CHAPTER IV

SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC AND DISTINCT SELF IN

A MARRIED WOMAN

According to Indian tradition, a woman must defer to her husband in every possible respect. She must make the marital home pleasant for him. She must cook the meals, wash the dishes and take care of the children. She must never enquire about the money and she must acquiesce to her husband’s every demand. But with growing opportunities of education and employment, urbanization and industrialization, Indian women have become aware of their self-worth, acquired confidence and assured themselves of independence and individuality. They have started revolting against the oppression patriarchy and have started redefining their roles in the society. Women are not required to find her total fulfillment in submissive domesticity, but can assert her identity in the world outside, widespread with countless opportunities of education and employment.

In the novels of men writers, the feelings of women are not shown as they are rarely experienced in real life. It is the women writers who give a picture of new emerging women. Women writers have given much more stress to the issue of women in India in its varying aspects both traditional and modern. The feminist literary criticism has developed as a component of the women’s movement and its impact has bought about a revolution in literary studies.

Post-Modern sensibility is reflected in Indian writing in English which is the product of new socio-cultural and political situation and circumstances that
pushed the marginal or the extreme marginal to the centre stage. Feminism is the product of such a sensibility. It has sprouted up as the point of culmination of various movements for woman’s rights led by eminent thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Virginia Wolf and Elaine Showalter. Their views on the actual gender discriminations and anxiety about the freedom and welfare of women have evolved eventually in the philosophy of feminism. It aims at establishing a balanced relationship between the sexes. It propounds the equality between as ideal. This hypothesis has developed into a variety of the western forms of feminism.

According to Elaine Showalter, as reminded by Anita Myles, feminism has evolved gradually from the past to the present day. This development took place in three phases:

(a) Feminism: the phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of dominant traditions.

(b) Feminist: the phase of protest against standards and valued in favour of autonomy.

(c) Female: the phase of self-discovery and a search for identity. (13)

Most Indian English women writers of younger generation belong to the third phase. Feminism, as a new way of life, came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s role in society. In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-
maker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. And at the same time women have difficulty in achieving their own inner equilibrium. They seem to be alienated, fragmented and broken. So they launch their quest for identity and they long to concretize their autonomy throwing away the socially constructed, prejudiced gender norms.

More than men, Indian women novelists turned towards the woman’s world with greater introspective intensity and authenticity. They launched an aesthetic voyage in order to explore the private consciousness of their women characters and measure the pressure of the inner weather.

The beginnings of modern feminism can be traced to mid nineteenth century; the latter two decades of twentieth century witnessed the rise of ‘new woman’ or independent woman, as complex cultural signifiers. This distinction has become a complex manifestation which creates new levels of tensions in post-independence women’s writings. Many Indian English women writers portray the independent woman who is not in conflict with the male, but rejects choicelessness, and accepts responsibility for herself. The present inquiry tries to explore and explain social relationships in broader framework of Indian English women novelist like Manju Kapur. The writer places their protagonists in the social milieu of modern India and portrays them convincingly. The modern Indian woman, with her typical social and psychological realities and problems, is authentic, recognizable and inclusive in their writings. Kapur reject the image of
the confined woman by replacing it by that of an independent person who is trying to expand her space both literally and symbolically.

In the light of feminist critical theory Manju Kapur’s novels can be examined as the manifesto of female predicament. Kapur’s first novel *Difficult Daughter* (1999) is a powerful exponent of feminism. She has denounced the Indian women’s socio-cultural predicament caused by their entrapment in male dominated socio-economic culture and political hegemony of patriarchal society. She has exposed such feminist views in her novel *A Married Woman* in the context of post-modernism.

Manju Kapur’s novels can be examined as the manifesto of female predicament. In her novel *A Married Woman* Manju Kapur 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. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of women as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes.

Search and female self-assertiveness in contemporary Indian fiction in English is a bifocal subject. The very expression ‘Search’ has become a fashionable term in literary and other studies. Day in and Day out, newspapers reporting on several sections of society resort to the expression “search for identity”. Their stories reveal national identity, regional identity, tribal identity, cultural identity, man’s identity, woman’s identity, Indian identity, European identity, group identity and hordes of other identities. At present, there are
numerous identities prevailing in the country. It is pretty difficult to comprehend all those identities.

