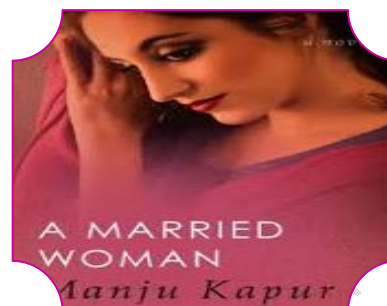




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## THE UNSPEAKABLE LOVE: SUBALTERN ISSUES IN A MARRIED WOMAN

**Dr. Shantilal Indrabhan Ghegade**  
Assistant Professor & Head , Department of English ,  
Savitribai College of Arts, Pimpalgaon Pisa,  
Tal. Shrigonda Dist. Ahmednagar.  
Affiliates to S. P. Pune Uni. Pune.



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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper is a modest attempt at analyzing the ways in which subaltern issues find their presentation in the novel of Manju Kapur. As the paper progresses, it addresses the questions of subalternity and ways intended, they found their manifestation in the novel A Married Woman. It should also be noted at the outset that the present work is not so much about the debates emerging about the intellectual worth of the subaltern aspects as much as about the artistic handling of these issues by Manju Kapur. By adopting a certain intellectual position within postcolonial discourses, the study examines the question of marginality and the voices of the unheard reconfiguring in subaltern theorization. The term "Subaltern" might mean different things in different contexts and hence it is important to clarify the sense in which the term is used in the present paper and also justification as to why a subaltern approach is found appropriate in analyzing the novel of Manju Kapur.*

**KEYWORDS:** *unspeakable love, subaltern issues, postcolonial discourses, unheard reconfiguring.*

### INTRODUCTION :

The novel focuses on the relationship between the two women- Astha and Pipeelika. Astha is the wife of Hemant, a foreign returned MBA qualified student and a proprietor of a company of TV sets. She is the daughter of a progressive father and conformist mother of the middle class family in south Delhi. A Hindu Brahmin girl, Pipeelika is the daughter of the professor and the wife of a Muslim (Aijaz). Manju Kapur describes the women protagonists as the victims of biology, gender and domestic violence. According to her manhood is questioned and womanhood is fragmented.

Astha is the only daughter to her parents and this rarely can be seen having lonely daughter to her parents in the Indian family structure. In Indian social structure a birth of a boy is essential to continue the family lineage ahead but it is not followed in Astha's family. Astha's father is not like traditional Indian fathers who educate their daughters to marry suitable bridegrooms. Education is the surest way to empower women so that they do not remain subalterns in their lives. Though Astha, from her childhood has been brought up in a free and frank environment, her mother regards her as a societal burden. Her parents are concerned about her education, conduct, health and marriage. Astha's father often motivates her in her study as she is a proficient girl. In the commencement of the novel, she is a submissive girl with promising academic record. Her parent anticipates much more positive result in her study. Such views marginalize girls in Indian socio-cultural situations. Extra caring tendency of the parents make their girls dependents. This tendency does not give a space to them to become self-sufficient.

Most of the modern girls come out of the patriarchal taboo to set their goals and create their identity equal to men in the society. An educated woman is able to know her own ability and right. The same thing happens with Astha. She wants to be free and from this sense, she develops her first affair with Bunty and then the other with Rohan. Hemant is her last choice decided by her parents to marry her. In her sixteen, she reads idealistic novels and starts to think about marriage, love and romance. Her affair with Bunty, an Army Cadet at NDA, Kharakwasla is the result of her reading and thinking.

The act of Astha shows a different dimension of her emotion to break down the traditional ideas of morality, virginity, chastity and purity. It directly challenges to the Indian society where a man is free to satisfy his passion before marriage and why not women. Such act of man is glorified as manly act compared to the violation of purity, chastity and virginity of the females. But such act of a woman to satisfy her passion before marriage is considered an act of immorality. It is attached to the name and fame of the family. Manju Kapur tries to uncover the double standards of male dominated society through Astha's character.

The manifestation of Astha's wish and her protest towards her husband's unwanted demands show that she does not believe in obedient or subaltern and suppressed place in her own family. Though she seems submissive, she gives importance to her inner urge. She accepts traditional married life as per the conventions of Hindu culture but she does not want to lose her individuality. Her rejection to the desire of her husband is a silent protest against exploitation and marginalization.

Realities of life are different from the romantic thoughts. After the demise of her father Astha comforts her mother to come out of the distress. She becomes lonely with her husband's death. She expects Hemant's help but due to his hectic schedule he does not often reside with them. Astha attempts to keep herself busy with her school. In such situation responsibility to take care of woman is somewhat neglected in family. In this condition traditional woman like Astha's mother lives forever in subaltern position.

