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Quest for the Identity and Freedom in ManjuKapur's *AMarriedWoman*

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the "Quest for Identity and Freedom in ManjuKapur's "A Married Woman". Kapur criticizes the conventional notion in Indian contemporary society about gender roles which is generalized based on sexual role. In a male-dominated society like India and Nepal or the Eastern part, males are characterized as backbones of the family, opposed to men, women are like machines to give birth to babies and take care of household activities. They are limited in private services. This fiction portrays the protagonist character, Astha, from the traditional stereotype middle class family. She is not very active at the beginning of the story, but later, she turns into a rebellious character. Being a female, she is supposed to handle her family only, but she revolts in her way. She is daring to accept Lesbian relation and break the conventional gender role, which is limited to the sexual role of male and female. The significance of the study is to reveal the real meaning of gender as gender roles is not defined by the sexual roles but the behaviour of the person, how do they perform. To analyze the gender studies, the researcher has used the theoretical lens of Judith Butler's concepts of gender as a performative role.

Keywords: Femininity, Freedom, Gender Role, Gender Studies, Identity, Masculinity

This research paper justifies the quest for freedom and identity in ManjuKapur's *A Married Woman* (2002), a novel that deals with issues of gender that is responsible for the suffering of women in the male-dominated Indian society. Kapur's fiction advocates independence considering the patriarchal realm. A woman can be independent if they change themselves as the backbone of the family. Astha is a bold character as represented in *A Married Woman*. In society, women are supposed to be limited within the domestic boundary created by patriarchal society obeying

each order taking them as verdict without raising a single question against them but not anymore. Traditional values of gender role inspire women to become submissive instead of revolting against the norms and values created by males in a patriarchal society. A kind of negative stereotype has been created for women. The patriarchal society only seeks vested interest by using women's emotions, feelings and sacrificial nature. In this scenario, this fiction is critically analyzed from the perspective of gender studies.

The protagonist of this novel breaks her gender roles as defined by a patriarchal society, standing against the conventional notion of gender roles as sexual behaviour according to sex. In her fiction, Kapur has raised the quest for identity and freedom within gender roles. Astha was compelled to follow traditional gender role hither and thither but not anymore. Moreover, this research work deals with the issue of the quest for identity and freedom picturing the concept of a new woman; it has challenged the previous gender roles. Astha, the leading female character, has challenged the patriarchal norms of obeying men and staying under them, advocating on behalf of every other female. Kapur portrays the female character very strongest female in this novel. In this fiction, the protagonist, Astha, has been represented as an action-oriented and bold female character, just like Kapur herself. She is not represented as submissive and obedient in her entire life. She transforms from powerless to powerful in her journey of life struggle.

The fiction has broken all the conventional boundaries made by a society that compels the woman to become submissive characters in their whole life. It proves the traditional role of gender to be unjustified as the gender role, and the performance is often misinterpreted. The traditional tendency has always portrayed female as weak and subordinated as well as kind and emotion-oriented. Thus, the main objective of

this research paper is to shed light on the structured gender concept of society from the perspectives of gender studies.

Kapur is one of the famous post-independence Indo-English writers. She is a feminist writer. Her writings expose the pathetic and oppressive situation of Indian women. This fiction deals with the Indian women's social and cultural predicament caused by a male-dominated society. Women are struggling to get freedom, identity, equality and space with men as they are guided by the patriarchal society. Their sufferings and suffocation in family and marital relationships are reflected in her novel. In this fiction, Astha is shown in a critical situation, which represents the condition of an Indian woman within her family whose parents always want a marriage for their daughter in a well-settled family. They concern about their marital relations as a meaning of complete life. Even her mother, as a female, is unable to understand her feelings. Somehow, her father is positive towards her thoughts of becoming independent but can't support her for long. They don't care about the career or studies of their daughter. Here, Astha faces many struggles in her in-laws' house. She is not happy with her in-laws because they are continuously trying to dominate her. But, she wants to go beyond the traditional family, society, norms and values. She wants to build her career as a successful artist.

Numerous critics have examined *A Married Woman* from various perspectives. Many critics have examined the present fiction from the subaltern perspectives as it portrays the picture of a marginalized community. However, a gender study is not discussed by others so far. Kapur's *A Married Woman* has been widely discussed as fiction about the search for rights and independent life of women by the feminist against the patriarchal world.

