Feminine Jouissance in Manju Kapur's A Married Woman

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur, a professor at Miranda house, Delhi University delves into the incidents that happen in the social milieu. An examination of *The Married Woman* exposes the objectification of woman in the institution of marriage which steals her subjectivity. Kapur's heroine is torn by her domestic chores and marital responsibilities. She is reduced to a sexual object by her husband. She embarks on a quest for a meaningful and fulfilling life by mustering her feminine power and affirms her subjectivity. She transgresses the cultural codes and establishes a lesbian affair to let her body vibrate as she pleased.

Keywords: marriage, social conditioning, transgression, body, lesbian love.

1. ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL:

Manju Kapur explores the plight of Aastha, a sensitive and enlightened Indian woman who yearns for a space for her existence due to the tyranny of patriarchal constraints and domestic responsibilities. Aastha's parents are conventional who believe that their only mission is to raise their daughter safe and sound until she is married. Beauvoir remarks that destiny that society traditionally proposes to women is marriage. Most women, even today, are married, have been, preparing to be, or suffer from being so" (Beauvoir, 1976: 219. Translation is mine). Beauvoir's statement holds true in this context. Aastha's parents conform to cultural rules and social values which uphold that a woman is destined for marriage which accords her a social status. Aastha's parents presume that their life will be complete only when they find a suitable husband for their daughter. Aastha is a twenty years old. Indian culture advocates that this is the ideal age for the marriage of a girl.

Every morning, the mother invokes her prayers to God that Aastha be blessed with a charming and good husband. Aastha's

regards that her prime responsibility is to instill conventional values in Aastha's Adrienne Rich affirms mind. that "patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, to instill patriarchal values in future adults [...]"(Rich, 1986: 61) Aastha's mother inculcates in her daughter the traditional cultural values. She reiterates that Aastha should read the sacred books, the Bhagavat Gita, the Vedas and the Upanishads which have the power to transform her daughter into a traditional woman.

Hemant, a wealthy business magnate looks for a chaste and naive Indian girl. Hemant proposes to marry Aastha and the grandiose Indian wedding is planned. During the nuptial ceremony, Hemant appreciates Aastha's virginity when he sees his wife's blood stain on the bed. Virginity is an imperative condition of marriage for the young Indian woman. After the honeymoon, Aastha immerses herself in her marital duties and familial responsibilities. Aastha is a silent, obedient and dutiful woman to her husband and family. Sylviane Agacinski remarks that "[...] the silence and obedience of the woman in marriage could already be the effect of a political consent on her part" (Agacinski,1998: 65,Translation is mine). Kapur comments: "The time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was time spent in the service of love and marriage" (Kapur, 2006: 43). Aastha spends most of her time in the kitchen, the enclosed space of women in a patriarchal society. Christine Delphy defines domestic work as unpaid household work for the benefit of others. Delphy states that domestic work is directly linked to patriarchy and women are under the obligation to provide this free work. According to Delphy:

Free labour is the most radical economic exploitation. One cannot wish to distribute this exploitation equitably. The only thing we can wish for is to ensure that no one works for someone else for free (Delphy, 2009: 54,Translation is mine).

Almost every day, Aastha cooks, washes and irons Hemant's clothes, goes shopping with her mother-in-law and at night she spends the voluptuous moments with Hemant. With reverence and conjugal love. Aastha takes off her husband's socks and shoes every night when he returns from work. Beauvoir remarks that "she will have for her husband a tender and respectful feeling called conjugal love; within the walls of the home that she will be responsible for administering [...]" (Beauvoir, 1976: 256,257, Translation is mine). Little by little, Aastha is exhausted owing to the monotonous chores and seeks a worthwhile existence. Aastha's mother persuades Hemant to let her seek some fulfillment and distraction as a teacher.

Aastha longs for a child and vey soon she declares her pregnancy. Hemant happily notes that Aastha was going to become a complete woman. Beauvoir statement is apt in this context:

If as a wife she is not a complete individual, she becomes so as a mother: the child is her joy and her justification. It is through him that she completes her sexual and social fulfillment; it is therefore through it that the institution of marriage takes on its meaning and achieves its goal (Beauvoir, 1976: 325, Translation is mine).

Aastha completes her marital duty giving birth to Anuradha. Hemant contemplates the beauty of his wife and daughter but makes fun of her plumpy body. Aastha is forced to go on a diet to satisfy her husband's physical needs. Beauvoir says that "[...] the act of love is, on the part of the woman, a service that she renders to the man; he takes his pleasure and he owes compensation in exchange. A woman's body is an object that can be bought [...]" (Beauvoir, 1976: 225, Translation is mine). The female body is an object that must be attractive in the eyes of the husband. A deformed body may be neglected.

