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LESBIANISM IN MANJU KAPUR'S "A MARRIED WOMAN"

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Abstract:

Author Kapur's focuses on the female uprising against traditional family norms and the institution of marriage is reflected in her writings. In Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*, female gender and sexual identity are inextricably linked to national identity, making it an intriguing case study in lesbian narrative strategy. The domestic connection is explored in depth throughout the book. To put it another way, Pipee's lesbian relationship with Astha was not an expression of Astha's feminism, but rather a byproduct of it. Finally, the novel retains its heteronormativity. With Astha's restlessness, she transforms into a lesbian and becomes careless with everything, even her children and husband, and Peepalika becomes a lesbian widow. She's always looking for a way to make an impact in the community. Getting married makes life easier for Astha, but she begins to feel lonely and dissatisfied after a while. She was raised in a regular middle-class family's traditional home environment. Astha is lonely at home because her husband is always away on work. She decides to pursue a career in education. Due to his busy schedule, Hemant is unable to listen to Astha's concerns or express his own. Astha finds great solace in her relationship with Pipeelika, another woman. She's in a bind and can't get out.

Keywords: lesbian, patriarchal, dispassionate, married, seduction.

A Married Woman (2002) by Manju Kapur examines the postmodern Indian woman as a new transgressive figure. In 2001, Kapur told a Delhi literary club that she was working on a "lesbian" novel. Her statements sounded sarcastic and pompous, but she didn't let up. The fact that she had written a second novel set in India about lesbian nature, when there had previously been very no lesbian or gay writing, was made public by her. She also made a name for herself as a powerful pen for the voices of the marginalised.

The story of "Astha," the novel's protagonist, who defies the restrictions of her middle-class family and shows courage to break through the barrier in search of emotional satisfaction and self-identity, is used to illustrate Kapur's concept of love, both platonic and prohibited, even going as far as lesbianism. Having a lesbian relationship provides Astha with a sense of security, which she attributes to her postfeminist outlook. As a result, the marginal character has rejected this central story and established a new narrative in an orthodox society such as India.

To be a lesbian woman is to be a rebel, a transgressor who is willing to go against the grain. Geeti Thadani equates lesbian invisibility in India to the "myth of tolerance," which she refers to as a "myth." Lesbians do not exist in India at all, yet they do manage to survive in the underground. Even if the word "lesbian" is not used for either Astha or Pipee, and this taboo issue has been dealt with carefully, the physical intimacy between the two women might be considered outright lesbian bonding on the basis of the aforementioned crucial elements.

It is common for lesbians to have a secret celebration of their sexual attraction to each other. There was nothing between them, as the narrator puts it: "they had been skin on skin, mind on mind" (Kapur 303). When [Pipee] closed her hands around me, I was barely able to breathe from the pleasure, exclaims Astha (Kapur 256). Behaviorist Catharine R. Stimpson echoes this idea in her work, stating that "Lesbianism represents a commitment of skin, blood, breast, and bone" (Stimpson 197-212).

However, despite spending a significant amount of time together during their love making, Astha and Pipee's romance has been restricted. Pipee's departure for the U. S. at the end of the novel is a storytelling device known as "lesbian panic" by Patricia Juliana Smith. Smith defines lesbian panic : "In terms of narrative, lesbian panic is, quite simply, the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character-or conceivably an author is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire." There are several examples of this in Smith's (78) work. When a female character is in this position, she is more likely to do something harmful to herself or others. Suicide, homicide, or generalised neurasthenic depression are all examples of catastrophic responses.

Astha, an upper-middle-class, working Delhi woman, is the protagonist of *A Married Woman* (2002). In the midst of a vividly portrayed Indian political landscape, Astha yearns for something more than just being a wife and mother. Her parents have no other children. She carried the weight of her parents' expectations in terms of her upbringing, moral character, physical well-being, and eventual marriage. Even though she didn't want them to be so protective of her, they were. She was their future, their hope. The mother of Astha hoped and prayed that her daughter would find a nice husband. Her father, on the other hand, lavished his daughter with attention. In order to shape her in his estimation, he even slapped her a couple of times. Manju Kapur's young heroine's emotions are brought out by her. "The tears came, but she wouldn't act sorry, would rather die than reveal how unloved and misunderstood she felt" (2002 2).