Roop Rekha Verma outlines the symbolism relating to the Hindu mythology which ranges from Sita, the epitome of unquestioning self-sacrifice, to kali, the goddess of power. Roop Rekha Verma feels that:

Generation after generation, women have been moulded by the ethics of self-negation and take pride in being…. the custodians of this norm. They are thus led to think of themselves as placed on a very high pedestal from which they can hardly dare step down….

(439)

Roop Rekha Verma considers three qualities as essential for an entity to be categorized as a person: autonomy, self-respect and a sense of achievement and fulfillment (440). An autonomous individual lives in harmony with the ‘other’ in society. The purposes of his or her life are shaped by his or her own experiences, interests and capacities. Self-respect involves a sense of indignity, consciousness of autonomy and worth. A sense of fulfillment and achievement is possible only for an autonomous person. It is clear from this definition that personhood is generally denied to the Indian woman. The conditions of her life preclude any possibility of developing self-respect or achieving autonomy. As a result, she rarely attains selfhood or even gains knowledge of her supposed goals and desires.
Woman’s writing is the narrative of female self-discovery in which the refusal of the heterosexual romance plot provides access to self-discovery and self-knowledge. Rita Felski opines:

The presence of such a symbolic act of separation as a defining feature of women’s right to a social identity, delinked from her sexual and maternal role, has become embedded within the discursive frameworks of contemporary culture, giving rise to hitherto unseen narratives of separation and self-discovery. (Feminist Aesthetics, 126).

The self-discovery narrative delineated by Felski awes a kind of politics that places emphasis upon creating qualitatively different relationships between the self and other individuals as a means of overcoming the alienated nature of modern thought and experience. Rita Felski describes the typical pattern of self-discovery which begins with:

A negative model, an image of female alienation. The restrictive nature of female social roles is often exemplified in the emblematic figure of the housewife whose entire horizon is circumscribed by the daily drudgery of catering to her family’s domestic and emotional needs. The sexual division of labor ensures the asymmetry of power in male female relations…
Women’s confinement to the familial circle denies them the potential for autonomous, self-fulfilling activity which trapping them into a relationship of psychological or economic dependence upon a lover who is unable to validate women other than in relation to his own emotional and sexual interests.(129).

An internalization of this view of a women’s role by the protagonist often leaves her with a self-image based solely on her relation to the needs of others.

Asthia, the heroine of the novel, A Married Woman, acquiesces meekly to her parents’ plans for her future. Set in present day New Delhi, the novel traces the adolescence and early adulthood of the protagonist through her unquestioning acceptance of the role chosen for her, that of a married woman. Astha’s rebellion comes much later, when she experiences a lack of validation within the marriage, despite two children, a dutiful husband and an enviable lifestyle. Her search for an autonomous identity is predicated on her artistic talent, which blossoms as the result of her confidence in being involved in a just cause. In fighting against communal violence, Astha finds a facet of herself that gives her a sense of power, which manifests itself visually in her paintings. She eventually returns to her family, ensuring that her life follows the conception of feminity found in the dominant Indian tradition.

The female protagonist of the novel Astha who is the daughter of an educated father and an orthodox mother has an earnest desire for peaceful co-existence in the family.
Asthana 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 Astha absorbed them through her skin, and ever after was drawn to the safe and secure. (AMW 1)

But she is discriminated and subjugated at her in–law’s house. There she is supposed to have a willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth. Her marriage with Hemant, the son of the government official in Delhi, does not prove to be based on mutual co-operation and understanding. She is compelled to be enduring wife and sacrificing mother, like a holy cow in the status of married woman. It leads to her physical exploitation and emotional starvation. Being deprived of her emotional fulfillment, she frantically searches for it and turns to lesbianism. Manju Kapur in her novel *A Married Woman* through the protagonist-Astha, has carved out an ‘independent life of the woman for self-fulfillment and has advocated for inter-religious aesthetics.

Asthana is brought up in a traditional homely environment in a typical middle class family. The very first line of the novel *A Married Woman* states “Asthana was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear” (AMW 1). Her orthodox mother wanted to instill in her tradition, religious piety practiced through proper rituals. Her father is a bureaucrat. He is very much concerned with her education and wants to inculcate in her good habits, tastes and manners. Romantic feelings of love flutter in her virgin heart right from teen age and she develops her likings for Bunty, an Army Cadet at NDA, Khatakasala. They write
letters to each other and this for her is like a precious possession to be displayed and boasted of among friends. But this episode soon comes to an end when Astha’s mother complains against it to Bunty’s parents.