Aastha is a woman who yearns for love, caress and cuddles from her husband. Hemant becomes all the more busy in the factory and stops courting Aastha. She would like to be more intimate with her husband and confesses: "Hemant, why is it that we never talk anymore? [...] I want to be close to you, have a better relationship" (Kapur, 2006: 66). Hemant fails to meet his wife's hopes and desires. He is a typical Indian man who devalues the existence of the woman at home. Agacinski asserts that:

she does not manufacture goods and does not increase resources [...] Begetting, nursing are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is committed there; this is why the woman does not find in it the motive for a haughty affirmation of existence; she passively undergoes her biological destiny (Agacinski, 1998: 87, Translation is mine)

For Hemant, his wife occupies a subordinate status because her socially constructed activity was procreation. Hemant finds no valid reason to glorify his wife. He neglects and belittles her all the time. The following year, Aastha gives

birth to a boy Himanshu. She is amazed at the irresistible cheer of motherhood at home. Aastha is felicitated with jewellery and silk sarees. The boy's naming ceremony is very pompous while the birth of her daughter Anuradha was not celebrated with such grandeur. Aastha wonders about the glorification of the male gender and the discrimination of the female gender.

Little by little, Hemant becomes indifferent and uncaring. One evening, Hemant refuses to take care of his own son and affirms: "It is the duty of the woman" (Kapur:70). Beauvoir asserts:

Marriage has always presented itself in radically different ways for men and women. [...] Socially, man is an autonomous and complete individual. [...] the reproductive and domestic role in which the woman is confined has not guaranteed her equal dignity (Beauvoir, 1976: 220, Translation is mine).

Hemant believes that raising children is a becomes woman's job. He autonomous and free while Aastha is forced to carry the entire burden of the domestic chores on her shoulders at home. The housework she does at home does not accord her any dignity from her husband. Agacinski's affirmation is also pertinent in this context. She observes that "[...] women have been kept by civilization in subordinate situations because they were condemned devote themselves to essentially to the reproduction of the species" (Agacinski, 1998: 80, Translation is mine). Aastha is torn apart by household children. She begins work and appreciate her independence. In order to distract herself, she immerses herself in poetry and painting which bring her relief. She reflects on love, broken love, desire and the desire to live and portrays her inner self. Hemant belittles Aastha's poems because they only evoke misfortune and suffering. Even when Aastha wishes to bring her books and paraphernalia from

mother's home, Hemant turns down her idea doggedly. Aastha's mother emphasizes that Hemant's decision should be respected and dismisses the thought. Agacinski notes that "it is the master/slave relationship that explicitly refers to a difference between the one whose nature is to command and the one whose nature is to be commanded" (Agacinski, 1998: 64, Translation is mine). Aastha is forced to obey her master's commands. She realizes that she has no authority or space at home. Aastha wonders about her status and identity at home. She yells: "So who am I? The tenant ? [...] The house is also mine" (Kapur, 2006: 87,94). She complains that Hemant weilds his power as a master and abuses her.

In the meantime, Aastha's mother prepares to leave for Rishikesh, the spiritual destination after the demise of her husband. Aastha is overwhelmed with guilt for having abandoned her mother. She wonders why the daughter does not have the right to keep her parents at home while it is an important duty reserved for the son to keep his parents safe and sound at home. Besides, Aastha's mother sells her house and deposits a huge sum with Hemant so that he can have control over the money and invest for the future of his wife and two children. His mother tells Aastha: "He is a man, he knows about money" (Kapur, 2006: 97). In this regard, Agacinski says that "the family is a small monarchical community which the father entirely commands" (Agacinski, 1998:63, Translation is mine). Patriarchy claims that the man who takes care of the economic space can direct all the things of the world. Aastha believes her husband to be trustworthy but she is quite hurt because she still has the right to know about her father's financial inheritance.