"mushy novels and thoughts of marriage" were a regular part of Astha's diet by the time she was sixteen (2002 8). However, she often fantasises about being held by a loving young man, just like any other high school girl. Then she saw Bunty, a lovely soldier who was a regular visitor to her home. he was there. She couldn't stop thinking about him, day and night. She wrote letters to Bunty at his boarding school, trying to maintain the fantasy of love at first sight. A few letters later, Astha's flirting came to an end when her mother caught a scent. When Astha later finds out that she was the one to cause division in her daughter's connection with Bunty, she is devastated. While Astha was away at school, her mother was concerned with their most important parental responsibility. Rohan, in the meantime, becomes her emotional anchor and the object of her sexual desire. In a few of days, Rohan will be moving to Oxford to continue her education, and she will be married to Hemant. As she struggles to find her place in a patriarchal environment, Kapur offers fascinating peeks into the workings of a woman's psyche. An upper-middle-class educated woman who is still adjusting to life in the rapidly changing Indian culture represents Astha's personality.

somewhere between the old and the new, or between the traditional and the modern, or something in the middle. Here is a woman named Astha who is on the lookout for her true love. She develops a wide range of relationships as she seeks to discover her identity.

Astha loses faith in human nature not long after her marriage is consummated. She made an effort to persuade her spouse that she was a unique individual who deserved to be treated as such. As stated by Kapur in *A Married Woman*, he believes "Wives have to dance to all sorts of tunes of their husbands" (44) in the Indian domestic sphere. Astha, on the other hand, wants to stand out. Astha's marriage began to deteriorate after only a few months. She was forced to wait all day for her spouse to arrive. Manju Kapur says, "her future now seemed very pedestrian" (2002 47). She accepted a teaching position in Delhi and thoroughly enjoyed it. On

the contrary, at home, she often found herself waiting an excruciatingly lengthy period of time for her husband to pay attention to her.

Kapur depicts Astha as a person who is constantly negotiating her social identity and personal ambitions between the private and social spheres in her quest for individuality. The goal of Astha's activism is to change her religious, social and national identity from that of a Hindu who considers Muslims as the other to a more secular one, where she views all religions with an unbiased critical lens. Astha's mother-in-law opposes her plan to demur the planned demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya because she believes in the tolerance of Hinduism. While everything is going on, my mother-in-law is refusing to talk about the implication of Hindu tolerance with me. Mother-in-refusal law's suggests fundamentalism in the family's beliefs. In the wake of her meeting Aijaz, a Muslim activist, Astha feels the need to reclaim her religious identity. According to Kapur, it was Aijaz's interaction with Astha that made her realise the dangers of allowing her family and the Hindu community around her to dictate how she should live her religious life.

Sexual freedom is obvious in the instance of Astha, notably in the form of an extra-marital sexual relationship in the new feminism dimension. In her connection with Pipee, she appears to have defied both the limits of middle-class life and conventional heterosexual norms. Ashok Kumar has the following to say about this:

Male sensibilities in India have been revolutionised as Manju Kapur has shown the passions of women for love and lesbianism, an unworkable marriage and its consequent aggravation, and the traumas of her female heroes, who suffer and die for their success. (Ashok 165).

A lesbian is the wrath of all women compressed to the point of exploding. Often emergence at an early age, she acts in consonance with her inner constraint to be a more complete and free human being than her society – may be then, but certainly later – cares to allow her. When these demands and behaviours are not fulfilled, she finds herself at odds with not only others around her but also with herself over time. She eventually finds herself at war with not only those around her but also herself. On some level, she has been unable to accept the limits and oppression imposed on her by the most basic role of her society, that of a woman. Because of the anguish she goes through, she acquires a sense of shame for not living up to others' expectations and/or begins to examine and study what the rest of society takes for granted. She is compelled to forge her own path in life, spending a significant portion of her time alone, and learns about the reality of loneliness and illusions at a far younger age than her straight sisters. It's impossible for her to achieve peace with herself if she can't get rid of the socialisation that comes with being feminine. Instead of embracing her true self, she is torn between accepting society's opinion of her and seeing the harm she has been subjected to because of the sexist system in place. Those of us who persevere find ourselves on the other side of a sinuous trip that may have lasted decades. Because we are all women, we can all benefit from the perspective gained from that trip, the extrication of ourself, the inner peace, and the pure love for ourselves and other women.