During the final year of her graduation she begins to meet Rohan and fell in love with him. But Rohan’s departure to Oxford for higher studies is a bolt from the blue for and forces her love to its abrupt end. Her mother is wonder struck to read about Astha’s feelings, imaginations and mention of the rendezvous in her personal diary which she incidentally comes across. But Astha casually hides it by saying that she is writing a story and it is all the work of imagination. Nevertheless, her mother feels that the convent education has spoiled the imagination of a young girl.

Asth a’s father is desperately keen to marry his daughter off before his retirement from the Indian Civil Service. But Astha is not an easy child to tie to any one so easily. Like a rebellious young woman she refuses every suitor:

Suddenly you become so high and mighty, and refuse to even be polite to someone who has come all his way…

she didn’t want to see a dull stolid man in the drawing room who advertised for a wife (AMW 21)

In the final year of her M.A they got a proposal from the son of a bureaucrat in the Commerce Ministry. The son is an M.B.A from America and serves as an Assistant Manager in a bank in Delhi. Hemant seems to match her dream of an ideal husband in the beginning of their married life. She is
disillusioned with her husband’s love for her. Family affairs are not right with her. Her mother-in-law likes her to be an enduring and sacrificing woman like traditional wives and mothers. She is always under pressure of work and suffocating with her responsibilities to meet everybody’s need. She says:

I am thirty-six, I need to be independent I am always adjusting to everybody else’s needs. (AMW 227)

She thinks that a married woman’s status in the family is always dependent on her husband. She is torn between duty and socio-religious concept. She has no emotional freedom from the domestic affairs. She is tired of her responsibility and thinks; “she was tired, her feet were telling her, and tired women cannot make good wives” (AMW 154). She is reeling under the stress and depression of a married woman who is no better than an unpaid servant. Socio-political, economic and cultural matters are responsible for her dependent and subjugated condition.

It appears… the community allows women to do only unpaid work within her home and forces them to be utterly dependent on their husbands. But these husbands are often irresponsible men her father being one such. (Kapadia, Frontline, 79)

She has to please her husband and for pleasing him, she must be,

she was a wife too, but not biomuch of her was required there. A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth… (AMW 231)
Asthia is marginalized in her own family by vicious social atmosphere. She rebels against traditional attitude of conservative society that woman should be like earth, she should bear the burden of the family and act strictly according to the traditional norms of the society. She should not open the mouth against atrocities inflicted on her by her husband or her in-laws because religion does not allow her to speak against her husband and her in-laws, however atrocious they may be. She can’t place her personal grievances. The expression of her personal grievances is supposed to be the transgression of traditional norms. The women like untouchables and other marginal of the society are discriminated in the conservative society.

The protagonist of the novel Astha rejects the traditional views of the society.

She asserts her personal identity ignoring the conservative thoughts of her family. She rebels against her husband for herself-fulfillment, and challenges the traditional restriction and compulsion of women. She thinks of freedom from stress and depression. She thinks of a good job thinking that “with good job comes independence” (AMW 4). So she joins as a teacher but this job also does not set her free distress and stress of discrimination.

But the wheel of time brings happiness in their life and Astha becomes pregnant. When her mother wishes them to have a boy Hemant out rightly condemns characteristic Indian attitude saying:
In America there is no difference between boys and girls. How can this country get anywhere if we go treating our women this way?

(AMW 57)

But his own attitude towards Astha displays the bitter irony of this speech. The first child is a girl. But now Hemant wishes to have a son. After having a daughter he is changed from an all-American father into an all Indian one. He openly says that if the second child is a girl they will go for the third. Fortunately the second is a boy.

Asthा’s two children Anuradha and Himanshu bring solace in her life. Having given birth to Himanshu—a son, she does not feel inferior to anyone in society and family members are grateful to her because they feel “the family is complete at last” (AMW 68). Astha also likes her motherhood like a married woman but she does not like the sex-discrimination. She is very shocked at the indifferent response of members of the family and the society at her daughter, Anuradha. But she gets an appraisal and approval of motherhood after the birth of her son Himanshu. She dislikes such a superstition and discrimination between a daughter and a son, such an attitude of Indian traditional society is detrimental to equal status of woman who “feel caught up in the web of daily life” (AMW 84) and fall a prey to tension and depression that is “disease of modern life” (AMW 76).