An Indian critic, Ashok Kumar argues upon the feministic view of writing in

India. Female psyche is well shown in his article “The Insurgent Female Psyche in ManjuKapur's *A Married Woman, a Socio-Ethical study*”, he writes;

ManjuKapurhas exposed a woman passion with love and lesbianism, on incompatible marriage ensuring annoyance with a passion to revolutionize the Indian male sensitivity she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for their triumph she is stunned at the intensification of fundamentalism and the argument of religious zealots to uplift the country by crusade and establish paranoia by presenting as evil as a historical necessity. (165)

Here, Kumar argues that Astha, as a leading female character, challenges the patriarchal society, which portrays women as weak, inferior and dependent. In contrast to this old view, she is not submissive; she challenges society by fulfilling her desires. She represents the bold image of women who dare to maintain their lesbianism. Kapur has set the novel against the backdrop of the most controversial Babri Masjid issue. Astha delineates the dilemma and trauma of the urban middle class educated women who experience discontent in their lives despite their material comforts. She symbolizes the struggle of women for their very existence in society. Kapur portrays the challenges faced by women in the world. Kapur has remained candid in presenting women and trauma; they have been facing in personal and professional, religious and socio-political spheres.

Through *A Married Woman*, Kapur has portrayed the picture of the female, whose quest for freedom and equality. But her voice has not been heard in the male-dominated society. In this way, she chooses her way to revolt against the dominated society. She wants to come out of the dark forest of the patriarchal world. This fiction talks about the inner feelings of a woman's mind as she struggles for her career as

well as her passion for painting and teaching. She is in search of her own identity, and she is not satisfied with the traditional roles of women. She wants to be a modern, educated and independent woman. So, she develops many relations with different people. The relationship between Astha and Peep are beyond tradition and culture. According to another critique, BhaghatNayak argues in his article "Feminist Approach to ManjuKapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Feminism in Indian writing" about the rules of lesbianism and gay theories. He argues;

A Married Woman conforms to the rules of lesbianism and gay theories and explores a hidden aspect of a woman's passionate life as defined by comfort levels without societal sanctions. Thus, the novel has a new ground in the genre of Indian English fiction of modern times. (234-235)

Here, Nayak looks into Kapur's insight into the minds of two women lesbianism for Astha and Peep are an assertion of them since it has driven them away from the feelings of being alone. Women have no power in the family, and they don't have economic freedom like father, brother and husband. Kapur explores women's oppression in patriarchal families. She shows her female characters as secondary to the male characters that are at the centre of the family. At the present, there is awareness in women who have developed enough confidence and boldness to put up a brave fight against all sorts of man-made suffering in the male-dominated society.

S. Robert Gnanmany, a theorist observes the women characters, Astha and Peeplika from the sexual diversity they have shown. In his article 'Rationale of Sexual Diversity in ManjuKapur's *AMarried Woman*. He observes, "ManjuKapur's women characters Astha and Peeplika have demonstrated the fiction. *A Married Woman* that the males are not all-important in their life. They seem to drive more sexual pleasure when they are together than when they are making partners" (101). This extract shows

that Astha and Peeplika's lesbian relationship justify that there no need for man for their sexual relationship. Both women fulfil their needs and desires. Astha falls willingly into the arm of Peep without having endured the guilt of doing with a man. Astha avoids her husband because she gets more pleasure in a lesbian relationship. Astha does not like her husband and his sexual feeling; she gets irritated with him because she is in lesbian relation. She feels happier and comfortable in Peep's arm, but not with her husband. She enjoys her new partner. So, here there is no need and necessity for a male partner. She celebrates her real gender role as a lesbian, which she finds at last.

Astha represents the image of a new woman who longs to have her own space in the patriarchal culture. This new feminist idea about 'new women' emerged in the late 19th century, which is profound elaborated by Irish writer Sorah Grand in her article. This term indicates women's independence, rebellious, educated, action-oriented, and job-oriented nature of the present world. She fights for freedom and raises her voice against male-dominated society. She tries her best to break the silence of suffering. She tries to move out of the cage of patriarchy. ManjuKapur's novel presents the changing reflection self-sacrificing women towards self-assured, moving away from the traditional, assertive and ambitious women and making society aware of the demands of the time, which is the medium of women's self-expression. ManjuKapur presents women who are trying to establish their identity. In this fiction, the protagonist undergoes philosophical changes against the conditions of India. The portrayal of a woman in Indian fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change. In *A Married Woman*, Kapur has portrayed the image of women who cries for freedom to act and choose on their own. Another critic, SushilaGunjan, expressed her

critical view in her article “*Difficult Daughters, a married woman and Home of ManjuKapur! A Saga of New Indian Women Emergence of New Woman Indian Writing*”.Gungan writes;

In *A Married Woman*, Kapur represents the woman race, the changing Indian society where the upper middle class educated women, who although finically independent, is still facing the problems adjustment between the old and the new between appearance and reality and between theory and practice explores the space of such women through Astha. (97)

As Gunjan justifies, ManjuKapur builds the story on the concept of women of the present-day society who stands on the threshold of social change in an unbelievable position. This novel gives voice to women frustration, women disappointment and alienation in a patriarchal world. This fiction provokes our thoughts, how Astha, in *A Married Woman*, search her identity registering her protests against the existing patriarchal setup emerging as an independent woman.

