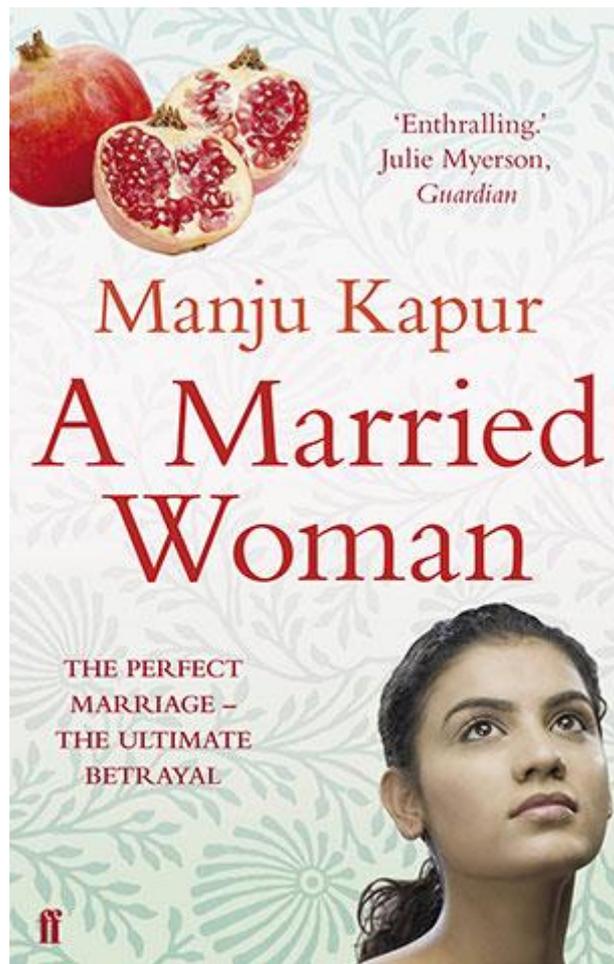


Aspiring for Distinctiveness in Manju Kapur's  
*A Married Woman*

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Courtesy: <https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/fiction/literary-fiction/A-Married-Woman-Manju-Kapur-9780571260669>

**Abstract**

Indian writers in English have made the most noteworthy contribution in the field of the novel. Feminist writers give top priority to the maximization of freedom of woman and minimization of patriarchal priority. The actualities of women's lives seem to be gaining greater significance day by day. Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and violence committed against women. Women have always been less important individuals. When a woman lives in a male dominated society obviously she undergoes many sufferings. Manju Kapur, an Indian

woman novelist, highlights her deep insight into human nature and her understanding of day-to-day problems. Her female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the boundaries of a conservative society. In her novel *A Married Woman* Manju Kapur brings forth those hard facts that will go a long way in demystifying marriage. The novel discusses the tragic tale of the middle class working women with Astha as the main heroine and Peepilika as the titular one. Astha imbibes middle class values and latter suffers from a sense of incompleteness in her married life. Through the personal private lives of these characters Manju Kapur gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her protagonists. Manju Kapur is convinced that the new, educated Indian woman has the capacity to determine her priorities for self-discovery. This paper speaks about the problems faced by the protagonist of the novel to have a distinctiveness of her own.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal System, Distinctiveness, Identity Crisis, Feminine Sensibility.

### **Manju Kapur among the Feminist Writers**

Indian writers in English have made the most noteworthy contribution in the field of the novel. Feminist writers give top priority to the maximization of freedom of woman and minimization of patriarchal priority. The actualities of women's lives seem to be gaining greater significance day by day. Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and violence committed against women. Women have always been less important individuals. When a woman lives in a male dominated society obviously she undergoes many sufferings. Manju Kapur, an Indian woman novelist, highlights her deep insight into human nature and her understanding of day-to-day problems. Her female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the boundaries of a conventional society.