Aastha meets Aijaz Aktar Khan, a theatrical artist in school. Aastha has an admiration for Aijaz whose ideology was to live for the society. The school organizes a symposium on the political subject of the Babri Masjid. Aijaz and

Aastha decide to act together in a play that would be performed during the holidays. Aastha embarks on the project of preparing the script of the play and sketches beautiful paintings. Aijaz's appreciation emboldens Aastha who does her best to stage the play. On the other hand, Hemant criticizes and scorns his wife and her efforts. One morning, Aastha learns of the death of Aijaz and that of his theatrical group. They are burnt alive in their caravan as they staged a controversial subject associated with the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Aastha is agitated and upset by this mournful news. It was Aijaz who awakened the social spirit of Aastha. It was he who gave Astha a taste for social life. To owe her gratitude to Aijaz, Aastha participates in a demonstration to protest Aijaz's death despite her husband's resistance. Unable to withstand his wife's growing indulgence for Aijaz's social cause, Hemant tells: "Keep to what you know best, home, children and teaching" (Kapur : 116). Pierre Bourdieu's affirmation is true. He states that:

> the social order functions like an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the male domination on which it is founded: it is the sexual division of labor, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each of the two sexes, of their place, their time their implements; it is the structure of the space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved women [...] (Bourdieu, 1998:23, Translation is mine).

Hemant dictates that his wife ought to stay at home, the restricted space designated to woman by the society. She remains engaged in painting for an exhibition dedicated to the unity of the country which infuriates her husband who thinks that Aastha neglects her familial responsibilities.

To her surprise, Aastha sells her paintings at the exhibition. She feels elevated and financially independent. Little by little, Aastha indulges in social life. In the morning, she is at school, in the afternoon she paints and in the evening she takes care of the household work and the children. Aastha believes that a painter needs a private space to produce masterpieces. She devotes the whole afternoon to the paintings but she faces many interruptions at home. She expresses her need for a room to her husband. When Hemant and her parents refuse her demand, she becomes enraged. Carole Pateman states that "women are not embodied as individuals but as natural subordinates" (Pateman, 1988: 181). Aastha is denied her own space. She is not considered as an individual at home who can have equal access to the ressources. Aastha is totally defeated at home. The whole house is hers, but she feels homeless as she has to beg her husband even for room space.

Aastha's economic independence gives her energy and power. Overcome by fatigue, her soul seeks respite from domestic life. disappointment increases Hemant organizes a family trip to Goa to their fifteenth celebrate wedding anniversary. Hemant plans to fly to Goa with his family. He buys his ticket and those of his children but does not buy Aastha's ticket. Hemant wants Aastha to buy her tickets. Aastha is shattered by her husband's decision but she silently leaves for Goa. The whole family hires a taxi and visits sights around Goa. By chance, Aastha sees a nice antique silver box and she wants to buy it with her money. Hemant firmly refuses to buy it. Although she earns, she cannot spend her own money. It is Hemant who controls the Aastha's finance. This pathetic condition makes her shiver and cry. Hemant's authority over Aastha's money raises the question of her liberation. She does not like her husband's attitude of interfering in her financial affairs. Aastha ruminates over the incident of the silver box. After a few weeks, Hemant purchases a television at his home. Astha wonders how Hemant could spend too much money on his own. The argument about buying the silver box resumes at home. Astha loses her temper and tries to remind her husband: "I also earn. Can't I buy a box if I want, even if it is a little overpriced?" (Kapur: 165). Astha becomes aggressive. She stands up against this injustice and demands equal dignity. Kapur translates Aastha's state of mind: " A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites oh Hemant's wife" (Kapur: Astha strongly criticizes the institution of marriage which persecutes the woman and glorifies the man. Aastha says marriage should bring happiness for both man and woman but marriage becomes a source of injustice and suffering for woman. Aastha remarks: "If a marriage is terrible, it is good to be able to leave it" (Kapur: 168). Aastha has had enough sacrifices as Hemant's wife. She criticizes that the ideals of Indian femininity have been used to trap women.

It is the New Year's Eve. Hemant announces that he has many invitations to hotels and clubs and that he ought to go with his wife. Aastha has her own plans and prepares to take part in the protest outside Rashtrapati Bhavan against the decision to build a temple in the place of the Babri mosque. Hemant is shocked to hear this news from Aastha. Furiously, Hemant tells his wife: "You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home and not on the streets" (Kapur: 172). In this regard, Beauvoir says that:

the sphere to which she belongs is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated by the male universe: however high she climbs, however far she ventures, there will always be a ceiling above her head, walls that will bar his way (Beauvoir, 1976: 51, Translation is mine).

Aastha is determined, participates in the gathering, hastily returns to join her husband for the New Year's party. Little by little, Aastha begins to free herself from domestic life.