This fiction tries to explore the concepts of new women in the modern era. Mainly, Astha and other characters are transforming themselves from submissive to rivalry. This paper studies gender role describes by Judith Butler, which stands as a new eradicate traditional assumption regarding women. Kapur is an Indian writer who mostly talks about gender-based discrimination in family and society. She observes the personal lives of women and extracts the difficulties faced by them in society. *A Married Woman* highlights issues of identity as constructed in society from the perspectives of gender role. The protagonist, Astha, a married woman, makes her constant struggle to establish her identity in Indian society as she is searching for equal opportunities both within and beyond the threshold of her family. She wants to break traditional gender roles and move forward in her future. In the first part of the

novel, Astha is not very active, but later her character changes into rebellious to find a better life. This research explores the issues of social changes. She wants to go beyond traditional norms and a value, going against society's rules because she is a new woman who raises her voice in society. She is an active participant in her personal life as well as society. This mark she constructs her identity from submissive to the rebellious character.

As the fiction draws a picture of Indian society, it shows the divided society in the name of culture, religion, and other issues. In this fiction, identity is presented as a construction that is visible when leading female character, Astha breaks her conventional role as society defines the issue of gender roles by picturing the concept of a new woman changing the traditional gender roles as man and woman. Astha challenges the conventional images of patriarchal society, standing against the gender roles defines and guides by a society that portrays women as weak inferior and dependent. But Astha is not a submissive woman. She challenges society by fulfilling her desire. The presentation of female characters as strong as male proves that they cannot be represented as submissive and weak in their own life they cannot bound up with household activities. She seems to have challenged the constants of the middle-class existence and established notions of heterosexuality by establishing the relationship with Peeplika.

Another critic, Arpita Ghosh, argues in her article "Women's Vulnerability to Violence as Portrayed in the Novels of Manju Kapur Literary Insight" that;

Lesbian feminism is typified by the assertion of difference and a desire to break the mound of passive femininity valorized by the patriarchal paradigm. Lesbianism feminism privileges multiplicity of meaning, resisting normative classification and expressing skepticism about the underlying patterns of

domination persistent in male logo-centrism. (113)

In her views, ManjuKapur shows how Astha takes an act of sweet revenge from her husband by gaining autonomy in a lesbian relationship with Peeplika. She was in a constant war with everything around her. She has been denying freedom of expression. It was an act of rebellion against male supremacy. Kapur, an appreciated Indian writer, unravelled the physical and the mental dilemma of a woman very effectively in *A Married Woman*. Kapur has not only challenged the traditional form of gender roles but also the traditional. Kapur has set the novel against the backdrop of the most controversial Babri Masjid issue of religion, social and political conflicts in this fiction.

Moreover, it becomes clear that though the text has been analyzing through various critics, the theory of gender studies has not been applied. So, there lays a strong needs to research this fiction from a gender perspective. Therefore, this research paper attempts to explore how gender studies are an appropriate way to challenge the traditional stereotypical gender role of society, especially, south Asian contemporary novels. This fiction tries to break the hierarchy between male and female.

A Married Woman by ManjuKapur, the Indian novelist, works on feminism. The novel examines within the context of feminism from Butler's concept of gender identities and construction in society. The researcher has brought Butler's concepts regarding gender's performative roles to analyze how Kapur has broken the conventional idea of gender role through her characters in this fiction, as Beauvoir's famous line from *The Second Sex* advocates, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (60). Butler adopted this claim later in her work *Gender Trouble*, she proposes that "gender identity is not innate, but rather a set of behaviour that all

members of a culture perform’’ (61). Therefore, gender is a performance that is constructing by the dominant patriarchal society and culture.