Manju Kapur has reacted sharply against unequal treatment of women in our family and society. The perception of male dominant society that women
should act like the holy cow is challenged by the novelist. Women must have their equal status like men in socio-economic set of our society. Astha remains busy with her two children and school job. Hemant also succumbs to the compelling necessity of materialistic needs and starts his own factory in the name of Astha. This makes him all the more busy and distant. She complains that he talks of business, house or Anu but not of themselves as they did before. Hemant says: “Grow up, Az, one can’t be courting forever” (AMW 66). But he convinces her and promises her to give more time to family. The novelist writes about Astha,

She found this soothing, and later scolded herself for being so demanding. Hemant was busy, Hemant was building their future, she had to be adjusting, and that was what marriage was all about. (AMW 67)

She tried to suppress her frustrations and focus on her duties as a mother, wife and daughter-in-law. She is expected to fit in all the roles perfectly. She has to learn to adjust with over bearing husband, interfering mother-in-law and disapproving mother. Her children, husband, parents in law and increasingly passionless marital sex take up most of her life. She finds herself trapped in a suffocating traditional society which frowns upon any expectation of change in the domestic chores of responsibilities.

Asthा prefers to continue with her school job because there she is appreciated and valued for one tenth of the work she did at home. About Astha’s necessity to continue with the job novelist writes:
Asthा was now virtually a single mother. Beleaguered by job, small children and house, she sometimes toyed with the idea of resigning from school, but 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. (AMW 72)

To compensate her husband’s lack of time for her she wants to give more time to children but children are ready involved with their grandparents. She feels herself quiet lonely and alienated. Her eyes are full of tears when she complains of this to Hemant. He fails to understand what actually troubles her. He says:

‘What rubbish’, he repeated. ‘It is all your imagination. When don’t you have me? You are the one who keep wanting to stay at home with children, or your school work, or your books when we are invited to parties, or when I want to go the club. (AMW 79)

Since their discussion usually leads to argument, distance, and great misery, to seek a temporary relief through diversion she resumes to writing poems and drawing sketches which she has been doing right from her school days. The only difference is that now she does it to express her anguish and alienation and gets some relief to her pent up emotions. The novelist’s sympathy with her can be perceived in the following lines:

She wrote about garden and flowers, the silent dark faces of gardeners tending plants and never getting credit. She wrote about
love, rejection, desire and longing. The language was oblique, but it was her own experience endlessly replayed. (AMW 79)

Even her poems that she shows to Hemant are all about cages and birds, and, mice and suffering in various situations. These poems are perhaps her objective correlates.

Asthा’s feeling of alienation and marginal existence further intensifies when even her mother hands over the money to Hemant to be safely invested for his children. She does it obviously for the reason that Hemant has proved his managing capacity both in his service and in business whereas Astha never proved her merit either before marriage or after that. Moreover “the sad thing was that she herself would have felt nervous handling a large sum” (AMW 97). She begins to give more time to her school, poetry and painting in order to soothe her bruised feelings. No one voices personal feelings publicly. She also has to prepare a face to meet the faces that she meets at school.

The wheel of time takes another turn with Ajiaz; a theatre personality enters into her life. He is a lecturer in history and organizes street plays to strengthen communal harmony in the country. But at the same time he is an expert at the weaker nerves of women. Astha thinks that he is the only one who can really understand and value her. She also loves looking at him on stage, allowing herself frequent covert glances. His touch on her knee surged waves of sensation and romance in her and she caught:
What did it mean, did he like her, did he want to have an affair with her, why had she been so started by his hands on her knee, why hadn’t she responded, but she was a married woman, with two children and those right before her eyes. (AMW 114)

Pipeelika is another modern woman who defies tradition. She works in an NGO. She is a Hindu. Like many other women she also is blinded by the personality of her companion. Their mutual likeness and proximity strengthen their passion for each other and despite all opposition from both the families they get married. But the commitment to create public awareness and establish communal harmony ultimately cost his life. This is followed by long processions, strikes and dramas organized by Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. Astha also suffers a lot when the masjid is ultimately demolished. She becomes politically active and begins to attend the meetings of the Manch.

Now she devotes herself to a cause beyond family and husband. It is during these activities that she happens to meet Pipee. She gets a good recognition and earns rupees thirty thousand when an exhibition of her paintings organized by the Manch. But her sense of self-respect and self-dependence is deeply injured when her husband doesn’t let her purchase an antique silver box at Goa. He dissuades her and frowns upon her mention of the money that she earned. Hemant’s domineering attitude, arrogant superior wisdom and lack of interest in her achievement completely freeze in her channels of bliss of married life.

