. He’s not that sort of person, and do you think I would love him if he were? He never mentions religion, except politically never suggested conversion, nothing. In fact you are the one obsessed with the whole thing.’ [122]

Pipeelika and Aijaz both are now closer. The work of Aijaz always surprises Pipeelika. She is deeply involved in Aijaz. He is aware about the conventional family of Pipeelika. He understands the feeling of her mother. He is aware that her mother never accepts him as son-in-law. He says –

‘Your mother hates me because I am Muslim. Your friends love me because I am Muslim, I don’t know which is worse.’ [125]

Besides disapproving both the families, Pipeelika and Aijaz marry. Manju Kapur here delicately handles the communal issue. In the country like India, the communities are prominent thing. It is rigid and causes violence. Here, Manju Kapur describes both Pipeelika and Aijaz missing their relatives. They marry secretly with few friends. The description of secret marriage is skillfully unfolded by the writer. Actually, the novelist explores the couple who has spent the event in solitude without family support. The author elaborates –

‘It was in September 1980 that the marriage between Aijaz Aktar Khan and Pipeelika Trivedi was solemnized in Tees Hazari. The bride and groom paid for their own wedding, the whole thing came to five hundred rupees. No relatives were present from either side, a colleague of Aijaz’s and Neeraj acted as witnesses, while the theatre crowd, a few of Aijaz’s colleagues, and the staff of Ujjala, later
Afterwards, the writer makes a different change in story. The past of Pipeelika was delicately described by Manju Kapur. The lesbian relation between Pipeelika and one of her classmate describes that Pipeelika spends her life in solitude. Actually, the novelist exposes the plight of Pipeelika. She expresses the lesbian relationship of Pipeelika which creates a twist in the story. The author unfolds the awful aloofness of the woman in the Indian society. Though the lesbian relationship is unacceptable in Indian context, the character like Pipeelika or Astha suffers in their life. Their suffering compels them to establish new relations. Pipeelika lives a solitary life without support. Perhaps, that is the reason she establishes a relationship with her classmates. She never reveals it before. She thinks about the reaction of Aijaz –

‘Aijaz feel silent. Pipee was so unlike her usual self that he didn’t know what to think. It must have been like those crushes that girls had on filmstars or their teachers. She was young and inexperienced and imagined her feelings to be love.’ [129]

Though the families of Pipeelika and Aijaz reject the marriage, afterwards they accept both. Pipeelika first time is acquainted with Aijaz’s family. Pipeelika feels the different community, their life style and living standard –

‘In the days that followed, Pipee realized for the first time she had married a Muslim. Everything was strange, the large haveli, the dishes they ate from, the food they ate, their pan making, the way they dressed, the way they greeted each other. As Salamalaikum-Wa Alaikum Assalam, their manner of speaking, the kh’s that made her Hindi tongue seem crude and unsophisticated.’ [136]

But, the happy moment of Aijaz and Pipeelika has vanished. Aijaz is murdered in the communal violence when he was performing in the sensitive area. Astha is stunned with the news. Though Astha does not get chance to flourish the relationship, there is something concealed in the heart of Astha.
This is exposed when Hemant shows Astha the news of murder of Aijaz in paper –

‘Asth a could not read further for the tears in her eyes.... she turned away her head to cry some more.’ [Singh, Nidish Kumar: 2013: 170]

On the contrary, Hemant is cold. He actually thinks that it is not concerned with Astha. He says: ‘He was Muslim, he should have kept to the issue within his own religion.’ [139]

Asth a is actually surprised with the attitude of Hemant: -

‘Asth a stared at her husband in revulsion. Ten men had died in the ghastly way possible and this was all he could say. Did he have no feelings?’ [140]

But, Astha is motivated with the thought of Aijaz. She decides that she should continue her work with the Manch. She has tried to break the shackles of household duties. Now, she is not worried about her family. She thinks that she should make her own way in her life. She is inspired by the words of Aijaz. Though his death creates pain for Astha, his work motivates her to do her own work with her own identity. She realizes that she is not a mere thing in the house. She is a modern woman with new identity –