In Butler’s performative theory, she introduces her seminal work based on the depletion of imitation. Eventually, it becomes the norm, the original. She further points that “Substantive effect of gender is performativity produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Identity is performativity constituted by the very expression that is said to be its results” (33). *A Married Woman* deals with Astha’s physical relationship with Peeplika. Astha, the protagonist of the novel, perils the closing of the acquisitions of her traditional marriage and secure family. The author deals with the disputed issue of homosexual relations in a challenging way. In this fiction, Kapur’s presents the protagonist as moving away from the submissive role to invent a new identity of their own. She rejects her traditional values as a culture. She feels culture is a handcuff to her and an obstacle. She proves that men are not all that important in her life. She protests against her husband and family and protests against a set of patriarchal values for identity.

Gender study is concerned with the questions of gender roles and their performances. Gender study is constructed on the ground of the stereotypical and conventional belief constructed by our traditional society. Gender Studies has focused on the roles plays by human, based on which they earn identities as males, females or LGBT, away from culturally and conventionally defined roles. The traditional and conservative gender consciousness creates discrimination between male and female, separating social and family roles based on sex. Most of the time, gender study is confused with sexual studies. Gender studies mostly try to raise the question about the conservative gender roles that are made by the patriarchy.

The term gender studies are coined by the British critique Cora Kaplan by

joining two different words 'gender and studies'. Eastern society is a bit different from Western society. Society is guided by patriarchal norms and values and our beliefs are deeply rooted in the traditional base. Therefore, the study is till now a fresh area to be researched. Gender study is an approach to the literary criticism and literary-based premise that considers a product of gender roles representation and performances of different gendered character rather than as an isolated work of art or the text.

Butler in *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* challenges the assumptions about the distinction between sex and gender, which are culturally constructed. She emphasizes the role of repetition in the performativity of sex as an ideal construct that is forcefully materialized through time. In the book, *Gender Trouble*, she addresses, "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed. Hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (10). Sex and gender are different from each other. Sex is biological, whereas gender is culturally formed. Moreover, gender study is a theoretical approach to the literary text that attempts to refigure the relationship between gender and gender roles. In *Edging Women Out*, Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin trace out the idea that "male writing was said to display 'ideas capable of having an impact upon the minds', while women's novels were associated with ordinary feeling and the trivia of everyday life" (78). This idea also contributes to prove the fact that the things related to the women are taken as the trifle activity, whereas the men's idea impacts upon the reader's mind. The novel should be analyzed from the gender perspective. Gender study does not differentiate between literary text and non-literary text. Feelings for both men and women are the same. Their gender does not determine their feelings. Gender studies

dig out the gender roles without supporting the conventional notion created by a patriarchal society.

A Married Woman presents its protagonist Astha as a fearless, strong and rebellious character of society in her pre and posts marital life. This fiction has shredded light on the complete journey of a woman, which has broken the traditional role of society. She dares to challenge the patriarchal norms and values created by the society going for her freedom. It is the story of Astha, a young lady from Delhi in a typical middle-class family. She is the protagonist, who is the only daughter of her parents. Her father wants to see her as a successful and independent woman in her professional life. She is just opposite to her father and her mother want her daughter to be a traditional housewife in a well-settled family, leaving the career. The problems arise when she looks for a boyfriend and wants to be engaged in marriage with him. Two boys come into her life, but the relationship ends up with sorrow.

Finally, she makes an arranged marriage which her parent's demand. Her mother's commitment towards her husband ultimately leads her to think that the happy relationship between her mother and father should be her aim in life. Astha finds a teaching job in a school, but her husband does not give any importance to it. Her husband received a degree in MBA, and at a certain point in their marital life, a problem crops up as to whether the birth of male offspring depends on the female or male sex. This difference of opinion makes her husband is unconcerned about Astha's happiness and freedom. Astha meets Aijaz, a Muslim social activist. He is a good supporter of her literary career. Aijaza's premature death during the traumatic Hindu Muslim riot converted her into a secular person. And she met a lady named Peeplika Khan, a widow and lesbian with whom she found sexual pleasure. She wants her husband and her lesbian friend under the same roof. Her husband found some

difficulties in this matter. The novelist focuses on the condition of a married woman in Indian society. She also describes the plight of a woman through the protagonist of the novel. Indian male-dominated society believes that males are supposed to do a grand subject matter whereas female does the little things and think the innocent things. The male is supposed to earn for the family, whereas the female does the household works. But here in this fiction, Astha represents both masculine and feminine character. She dares to challenge every other male of society. Moreover, by observing Astha and Hemant, this fiction breaks the traditional concept of real manhood, where Hemant is unable to satisfy and fulfil every wish of his wife. These activities directly challenge the traditional concept of manhood and womanhood in society and show the conversion of the gender role.