The increasing awareness of Astha's limits is placed within the context of historical events in a way that juxtaposes the personal with the political. Because of her involvement in Aijaz Khan's workshops at her school, she has become more aware of events occurring outside of her immediate environment, in which she can attempt to make a small impact. With Aijaz's ongoing work on the Ayodhya Ram-Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid conflict, she is forced to see herself in spatial contexts that are much broader than the straightly defined limits of her own home and community. After Aijaz's calamitous death, the anticommunism activist group Sampradayakta Mukti Manch is formed to commemorate him, and Astha joins the group as a sympathiser and artist. Aijaz's widow Pipeelika Trivedi-Khan, a sociologist and NGO worker in Delhi, is one of the people she meets on one of the trips to Ayodhya with this group. It is Pipee's disenchantment with the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch's organised activism that attracts Astha to her, even though her marriage to Aijaz had been a secular statement dissected the Hindu-Muslim divide on the surface. Astha and Pipee meet for the first time in a public space that has been scarred by the scars of history, and this is where their relationship takes off.

Even though she's stuck in a quandary, Astha decides to travel on a holy expedition to the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya with Pipeelika, where she and Pipeelika spend a few days together. Kumar responds to this question:

An unsuitable marriage and the associated discomfort have been disclosed by Manju Kapur. She depicts the sufferings that her female protagonists go through, and the deaths that they encounter as a result of, in order to reform Indian masculine perception. She is astounded by the rise of religious zealots who want to use a crusade to raise the country and create fear by presenting evil as a historical necessity (2008 165).

When Astha needed sex, she would frequently visit Pipee. According to Joseph Bristow, "sexual satisfaction is a basic human need" (Bristow 12). In the midst of Pipeelika's forgetfulness, Astha enjoys a sweet retribution on her spouse with her tongue. When it comes to sexual identity, Astha would not mind "destabilising the entire sex regulation system," as Judith Butler puts it, "that undoes binary oppositions like gay/straight" (Stuart 345). Historically, women were shown as less aggressive, more unrestrained in their views, and less articulate than they are today. It's not only words that she's been using to make a point of claiming her substantive identity; she's also started acting on it. This class structure is one of self-assertion and rebellion against male supremacy, and a protest against being subordinated to man by women.

Hemant's male dominance is threatened by Astha's desire to break free of her dependence on others and achieve full human status. She is caught between the constraints of contemporary society and the fetters of traditional prejudices. To find a deeper meaning in her lesbian relationship, she sets out. Through the discussion of women's issues in society and the canonization of her own feminine sense. Astha is mesmerised after meeting Pipee. When she gets the message, she heeds it wholeheartedly and acts appropriately. Pipee makes her believe that she can lead a more fulfilling life away from home because she has already achieved her full potential, and hence can never go wrong. In contrast to Hemant, Pipee appears to have a better comprehension of Astha. Furthermore the former put in motion her to wallow in the new relationship with her, "There was no aphrodisiac more powerful than talking, no seduction more effective than curiosity." (p.218). Astha's rediscovery of her difference from her husband, her transformation from a convinced and hopeful bride to an abused wife, and her meeting with Pipee led her to an unethical rather than amoral shame wakefulness of lesbian love explaining her old morality.

Astha receives a sense of fulfilment from Pipeelika that she never received from her husband. Every time she came close to Pipee, her heart raced like a girl's does when her lover exposes her more intimately to physical touch. If Astha could not connect Pipee, she "felt terrible the whole time" (2002 230). They were once inside of Pipee's apartment when the incident occurred. Slowly:

Pipee cradled her in her arms. She could feel her hands on the initial spread of her hips and the narrowness of her back. Taking her time, she gently undid her blouse hooks and her bra, looking at her face as she did so, and as she did so, she felt her back and breasts, especially the nipples. She felt them again and again, in no hurry to get to the end of the process.