‘She takes an active part procession, rallies, or Manch related to Aijaz, forgetting the rules and regulations of a middle class family. In other words being a woman of 21\textsuperscript{st} century, she doesn’t care for such limitation.’ [Op.cit: 171]

Now, Astha engages herself in the Manch. Paintings are prepared. Slogans and songs are drawn. She forgets her household responsibilities. She does not care about her husband, children and family. Her behaviour irritates Hemant and he says:

‘You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the street.’ [Op.cit: 172]
Actually, Astha is not surprised with the behaviour of Hemant. She thinks that her husband has the same patriarchal feeling. He thinks that the job of Astha is in the house not on the street. She is a decent Indian woman who takes care of family. Rallies and Marching are not the job of Indian woman. Hence, Astha never considers Hemant in her social world:

‘Asthā’s generosity was not required, her sharing could keep. She could not enter into his frustrations; he could not share her enthusiasm.’ [145]

The frustration of Hemant is neglected by Astha. She continually engages herself in the work of Manch. She is unaware about her family responsibilities. She thinks that if there is no space in the family, then better to engage herself in her own work. But, her attitude makes Hemant angry. He suggests her to leave her job. Astha thinks that the job is her new identity. She has her space and individual freedom in the job –

‘But she was not yet enough of a painter to risk giving up a job she had for ten years. It represented security, not perhaps of money, but of her own life, of a place where she could herself.’ [149]

Manju Kapur delicately describes the lesbian relationship. Astha is not getting her real love from Hemant. After marriage, she becomes the thing in the house. She never has her own space in the house. She demands a room of her own. This request has been denied not only by her husband, but also by her in laws. Then, she tries to create an imaginary independent space of her own in her real space. Gigy Alex expresses –

‘Constantly reminded of the space nobody thought enough of her to give, she became very bad tempered during interruptions. Finally, she steeled herself; she shut the door, and if disturbed too often locked it. In this way certain privacy was granted her.’ [Alex, J. Gigy: 2012: 125]

The charm of the marriage is over. Hence, Astha feels lonely in the company of Hemant. The novelist vividly describes the solitary plight of Astha.
Though married, having two children, she feels alone. That awful aloofness causes illness. The novelist describes -

‘a solitary woman looking towards the heavy darkness above. Melancholy filled her. After the deadness of summer, the monsoon was a time of awakening and desire, but what was one to do with one’s longing?’ She wished she could share her feelings with someone, but with only Hemant to fall back upon it was certain that her loneliness was secured.’ [161-162]

Hemant and Astha visit Goa. But, it is not for Astha. He makes that trip for business purpose. Manju Kapur here describes the strain between the relationship of Astha and Hemant. The novelist describes that the charm of the marriage was over and Astha thinks that their marriage is now merely adjustment. The love between them is evaporated. The novelist has exposed that the couple like Astha and Hemant is found in many Indian family. The marriage is just like adjustment. There is no love that remains between the couple –

‘She didn’t want his touch, his nearness to compete with the pureness of her despair.’ [165]

Asth a actually is fed up with all her household duties. She thinks that she has wasted valuable years for her family. She thinks that she has lost her identity in the family responsibility. She has sacrificed her own dreams for the sake of the family:

‘Asth a was a woman, and she was sick of sacrifice. She didn’t want to be pushed around in the name of family. She was fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail.’ [168]

The condition of Astha is seriously described. She not only describes the drastic condition of Astha, but also Pipeelika. At one side where the world celebrates and welcomes New Year, Pipeelika becomes solitary –

‘Pipee stumbled into the New year alone in her flat staring at the two-rod heater, nursing a small rum and coke. It had been a year since Aijaz’s death, and
as every day in the past year, she had been fierce in her desire to be alone, turning down well-meaning invitations that friends, colleagues, relatives and acquaintances showered her with.’ [181]

Pipeelika is alone. Without Aijaz, her life is in despair. Pipee never comes out from the memory of Aijaz. She Misses Aijaz. She thinks that why Aijaz has been murdered in the communal violence. Though Pipeelika is supported from both families, her real love is departed in the communal crises –