Kapur always observed the life of young women and their sufferings in Indian society. In this novel, Kapur describes the self-identity of female characters. Kapur shows that women are not rubber balls or decorative ornaments. This novel shows cleavage between the characters of two generations from the old and the new one. Astha's mother, in-laws and her husband are guided by the traditional thoughts, norms, and values but her father, Ajaz, Peeplika and herself belong to the new one, who are raising their voice against the society in each aspect from religious to cultural issues as well as acknowledging their gender role, they have accepted it.

An American philosopher, feminist and gender theorist Butler is best known for her book *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter on the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). She challenges conventional notions of gender and develops her theory of gender performativity. Moreover, "Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can

also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible” (180). ‘Gender’ and ‘sex’ are socially and culturally constructed where ‘gender’ is performativity and ‘sex’ is the matter of natural or biological fact. She argues, “Although the claim of universal patriarchy no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did, the notion of a generally shared conception of ‘women’ the corollary to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace” (7). These are the shreds of evidence that make us clear about the fact that some practical consequences are followed naturally.

Masculinity and femininity are not inherent. They are also constructed. Our interest and behaviours determine them, not what our sex relates to or society imposes upon us. She further claims, “in our society, masculinity and femininity are kept in a frame like male and female. Masculinity is for male whereas femininity is for female. The patriarchy has divided gender into two parts and it’s like a universal truth” (46).

Gender is not fixed and determined from the start but, “The very notion of ‘patriarchy’ has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts It is our performance that determines” as Butler argues (46). This fiction presents, Astha as a strong female character who turns out to be a Lesbian, rebellious, bold character. She is not weak and submissive, rather than she has a masculine attitude. In a few months, dullness began to taint Astha’s new life. She speaks in her dilemma, “What was she to do while Waiting for Hement to come home? Her in-laws were not demanding for the housework they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free time to be restless in” (46). Her role as guided by her family is not enough for her. She feels empty, incomplete and a kind of emptiness in her life hunts her mind. That emptiness, incompleteness and restlessness have led her life in a new direction. She is unable to limit herself in the traditional

gender role, as society believes women must be limited themselves within household work. Astha has seen herself far from this.

Society has been representing women as a subject from the past. In Butler view, “‘Representation’ will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of ‘women’ is nowhere presumed” (6). To break this traditional image, feminists have raised their voice against it. Kapur is also one of them who have raised her voice, against this traditional representative image of woman, through Astha in this novel. Astha is a very modern woman and coming out of her home and going in search of her own identity as an individual society. As a modern woman, she should have followed her career has given no second thoughts to her family. She is always prepared to show her boldness in society. She has the concept that if she shows her weakness, the patriarchal society will characterize her in the women who are emotional full. She does not want to be inferior. In the same way, Butler argues, “‘Genders can be neither true nor false, but they only produced as the true effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (174). Sex is already there to be differentiated naturally, as there is a biological difference between male and female but having a perception of gender difference is different from sex. Further, she states, “‘Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (179). Gender is formed by observing someone’s performance and organized with frequent practice. So, gender is most probably built upon our assumption. It is just an identity that has given to the male and female, depending upon someone’s nature. Gender is different from sex; it is not a natural factor like sex.

Astha is a woman of self-respect and self-dignity. Astha reveals the hidden fact about how the performance of gender role functions in society, as well as

individuals through hiding personal emotion and pain, is a small act. It contributes to the self by raising the confidence level within. This small act also helps to dig out the fact that the gender and the gender roles in a society constructed by the people in power. Butler argues;

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (10)

The idea is that nobody is gender from the start, and nobody can determine the quality of masculinity and femininity without knowing someone's ability to do something. Similarly, gender cannot be represented based on sex. According to Butler, "Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized 'the internal' is a surface signification and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody" (179). However, our society creates its regime of the roles, which functions through its distinctive values and beliefs. A newly born baby is the best example of the gender roles constructed by society. They are supposed to act like the gender constructed by society and more likely to be categorized based on their biological sex. A baby boy and a baby girl are differentiated with the dolls they are given to play with. A baby boy is given hard instruments like gun and vehicles, but a baby girl has given soft and beautiful toys like a Barbie doll. Society pressurizes us to follow the regimes that are created for us.

Feminism in India can be understood by connecting the relation to the concept of marriage. Marriage is an institution in India which unites male and female to live together as husband and wife. Marriage is a pious institution that flourishes all over India, right from the beginning of civilization and culture. For instance, Simone de

Beauvoir writes about marriage in *The Second Sex*, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by society” (445). Western critics said marriage is bondage and according to them, there is no role of emotional attachment or psychological bindings.