The religious committee organizes a meeting in Avodhya to discuss about the fanaticism that exists in the nation. Aastha is invited to give a speech at the meeting. She finds herself more and more attracted to the social milieu. Aastha decides to participate in the rally to be a responsible citizen. When she announces her project at home, her husband and her in-laws categorically refuse. Despite explanation of her social responsibilities, the mother-in-law rigidly rejects saying that Aastha's responsibility was within the domestic sphere. Mustering her courage, Aastha brings her mother to take care of her children and sets out on the journey to Ayodhya. It is in Ayodhya that Aastha meets Pipeelika, Aijaz's wife, appreciates Aastha's public speaking. After her return from Ayodhya, Aastha establishes an intimate relationship with Pipeelika.

Aastha's troubled relationship with her husband creates an atmosphere of anxiety, melancholy and loneliness and disrupts the institution of marriage. Aastha realizes that she has been reduced to a sex object and a slave by the institution of marriage. The family imposes rigid values and rules to lock him into a subordinate status. Aastha dreams of an exciting and ambitious life. Traumatized by the incompatible marriage of heterosexual life, she adores Pipeelika's feminine rapport where there is no male domination or oppression. She begins to hate the heterosexual life where her husband does not give her a comfortable Aastha soon realizes Pipeelika's friendship gives her a new existence. It is to Pipeelika that Aastha confesses her miserable life in the family. In all these moments, it is Pipeelika who gives her the confidence to rise above any kind of oppression in her home. Pipeelika, who is a widow, seeks Astha's company

all day. Aastha forgets about the house and Hemant. She establishes a lesbian affair with Pipeelika. Hemant becomes inquisitive of Aastha's and Pipeelika's weird friendship.

In her theory of Écriture Feminine, Cixous, a French feminist who pins her theory on Psychoanalysis, emphasizes the rejection of family and conjugal confinement, the subversion of patriarchy and the recovery of the female body. She adds that love and desire are the subversive forces. We find almost all of these elements in Manju Kapur's Themarried woman. revolutionary attempts of Aastha reflect the thoughts of Cixous. She affirms that the woman has been driven out of her own body because she blindly surrenders her body to the man following the norms of patriarchal society. Cixous says: "We have been turned away from our bodies, which we have been shamefully taught to ignore [...] " (Cixous, 2010: 55, Translation is mine). Cixous urges the woman to reclaim her body from patriarchy to regain her own body and value her existence. For Cixous, the female body which has been locked up in familial and domestic life can free itself by shaking off the patriarchal norms. She says that woman must constantly try to fight against the patriarchal law. Cixous affirms:

For a long time it was as a body that she responded to bullying, to the family-conjugal enterprise of domestication, to the repeated attempts to castrate her. [...] Now, I-woman is going to blow up the Law: bursting henceforth possible, and ineluctable [...] (Cixous, 2010:57, Translation is mine).

Throughout her writing, Cixous continues to pray for the recovery of the female body. For Cixous, it was time to wake up, to take possession of the body and to bring to life female sexuality rendered dead by man. As Cixous is committed to working against repressive forces that cause political oppression, Aastha's submersive actions echo the revolutionary ideas of

Cixous. She rejects the marital confinement, subverts patriarchal values, reclaims her body and finds her corporeal pleasure in a lesbian affair.

Lesbianism is a complete rejection of the patriarchal society and also the rejection of the roles traditionally imposed on woman in order to regain control of her body. The revolutionary liberation of Aastha translates into the transgression of the codes of traditional femininity to establish a lesbian affair. She understands that she cannot exist in harmony with Hemant. To be a lesbian is to resist compulsory heterosexuality and deconstruct to heterosexism. Monique Wittig says:

> Our survival requires contributing with all our strength to the destruction of the class - women in which men appropriate women and this can only be accomplished destruction by the heterosexuality as a social system based on oppression appropriation of women by men and which produces the body of doctrines on the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression (Wittig, 2001: 56,57, Translation is mine).

For Monique Wittig, refusing to become or to remain heterosexual is a mode of resistance for lesbians. She adds:

> for [...] what makes a woman is a particular social relation to a man, a relation which we have formerly called serfdom, a relation which involves personal and physical obligations as well as economic obligations ("house arrest domestic chore, marital duty, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relationship from which lesbians escape by refusing to become or remain heterosexual (Wittig, 2001: 56,57, Translation is mine).

Aastha resists the institution of heterosexuality and seeks a lesbian partner. For Adrienne Rich, female-identification is

a source of energy, a potential fountain of female power, and this is violently immobilized and wasted under the rule of the heterosexual institution. For her, the lesbian experience is a deeply feminine experience.