‘Her mother-in-law had phoned from Shahjehanpur asking her to visit. But she couldn’t. Not yet. The onetime Pipee went, she had hardly been able to stand the memories that swept her every inch of the way. In every face she saw traces of Aijaz, and their wetness to her had made it even harder.’ [181]

Her grief is limitless. Her life is empty without Aijaz. Pipeelika’s character has exposed the condition of Indian woman. After the death of husband, her life is contracted within the boundaries of social customs. The community never counts the loss of a woman. Pipeelika is also one of them. Her life is also full of grief and unbearable pain. But, she never reveals it in front of her mother or the family of Aijaz. The novelist beautifully explores the plight of Pipeelika –

‘Although it had been a year she didn’t feel any better, perhaps she never would. But to go on refusing to meet people, always to be alone, that was not the answer either. Her life stretched before her, long and dreary.’ [183]

Manju Kapur at one side describes the shaking incidences in the life of Astha and Pipeelika and on the other side, she describes the stirring situation of communal crises. Both women’s life suffers from the situation and the nation become stirrup because of communal crises. Meanwhile, Astha engages herself in the work of Manch. She is busy in the painting. Hence, she has spent little time with her family. Her mother-in-law thinks that it is not good. She says in a satirical way –
‘You know I never try and stop you from doing anything. Even when you neglect the children, and are busy in your paintings and meetings, I do not say anything. I am not the type to interfere. I am glad my daughter-in-law does not feel she has to sit at home. Till I have the use of my hands and feet I will help you, but it is my duty to point out that you are going too far.’ [187]

Now, Astha decides to visit Ayodhya. She wishes to see the monument which causes death of millions. Hemant and his mother are denied of her visit. But, she is firm and she visits Ayodhya with Rehana. They address people about the reality of communal crises. This is the first time, Astha addresses the mob. She not only expresses about Ayodhya, but the condition of Indian woman also –

‘In essence of woman all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brothers and children. In history many things are not clear, the same thing that is right for one person is wrong for another, and it is difficult to decide our path of action. We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering, unnecessary and continuous suffering.’ [197]

After finishing the process, Astha meets Pipeelika for the first time. Actually, she is fascinated with the appearance of Pipeelika. But, when she first meets Pipeelika, she never imagines that she is a wife of Aijaz. When Astha comes back to Pipee in Delhi, they always meet and share their thoughts. Actually, both have the same aloneness in their lives. Hemant is upset with regular visits of Astha to Pipeelika. He always says in a cared way about woman. Astha gets furious on the thinking of Hemant –

‘Then she grew angry. How dare Hemant be so derogatory. Would he prefer her to be like him, with condoms in her suitcase, which a friend had put there by accident? She refused to engage with him on any issue, he was capable of nothing but the very crudest understanding. Instead she related the whole to Pipee
who said that men were so pathetic, so fucked up
themselves, they only understood the physical and in
this way she felt soothed.’ [219]

The novelist describes the trauma of Astha. She also explains how Astha
sacrifices her life for Hemant and her family. She says –

‘I am always adjusting to everybody else’s needs.’
[227]

The novelist delicately expresses the lesbian relationship of Astha and
Pipeelika. Both women have pain in their lives. Astha has scarified her life in a
solitary way finding the support in Pipeelika –

‘They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only
sound, sound of their breaths, close together and
mingled.’ [231]

The novelist then explains that Astha finds real love in the company of
Pipeelika. In her life, she made compromises with her husband, with her career.
But, with Pipeelika she had a new hope to live her life in a different way –

‘Meanwhile her best time at home was when she was
fantasizing about the one she loved without
interruptions, lost in her thoughts, wallowing in her
feelings.’ [232]

The love of Pipeelika brings the spring in the life of Astha. Though
society and her family never have accepted this, it gives new hope for Astha to
live her life with her own identity. The relation between two women is never
accepted in Indian society. But, the fact is that it brings the space for Astha.