In this regard, Simone De Beauvoir remarks in *The Second Sex*;

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband or some cases a ‘protector’ is for her woman the most important of the undertaking. She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold; she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself, up to passive and docile, into the hands of an anew master. (352)

The institution of marriage has provided for society’s needs for love, security and children. But in the name of security, women have always lost their freedom. From one hand, from one caged, they are handed over another one. Marriage is just a process, from which women are handed over from one man’s (father/brother) custody to another man’s (husband and in-laws) custody, where women are compelled to live in house arrest, an open jail, without sentencing any crime, like a criminal, good behaving one chained by different relations, sacrificing their freedom and identity in the name of so-called secure life. It has been seen that marriage is quite essential for human society because its legality and religiousness bring moral values to society but always mistreated and misinterpreted for women. This is not just a story of Indian women, portrayed by Kapur, but the story of every corner of the world, where female are mistreated and take as subject to decorate a house.

In modern India, this great institution of marriage is on the verge of alteration, which is reflected in this novel through Astha. Astha, the protagonist, complains to Hemant about children spending more time with their grandparents. He responds if the age-old parents are happy being with children, letting them spend together. Here,

Kapur highlights the feeling of loneliness, isolation, and restlessness of Astha's mind. Thus, Astha claims, "What about me as it is when I am in school Himanshu is upstairs. When I come home, I want the children. I hardly have you, I should have them. Tears came to her eyes" (78). She is asking for her space in her family, in their relations and her rights, which are holding away by in-laws and Hemant from her knowingly and unknowingly. Hemant does not have any idea about what Astha expects from him. He always thinks about his own needs and the needs of his parents. Hence marriage becomes a burden and boring affair for Astha. After all, she has nothing in her hands.

Astha gets a new identity as a teacher at St Anthony's school. She likes to transform her occupation of a housewife into a working woman. She feels;

Being a teacher meant the longer of her days was over. No longer did she have the luxury of leisurely brooding over her love, she had to get up early and go to work. She had exercises to correct, and lessons to prepare. She started a reading club, writing club, a painting club, directed by the principle's suggestions and followed through with her encouragement. The peripheries of her world now stretched to include many schoolgirls. Life was shaping up nicely, with her mind and heart gainfully employed. (48)

She has become a working woman although her in-laws don't like this. She is on her own, becoming an independent lady. She has created a new identity and a new space in her life. She is different from before. At the same time, she tries to keep a balance between inner and outer spheres, which beautifully portrays the practical problems of a working woman by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*:

The independent woman of today is torn between her professional interests and the problems of her sexual life; it is difficult for her to strike a balance

between the two; if she does, it is at price of concessions and sacrifices which require her to be in a constant state of tension. (705)

The life of working women is filled with hustle and bustle of life. They are torn between their professional interests and the problems of her sex as well as personal family life. It has become very hard to keep a balance between office and home because women are supposed to see their family after professional life too. Men are free from these household jobs and duties, but women are not. In this fiction, Astha performs the role of a dutiful wife by serving her husband as every Indian wife does. But, Hemant does not possess any duty as a husband towards her. Within this complex life, fighting for her own space, she also engages at other work like kitchen, washing clothes arranges them. Kapur delineates through the protagonist Astha; the position of a wife considers as subservient to her husband. Astha expresses her daily activities as follows, “Her subservient position struck her she had no business kneeling, taking off his shoes, pulling off his socks feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet” (50). Astha has to manage every duties and responsibility of a wife, mother, daughter and daughter in law and teacher without getting any help from Hemant. In the above-mentioned text, Hemant often blames his wife for mismanagement, incapability, and wastefulness. He asks Astha, “Why can’t you train these servants properly?” (71) Sometimes Astha feels like resigning from her job because of her responsibilities. In social eyes;

Astha was now virtually a single mother. Beleaguered by the job, small children and house, she sometimes enjoyed the idea of resigning from a school, but between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love to be a woman, who valued independence. (71-72)

Astha has to manage every duties and responsibility of a housewife or professional work. She feels a lack of her desire. She wants independence from the inside and outside of her mind. Here, Women are forced to play a passive role in the in-law's house. They have to accept the customary views of male members or others.

Astha feels suffocated with her responsibility. Her condition becomes despicable. Her husband is also very much unconcerned about her feeling and emotion, which stretches her agony. Her position becomes submissive like that of unpaid servants. Socio-political, economic and cultural stuff are responsible for her dependent and subjected condition.