### ***A Married Woman***

In her novel *A Married Woman* Manju Kapur brings forth those hard facts that will go a long way in demystifying marriage. The novel discusses the tragic story of the middle class working women with Astha as the main protagonist and Peepilika as the titular one. Astha takes in middle class values and latter suffers from a sense of incompleteness in her married life. Through the private lives of these characters Manju Kapur exposes the existing tension and the oscillation of the self between the two states of mind. She gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her protagonists. The urge to lead their own lives and the urge to stimulate them drive them ultimately to disappointment. This is a beautiful, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious chaos in India. The story is really about how Astha changes from a unsure, college girl who has dreams of a mills and boons-type hero jumping in and carrying her away to a mature, middle-aged woman who feels a little alienated in her marriage as time passes. This paper depicts how Astha has lost her distinctiveness and how until the end she was unable to find herself.

### **Astha**

Astha, an educated, upper middle class, working in Delhi is the protagonist in this novel. As a girl, she was brought up with large supplements of fear. She was her parent's only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage were her parent's burdens. But like a common school going girl she often imagines of romantic and handsome young man holding her in his strong manly embrace. In her adolescent she falls in love with a boy of her age. Thinking of him day and night, she was unable to eat, sleep and study. This relationship is lost within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for his higher studies. When she has fallen in love, for the first time she has lost her individuality. Astha's marriage is settled with Hemant and soon she got fed up with her marriage life.

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 18:9 September 2018

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Astha starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and her parents. Soon she becomes the mother for two children. Her temperamental strangeness with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of mother and father for her children. This denies herself completion and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Discontentment leads her to disobedience and agitation. Her anxiety, uneasiness, and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her sorrow, over her anxious relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self – esteem in facing the challenges of life.

Agitation drives Astha to enjoy complete loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its slight domination and she yearns for liberty. In the midst of a family and its vast minefield of income, expenses, rights, responsibilities, knowledge, dissatisfaction, agitation and dependency, Astha enjoys the destiny of the poorest. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and “Always adjusting to everybody’s needs” (227). She pushes her frustrations aside, focuses on her duties as mother, wife and daughter. Her children, husband and increasingly – passionless marital sex take up her life. But the tensions continue to boil, surfacing from time to time as paralyzing migraines. She understands a married woman’s place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She feels for herself that, “A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth” (231). These are the necessary basics of a married woman. She contemplates marriage as awful decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of anger, pain and indecisiveness. Judging the male impression of woman, she thinks that a married woman is an object of mind fucking. She does not think that marriage is just about a sex; somewhat it provides curiosity, togetherness and esteem. Being ragged between her duty and liability, confidence and truth, public ethos and personal principles she thinks that a tired woman cannot make good wives and she struggles from emotional freedom.

Astha meets the anguished widow of a Muslim activist whom she had admired and who died in the violence in Ayodhya. There follows a hot affair between Astha and Pipeelika Khan: two women crossing social limits to find comfort and understanding in each other’s arms. She feels great empathy to Peepilika and a powerful physical relationship is established between them. This relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. They both live together, and deep emotional attachment develops between them. Astha is in the verge of losing her conventional marriage. Peepilika leaves India to study in abroad and Astha returns back to her family.

### **To Conclude**

Thus, Kapur frankly depicts the love affair between two women, but less attention has been paid to the historical and political context in which relationship develops. It is an attempt to insert an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually, a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as the relationship with a man. The novel exposes the domestic relationship. Kapur has remained very truthful in presenting the women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio political levels.

Manju Kapur presents the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium for self expression. We see the coming out of new women in Manju Kapur’s heroines, who do not want to be puppets for others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal ideas that inflict women towards domesticity, they declare their distinctiveness and aspiring self reliance through education. They care for the desire of

being autonomous and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond their husband and children. They are not silent rebels, but are courageous, forthright, strong-minded and action oriented. All her protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle on their own. In spite of getting education and freedom the women protagonists of Manju Kapur's novels does not blossom into new women in the real sense. Though they dare to cross one patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are restricted and all they can do is to Adjust, Compromise and Adapt. Through Astha, the central character in *A Married Woman*, Kapur has revealed women have always been less important individuals and aspiring for distinctiveness of her own.

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