Aastha who is a victim of male subjugation is transgressive. She does not want to remain passive by accepting her status as the other. She breaks the codes of conduct imposed on her in order to claim her autonomy and her identity. She engages in a fight against patriarchy through her lesbian love. Her corporeal relationship with her friend frees her from all her family worries. Through her lesbian affair, Aastha discovers her identity as a subject. She would like to leave the institution of marriage so that female sexuality is not governed by men. She expresses her anguish and hatred against the patriarchy by this counter-attack.

Aastha is fascinated by Pipeelika's amorous passion and dreams of an independent existence. Aastha experiences the rebirth of her femininity and regains her feminine identity with her partner voluptuous Pipeelika. The lesbian relationship is not humiliating to Aastha. She auestions the socio-cultural constructions that stigmatize lesbian relationships. She adores the feminine world which reserves her space, her independence, her love, her desire, her happiness and comfort. her exploration of feminine sexuality draws Aastha's attention to the absurdity of domestic roles and monotonous tasks. Tired of the heterosexual life, she wants to reinvent her desires, her aspirations and her dreams in a more fantastic life with Pipeelika. She says: "I want something of my own" (Kapur : 148). Aastha who begins by claiming her own money ends up claiming her own body. When Aastha begins to explore the feminine universe, she hates the heterosexual life man controls her body and freedom. She furiously tells her husband: "I am not a sex

object, you have others for that" (Kapur : 224).

To assert their lesbian life. Pipeelika provokes Aastha to abandon authoritative husband and be next to her all the time. The exploration of their bodies evokes feminine eroticism in them. Pipeelika's caress and touch are soft and harmonious to Aastha. Pipeelika touches every part of her body with her mouth realizing that Aastha is very fond of her. Kapur describes: "Understanding how Aastha feels, Pipee takes her time touching every crevice of her body with her mouth" (Kapur: 231). Kapur also describes: "In the meantime, they talked about the discovery of female love, the story of a three-month relationship. There is also teasing and the pleasure of an intimacy that is complete and absolute [...] "(Kapur : 231). Pipeelika takes the pins from Aastha and strokes the open hair. This reminds Aastha of her mother who oiled her hair every Sunday when she was young. Aastha closes her eyes and feels she is in a hot bath. Cixous says:

the mother is also a metaphor; it is necessary, it is enough that the woman be given by another the best of herself so that the woman can love herself and give back in love the body which was "born" to her (Cixous, 2010: 48, Translation is mine).

Pipeelika's caress reminds Aastha of a mother's caress which is gentle yet powerful. For Cixous, the mother is omnipotent and generous distributor of love, nourishment, comfort and plenitude. Cixous values the mother who exists in all women. Pipeelika expresses her state of soul when she says: "We have to struggle for acceptance and the right to love as we feel" (Kapur: 237).

Aastha confesses to Pipeelika: "My whole life is a fabric of lies, you are the one true thing that I have" (Kapur: 242). Aastha marvels that Pipeelika's love gives her a true, worthwhile, harmonious and perfect existence. Luckily, Aastha and Pipeelika

seize the opportunity of a demonstration which would be organized for three weeks from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. Aastha participates in this demonstration to enjoy the feminine perfume of Pipeelika. They spend three weeks in the exploration of the female bodies which are linked in corporeal play. Irigaray says that "the woman has sexes almost everywhere. She enjoys everywhere" (Irigaray, 1977:28, Translation is). Aastha enjoys multiple pleasures; she can understand the power and richness of her femininity. She loves the feminine scent of Pipeelika. Aastha has no thoughts of her family as wife, mother and daughter-in-law. It is this feminine space that brings her warmth, enthusiasm to survive and maternal care. Pipeelika's love is immense and eternal like the sea whose horizon touches the sky. She confesses to Pipeelika: "I want a safe place, a warm place, loved place" (Kapur: 265). Aastha often dreams of this lesbian life that allows her liberation and complete enjoyment where there is no authority. Pipeelika's maternal love liberates Aastha from all kinds of domestic and patriarchal oppression. She is a renewed woman who listens to the voice of her own body and values it. She realizes the multiplicity of bodily desire.

2. CONCLUSION:

Feminine jouissance, experienced by the lesbian women, is a type of deconstruction because it destroys the codes structures held by culture. Lesbian eroticism is an act of resistance to the patriarchal power and a rejection of the institution of heterosexuality. The pleasure of self-discovery is realized through lesbian sex and autoeroticism in the female community. Lesbianism provides the space in which woman can live freely. By transgressing patriarchal laws to seek female jouissance, our protagonist inscribes her female body and affirms her identity as a desiring subject.

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