Astha is devastated by her family members and social values. She is fighting for her space every time with them. She has lost her chance to keep his father memories with her, just because Hemant refuses to keep them in his house, saying there is no space for them. Kapur highlights the argument between Astha and her mother;

‘Why did you do that’ screamed Astha to her mother. They were mine as well. I loved them’. But you never showed any great interest in them when you were growing up, protested the mother ‘that was then. This is now. Don’t you care about papa’s memory? How could you do this to him to me? It is Hemant’s house, and he said there was no room, her mother replied. (87)

This single sentence speaks a lot about woman condition in the family. The house belongs to Hemant, in which whatever he decides is implied for all. A woman doesn't have any position to decide for the family. Astha is upset when Hemant refuses to keep her father's books with them; he decides to donate them to a library. Astha claims her mother for agreeing with his words, but her mother said this is the home of Hemant. Astha does not hold any position to decide what to do with her father's

belongings. So, he takes his decision as a man. Astha's wrath with her husband is unmeasurable, who has never consulted her before taking any decision. He has accepted her equality but always plays the role of a prominent position in the family. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes, "This has always been a man's world" (91). This is true for a woman who has to live according to the decision made by a man. In "A Search for Identity and Self-independence", ReenaSanasm says, "Through the protagonist Astha, ManjuKapur reveals that woman still upholds the position of inferiority despite her search for equality and worthy member of the patriarchal society" about Kapur's *A Married Woman* (4). This is true for a woman who has to live according to the decision made by a man. Kapur highlights the disappointing life of Astha, who live in bondage with no gratitude, and how she struggles in life. Astha expresses her feeling in poetry form. She writes;

About love, rejection, desire and longing. The language was oblique but it was her experience endlessly replayed writing alleviated the heaviness within her, a heaviness she found hard to deal with discussing her feeling with Hement usually led to argument distance and greater misery. (79)

When Hemant reads the poem of Astha, he is upset to see the images of the poem. Astha uses images of cages and birds instead of good heavens. She wrote about suffering and suffocation. Hemant didn't find any happy poem. So, he becomes upset about Astha. They symbolically reflect Astha's inchoate feeling of despair and alienation.

In *Feminist Exploration*, DrPriyankaVaidya says, "Hement sees her emotions in the poem as an attack on male hegemony" (qtd in M. Rashmi70). Such a suppressive and oppressive attitude of Hement hurts the dignity of Astha. It indicates that with the unbound dominance of male in the family and society, a man has a right

to take every decision. He shows his male attitude. The sudden death of Astha's father happens just after her marriage. Astha is the only child of her parents. So, she has the rights of property though her mother hands over the money to Hemant, something that enrages the daughter. Kapur exposes Astha and her mother's conversation regarding this;

Dear child, her mother speaks. 'I have given Hement part of the proceeds of the house. She asks, 'Why the money is for you ma? 'I don't need so much. You can consider this your father's legacy. Then, why it to Hement 'asked Astha bridling. Why not? He is a man. He knows about money. He will invest it for you and the children. I have discussed all things with him. (97)

The above line shows Astha's mother is an orthodox woman. After the death of her husband, she wants to go to Rishikesh and lives in an ashram. She sold her property and handover money to Hemant. In the Eastern part, it is common because a woman has no power in the family and economic freedom. Women's depend on male companies like father, brother and husband. Such activities of her mother exhibit woman regard as a subordinate figure of a man. *In the Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes, "However respected she may be, she is subordinate, secondary, and parasitic" (475). Kapur portrays Astha as a modern woman, who raises a voice for equal treatment within this anthropocentric male dominant society. In this fiction, Astha seeks her identity. She does not follow the conventional role. More than this, she challenges the patriarchal norms and value of contemporary time alone. She defers herself to other conservative's women of the time. She is different from her mother. Though she works in different fields, she is bold and courageous to take her decision. She is not male-oriented like her mother. She believes a man is superior to a woman. Astha's mother represents a traditionally guided female, whereas Astha is

carefree; opposite to the women who are deeply rooted in the traditional norms and values. Astha celebrates her existence; she celebrates her body. She has lesbian relation with Peeplika. She is bold and courageous in this men-dominated society to take her own decision.