Aijaz's death has left Pipee and Astha in a tense relationship, and the relationship serves as a means of coping with this loss. Kapur makes use of the interaction between Astha and Pipee to illuminate the nuanced nature of Indian women's religious identity. According to patriarchy, an affair with a widow of a Muslim man represents an area where Astha is not allowed to exist in the same way as other women. Astha's relationship with Gopinath permits her to move freely between the two realms, as a homosexual relationship in India is "either condemned or ignored," as Gopinath points out (1999 263).

Lesbians are often seen as discrepancies that do not fit into the heterosexual family paradigm. To be a lesbian, Pharr explains, "is to be viewed as someone who has stepped beyond the line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman identified" (1998 18). Lesbians are women's wrath compressed to the point of annihilation. As a result of these desires and acts over the years, she finds herself in a constant state of conflict with everyone and everything around her, as well as with herself. She may not

be aware of the political ramifications of what began as a personal requirement for her. An in-depth examination of gender stereotypes, beliefs, and restrictions on women's freedoms, rights, and choices is the focus of Kapur's research on the "womanization" of women. A woman's body and sexuality are only allowed to be enjoyed in heterosexual relationships that are tied to marriage. The truth of married life in a traditional community, as depicted by Kapur, is that a woman must bury her identity and give up her very existence. " A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet during the day and an obedient mouth are the necessary criteria for a married woman, Astha learns. " (200-2 231). It is through the exercise of her agency and the interrogation of socio-cultural constructs that she realises "many parts of her marriage to herself reflected power than love" (2002 233). Rejecting the deterioration of her body and wanting to reclaim the female body she once had, she embarks on a journey for a more significant life in her lesbian relationship with Peepilika, who is a widow. In order to fight patriarchal heterosexual power structures that have rejected and condemned lesbianism and homosexuality, the female protagonist rejects the conventions of a ritual-bound society for a period of time. Using the heterosexual world as a starting point, the lesbian couple constructs their own world inside that of the heterosexual majority. When people are in a state of ecstasy, they are not a mother, wife, or daughter, but an unique self who is solely responsible for their own bodies. Exposed lesbian sexuality uncovers a society's underbelly and offers women the opportunity to express their sexuality in new ways. Overall, it promotes sexual expression as a means of emancipation for women in a basic manner. Because of the internalised patriarchy represented by her in-laws, husband and mother, Astha's sudden liberation was met with furious retorts. By virtue of her dead husband's last name, Pipee is a Muslim and "one of those social activist types." Hemant is opposed to Astha's connection with Pipee (2002 227). By categorising all social workers as "those types" and expecting Pipee's work to gain Astha's trust and respect, Hemant has to prove his dominance and significance in her life. Social workers are depicted by Hemant as greedy, self-centred individuals who exploit social work to raise money for themselves, rather than for the greater welfare of society. Astha, despite Hemant's disapproval, finds a surprising amount of strength in her same-sex connection with Pipee, and she makes good use of it. Through Pipee's support, Astha discovers her own artistic independence. To Astha, Pipee advises, "Have an exhibition, create something of your own" (2002 269).

This image is being resisted by Pipee and Astha, who are both thriving in spite of it. It's not so much that they've survived as much as it is their process of self-discovery and progress toward psychological liberation. In the Indian setting, lesbian relationships were once considered taboo and socially inappropriate (Bristow 17). Liberation and affirmation of one's own identity can result through one's deeds. Even if they were placed in an exclusion zone, they appear to be unconcerned. Such a change of attitude in them moves us to understand that it is possible to go beyond established rules and convention. Neither Pipee, nor Astha, would be willing to sacrifice their femininity for the sake of independence. Thus, Manju Kapur builds a feminocentric disapproval against the heterocentric, homophobic, and phallogocentrically glamorised patriarchy by portraying her heroines as lesbians (Milhoutra 164).

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