She now neglects her household duties. Even, she is unaware about her
family. Her life is full with love. Actually, she feels completeness in the
company of Pipeelika. The love between them is far away from the condition.
There is no space for adjustment. No sacrifices take place between them. Hence,
she forgets about her married life –
‘Their disagreements had the history of their marriage hanging into them, and Astha had no time for this now.’ [236]

Asthा is desperate with her new relationship. Actually, she has got the real love in this relationship. Though for the world it is unnatural, it gives the new spring in deserted life of Astha –

‘Asthा thought that if husband and wife are one person….. but this was not the time to say these things.’ [243]

Asthा is detached with the family. Her life is engaged with Pipeelika. Ever when she thinks about her life, she understands that she has wasted her precious years –

‘Ever since Aijaz had died, and I had started being exploited by the Manch, and gone to Ayodhya, and met Pipeelika Khan, I had no sense of home, duty wifehood or motherhood.’ [248]

Asthा and Pipeelika have their own special world. Pipeelika also wishes that Astha should have her own life. When Pipeelika and Astha go for Rath, Yatra they visit Bangalore. Astha thinks that she has new life where she has her own identity. She is here not a wife nor mother or daughter- in-law also. In the company of Pipeelika, Astha has new fragment of life which she never experienced with Hemant at all. Meanwhile, Hemant suffers with high tension and blood pressure because of the condition of the factory. On the advice of doctor, they prepare for abroad trip. Her mother always suggests Astha to be with Hemant. She says –

‘You do not give him enough attention. Remember men have to bear the burdens of the outside world, home is their refuge.’ [270]

In vacation, they visit many places. But the relationship between Astha and Hemant goes in a drastic way. There is strain between them. Hemant’s possessive attitude hurts Astha. Hemant always says –
‘Why do you always make things so complicated? You are my wife that is enough for me. I would have thought it is enough for you or is it someone else?’ [276]

Meanwhile, when Astha and Hemant come back to India, Hemant has chest pain again. Astha takes much care of the health of Hemant. She suddenly thinks about her changed life –

‘Asthha spent a lot of time thinking about herself. Was she a traditional wife as Pipee had alleged? She flinched at the idea, but she was certainly doing what devoted wives did, putting a great deal of effort into protecting their husband’s inside. When she saw him tired, afraid, depressed at having to change, unprepared mentally for the betrayal of his body, she felt sorry for him, and wanted to help him alive. She told herself it was for the children, but sometimes she wondered bleakly at the nature of the bond between them.’ [284]

Asthha never feels comforts with Hemant. Her only comfort is Pipeelika. Now, she is also far away from her –

‘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.’ [287]

The communal crises bang in various areas of the Ayodhya. Astha wishes to visit the place and join the March, but Hemant denies. He thinks that this is the nonsense activity. Meanwhile, Pipeelika takes admission for Ph.D. in foreign University. She packs all her belonging even her affair also. Astha decides to see off Pipeelika. It is very hard to Astha again to separate from love –

‘As she drove her hands felt heavy on the wheel. How many times had she travelled down this road in hope and longing, and then rushed back dreading the demands and questions of her children, husband, in-
laws. Where have you been, we were waiting for you, this that and the other happened, and you weren’t here to fulfill your place in this house. Soon nobody would have cause for complaint, if there had been neglect; she would make up for it now.’ [300]

Now, Pipeelika departs for the further education at abroad. Astha visits Pipeelika’s flat for last time. Manju Kapur elucidates—

‘The night of 6 August. The last time Astha would drive to Vasant Kunj. The weather was hot and still, it hadn’t rained since the night of her opening. She parked, climbed the three flights to Pipee’s flat, rang the bell, and contemplated the bars, bolts and locks on the wooden and screen doors. Last time, for the last time, rang irritatingly in her mind. Was there anything about this night that was over, that she did not have to go through it step by painful step, Pipee’s departure from her life.’ [305]

In this way the novelist focuses on the condition of a married woman in Indian society. The novelist also portrays the plight of woman through the protagonist of the novel.
WORKS CITED