Asthा’s suffering alienates her further. Similarity of the situation and the like mindedness bring Astha and Pipee closer. They understand each other, feel for
each other and develop even lesbian relations. Astha is conscious of her self-fulfillment like a post-colonial woman and carves out a life for herself violating social codes that restrict her from asserting her own womanhood. Turning to lesbianism and defying social code, she empowers herself in association with Pipeelika.

Many of these lesbians identified themselves as lesbian feminist to emphasize their connection to all women and many of them identified as lesbian separatists to stress the connection they felt to lesbians everywhere and the strength they got from being with other lesbians. (Chandra, 110)

During their pilgrimage to Ayodhya their bond becomes stronger. She finds some crevices in Astha’s married life and she begins to widen them enough to assure a safe place for her. Astha lays bare her lacerated heart before Pipee to which applies the ointment of sympathy. Pipee tries to brainwash her by saying that true love cannot be felt at bodily level only but it should ensure union of souls, emotions and ideologies. In her company Astha feels herself stronger. On Pipee’s insistence, in spite of all oppositions, she leaves her children and family and goes on the Ekta Yatra from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari for the sake of the company of Pipee. Their proximity during this yatra makes their relationship of more carving for each other.

During their talk Astha comes to know of Pipee’s lesbian relations with Neeraj and Sameera. Pipee’s demanding passion and her past associations disillusion her. She is trapped in a terrible dilemma whether she should stay in the
sheltered existence provided by family and tradition or she should run for her freedom and unthinkable love. She tells Pipee:

    I love you, you know how much you mean to me, I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can’t abandon my family, I can’t. May be I should not have looked for happiness, but I couldn’t help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had foreseen… (AMW 242)

After sometime, Astha too realizes that any relationship, even that between a woman and another woman, becomes demanding after a length of time. Pipee wants Astha totally committed to her but Astha is not willing to divorce herself from her old life. She wants to sail in both boats, keeping these two important parts of her life separate from each other, though she finds a soul mate in Pipee:

    Astha thought that if husband and wife are one person, then Pipee and he were even more so, she had shared parts of herself she had never shared parts of herself she had never share before. She felt complete with her. (AMW 243)

Yet such a relationship can continue only between two people who are firm and strong and totally resolved to live together. Astha however is not a strong woman. She could never be bold enough to leave her marriage and live with Pipee and so ultimately Pipee leaves for the U.S.A and the relationship breaks up.

Asth’a story is similar to Virmati, the protagonist of Kapur’s earlier work Difficult Daughters. Virmati had suffered deeply in order to be united with her
love, the professor. Astha too has to depend totally upon the husband and the family and that is what is socially acceptable. But Astha’s story continues where Virmati’s ended.

Manju Kapur like has focused on the women’s problem and explored the possibilities of their emancipation from the atrocious clutches of male chauvinism defying man made prejudices.

But unlike Deshpande’s protagonists of her novel, Kapur’s Astha, the protagonist of A Married Woman is different. She turns lesbian seeking emotional satisfaction and challenging the ego-centrism of her husband. Astha is different even from Virmati of Kapur’s first novel Difficult Daughters who breaks social code having married the man of her choice against the wishes of her mother. Finally Astha took a different, safer and secure path of rebellion against male chauvinism. She neither breaks herself nor becomes violent in the violation of traditional concept of society rather she becomes more severe in her attack on the established norms of socio-cultural set up of traditional patriarchal system in turning herself to lesbianism. In this way she shoots two birds with one stone. She challenges male chauvinism of her husband on the one hand while on the other she satisfies 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…looking at her face as she did so and slowly she continued, 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. (AMW 231)
Kapur aims at a married woman’s passion for another woman and makes lesbianism a powerful competent for the satisfaction of woman’s emotional urge and sexual pleasure. Lesbianism provides as much pleasure to women as heterosexual intercourse. Having realized women’s oppression and emotional starvation like Astha and Pipeelika the novelist has turned them into lesbians for their self-fulfillment and posing challenge to male chauvinism. Both are victims: one is the victim of domestic violation while the other is the victim of social violence and becomes widow when her husband dies in a riot. If there is any violence whether domestic or social, women are more affected 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.

Being obsessed with women’s manifold problems Kapur like other women novelist and some male novelists, has turned to feminism. Injustice and inequality are meted out to women in traditional socio economic culture of patriarchy system. And feminism is the product of such discrimination against women.