In this story, Astha is a girl of traditional parents, and she feels no guilt for her lesbianism. She falls in love with Peeplika, a female friend participating in MuktiManch. Mukti means freedom from the caged of patriarchy, an organization that speaks for freedom from the different aspects, reasons and causes that holds people backwards. With her carefree nature, she sheds light on the violent oppression of different forms against the females rooted in gender discrimination. Kapur presents the portrait of a woman, whose endeavours for liberation has gone unnoticed and unheard in the patriarchal world. She is searching for self-identity in the patriarchal society of India. Astha's inner turmoil and the quest for identity lead her to 'The Street Theatre Group'. Aijaz, who is a lecturer of history, is the founder of the theatre group. They both are working together in the same school. Astha starts to like Aijaz. Astha loves looking at Aijaz while he performs on the stage. Aijaz admires her for her insightful and brilliant mind when he goes through her script on the contemporary issue of Babri Masjid and Ram's Janmabhoomi to be performed on stage in school. Her husband also knows about the brilliancy of Astha, but he never appreciates her. He is guided by a male superiority complex.

The social activist, Aijaz, encourages Astha to write a script on the Babri Masjid issue. He appreciates her writing and her skills. The friendship gives Astha a glimpse of an alternate life. Astha is deeply engaged in a workshop designed by the theatre group. Astha and Aijaz develop a feeling of more than friendship. But they could not share because Aijaz and his team are murdered while performing a play on

Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi, a sensitive issue of religious controversy. The death of Aijaz motivates and leads Astha to emerge as a social activist. Now, Astha's character is changing into rebellious she taking parts for justice. Despite her household responsibilities, she creates a painting for the donation of an exhibition set up in memory of the street theatre group. He tells Astha to give up her job to give more time to painting and other responsibilities. He blames her for not bringing sufficient money from work. It is true that Astha seeks self-independency, self-fulfilment and expresses. "I want something of my own" (148). She wishes to make money out of her art to own her dream studio one day. She says, "I need my own space" (156). She wants her personal space, and she asks her husband to leave his sister's room, but he ignores her wish. Asking for personal space and room as a married woman is directly hitting on the face of conventional thoughts of a society, where a woman must be dependent upon her husband and family. She should stay in her husband room. That rejection from him, make her desire to get personal space and room for her studio, make stronger. She vows bitterly to earn enough money to rent her studio one day, "If there was no area available to her, she would try and make do with the wide ranges inside her head. Constantly reminded of the space nobody thought enough of her to give, she became very bad-tempered during the interruption" (157). These lines express Astha's rebellious mood as a woman who seeks to have a space of her own and enjoys her life within the house. Now she is not limited to household responsibility but also politically involved and active in her outside world. She begins to attend the meeting without giving importance to her husband because she is independent now. She grabs her own identity and freedom. She is flying like a free bird, at least outside her in-laws' house. She has two different worlds; inside the house and outside the house. Inside the house, Hemant is the boss but outside the

house, she is the boss of her wish and dreams. Later on, She is able to gain space inside the house too.

After the death of Aijaz, she becomes restless and joins Sampardayakta Mukti Manch. When she goes to Ayodhya, she meets Peeplika at Mukti Manch, who is the wife of Aijaz. In their first meeting, both of them talk very closely. They share their emotions and feelings in the first meeting. The emotional attachment between the two is inevitable. They establish a lesbian relationship. They love each other. Astha and Peep start to enjoy each other's company. So, Astha wants a sexual relationship and enjoys it. This is possible because Peep lives in a flat alone. So she doesn't have any problem. But, staying away from her husband and family becomes difficult for Astha. She begins to tell lies to maintain their relationship. This relationship gives her more pleasure and relaxation.

Thus, creating Astha as a strong, leading character, who acknowledge herself as a Lesbian in this fiction, Kapur has presented the quest for identity and freedom. Astha and other characters, in this fiction, are fighting for women empowerment against the ill-treatment of the cultural and ideological superiority of men. The idea of gender is only a term created and assumed by the authoritative males of society. Therefore, gender is culturally constructed, which could be reversed as Astha has broken the conventional meaning of gender, turning out as a lesbian mother. Gender does not remain as the traditional society has preserved for the man and woman, but women are portrayed as individuals free to express themselves, and they are bold and courageous in present times. Particularly, talking about this fiction, *A Married Woman*, shows the quest for identity and freedom. Astha is an educated woman, who is submissive, in the beginning, but later she becomes rebellious against the patriarchal society. She develops self-confidence and an inner strength against the

norms of traditional values and patriarchal society. Gradually, Astha grows assertive and asks for a separate space for her writing, painting and her successful career as well as she involves herself in public spheres. She breaks the conventional boundary of gender roles. As Butler argues about gender, which is culturally constructed, Astha, the protagonist of this novel, performs the different gender roles, which are not related to the traditional understanding. So, gender depends on the performative role which is finally got by Astha in her journey.

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