Manju Kapur has suggested in her novel *A Married Woman* that modern women will never tolerate inequality, injustice and discrimination like a holy cow which is the concept of traditional families in India. Now the women assess their status in each and every moment and if they find any discrimination, they are very quick to their identity breaking traditional customs and religious faith. They break the traditional laws, if they are compelled to be emotionally starved and socio-economically deprived. Astha does the same when she finds that her husband is
lacking in satisfying her emotion and passion. Her husband Hemant has never realized and respected her deeper self to be loved.

When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who notices nothing, with whom for that very reason it was soothing to be with. (AMW 287)

Betrayal in love with her husband and discrimination meted out to her by her in-laws made her life suffocating and restless. But she is relived from depression and discrimination, when Pipeelika satisfies her passion for love which she sought in her.

Religion and politics play very important role in the life of every human being. But they should not be above human being. Socio-political crises is more harmful and detrimental to women’s identity. Fanaticism brings obstruction in the way of women’s fulfillment. These things are very injurious to Indian women. They are victims of these things. In these nets both Astha and Pipeelika are snared. They fail to satisfy themselves and reach the height of emotional feeling and physical passion. Astha has to suffer due to discriminatory socio-political culture and Pipeelika for fanaticism.

In A Married Woman, Kapur has openly defied social code of marriage in which women are compelled to play passive role in in-law’s house. They have to accept the accepted views of male members of the family whether they like them or not. Their husband’s views are imposed on them without a bit care for their sentiments and personal requirements which leads their lives to discontentment
and restlessness. They can’t voice their agony and unhappiness against their
husbands over their troubled relationship. Their voices against their husband and
in-laws would lead them to total isolation from social constructs and leave them to
the place where they would have no refuge. They are compelled to be enduring
and sacrificing wives without the care of their personal requirements. Kapur has
challenged such traditional views of Indian society, having turned Astha to
lesbianism.

In this novel Kapur has suggested that change in the norms of traditional
patriarchal system is essential for women’s rights and their identity. Inter caste and
inter religious marriage relives the women from traditional constraints. They are
always in search of their identity. Post-colonial women can’t tolerate sex
subjugation and discrimination. They want co-existence and equal treatment in
socio-political aspects of life. They would not tolerate social or domestic violence.
Social or religious matters should not interfere with their identity. If their identity
is challenged they would challenge the entire system.

Manju Kapur has challenged such discrimination against women in her
novels. Astha, the female protagonist of *A Married Woman* who aspires for
freedom, defies the traditional concept of women’s subservience and tolerate like
the holy cow. Only economic freedom is not sufficient for them. Socio-religious
culture has to accept their identity. It is in the hands of the society to allow her to
let her be what she decides and let her have the justice which has been denied to
her for ages. They can no longer remain subdued, subjugated and suppressed.
Tradition in Indian society is so strong that a woman of average capabilities fails to break them and get out of them to make a separate identity of her own. But Astha makes her attempt, 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’.

“She saw herself as a bird pecking at a few leftover crumbs from the feast of life. She said as much… ‘I never thought of myself as a crumb’” (TMW 242).

In this sense Astha is not only the face of modern woman of our time but also the real woman of our time. Kapur shows Astha growing and evolving through this relationship. Her inborn desires and longings are now better expressed through her paintings which are strong and effective statements. They bring her comfort. Ultimately she grows and evolves through these conflicts and transcends into a talented woman, surer of herself and more confident. According to Amar Nath Prasad;

Manju Kapur’s new woman Astha is conscious, introspective, educated, wants to crave a life for herself, to some extent she conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes. (Prasad, 199)
Thus, Astha, in *A Married Woman*, is Manju Kapur’s New Woman who is conscious, introspective and educated and wants to carve a life for herself. To some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes. Therefore, Manju has revealed the realistic and optimistic portrayal of Astha’s problems and emotions. The concept of new women in Indian society varies from the one in the west and therefore Manju Kapur has tried to evolve her own stream of emerging of new women grounded in reality. She has her own concerns and priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists.

The narrative by Manju Kapur is straight forward. She gives free rein to her imagination and brings her characters and situations alive. Kapur has exposed her main emphasis for women with zeal, enthusiasm and suggest that a married woman’s work is not only as a housekeeper and child bearer, but to do something more.

On the whole, *A Married Woman*, deals with the theme of love and marriage, the problem of womankind, it's increasing demand for liberty and equality, for due respect and recognition. A woman’s fears and hopes, her desires and yearnings, her sense of dignity and independence are beautifully highlighted.