Role of mother makes Astha busy in her home that forces her to think about her job. Sometime she thinks to quit the job due to over burdened responsibilities. She has been sandwiched between her job and her family. Though her job gives her status yet she thinks to leave it for her family responsibilities. The load of the housework and the school affect her so much that she begins suffering from headaches. Intensive headache makes her restless. Astha comes to know that her problem becomes inseparable part of her daily life. Intolerable suffering makes her oversensitive that affects her daily activities. She is given to going out in sunshine, sleeping too late in the night, eating unsuitable food which aggravates her headache.

Most of the times, women have deprived other women from their rights and claims to their own property. We can see that the real heir to the property of Astha's mother is Astha but Astha's mother prefers Hemant. It is an instance of a woman becoming an obstacle in the progress of a woman. This is a small issue but here the real heir of women is challenged by the thinking of Astha's mother. Even Hemant supports this view though he is a modern and well educated man. Nobody takes her claim serious and Astha comes to know that there is no use claiming such things. Kapur shows male dominance in all monetary decisions in traditional family. What Virmati thinks is just the equal position in the family rather than to be a master and slave and the result is that she is smacked by her husband by calling her as lacking something in her. Here, Astha understands the price of being a woman and tries to wash her subaltern stigma in the society.

Another significant feature of this novel is that the women try to chalk out their ways of living. After the death of her husband, a woman's life takes a new mode where she remains no more in her life. Society imposes more obligations on a widow. Kapur rejects all obligations to present her female in modern look. When Astha visits Ayodhya she meets Pipeelika there, Aijaz's widow in a different situation. Their intimacy gives a new dimension to their relationship and they find satisfaction. Pipeelika's response to the monkey jump on Astha was very serious as she observes Astha's arms, back and neck which show their closeness with each other. Astha reveals her own identity by giving a speech for women at Ayodhya in which Astha appeals to women's sentiments, rather than the technicalities of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy. She tries to search her identity in her country rather than involving in religious controversy. So Pipee stands against religious and cultural conventions and customs to express her anguish. She decides to

take revenge on society through her emergent association with another woman and become indivisible to show that two women make an ideal couple. Lesbian relation between Astha and Pipee is another rebellious reaction against conservative culture.

The projection of lesbian relation tears the so called moral veil of Indian culture where morality becomes more crucial than the satisfaction of an individual. Morality is made more important than physical needs of a widow woman. A widow is restricted under the name of purity and chastity in Indian culture. The novelist uncovers the paradoxical nature of Indian society by putting an example of a widow who craves for her physical satisfaction. The delineation of Pipee's character as a widow makes readers ponder upon the discriminatory attitude of Indian society towards widow and widower. Repressive socio-cultural situation estranges Astha and makes her feel inferior. Soon she turns to Pipeelika. Positive plans are made for the display of Astha's paintings in the reminiscence of Aijaz. This makes her busy. Everyone connected to this group comes forward and donates one painting for the exhibition. Even she also gets a good acknowledgment of her painting exhibition and remunerates thirty thousand rupees. She is happy outside but at home she feels lonely.

In order to come out of the circumstances Astha develops a lesbian relation with Pipeelika which brings both of them closer to each other and they become two 'ants'. Astha is fascinated towards Pipeelika, a widow in distress against male oppression. Astha validates lesbian relation as an essential part of human need. Their relation to each other makes them happy to forget suffering and pain. They get internal power out of their fulfillment in obsessive fantasies and love making. Lesbian attempt helps Pipeelika forget her agonizing past for some time. For Astha, it is a sweet vengeance on her husband to become a new woman.

Although this relationship does not long last but its rebellious spirit challenges the male authority over sex. A subaltern or submissive woman has to act as per her husband's wish and a man always takes advantage to satisfy his desire. The issue of her own right on her body is revealed through the relationship to Pipee in the novel. The relationship between two women does not generate any aggression in society so Astha thinks that Pipee is a woman and therefore there is no risk in breaking her marital relations but it defectively affects her marital life. Once a night when Hemant starts his customary sex routine, Astha opposes him and shows no interest by feeling noting like it. It upsets Hemant because it was the first time that his wife did not sense like it. Even she tells him that she is not a sex article to please whenever he ordered and she reminds him of the condom episode and hints at a different option. This is the change in Astha's personality. She knows that Hemant's necessity is "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth" (AMW, 231). This is the vengeance which Astha takes against her husband. This does not signify that the novel is a lesbian text.

Astha feels oneness of her relation with Pipee more than husband and a wife. She shares personal moments of her life which she had never undergone before. But she cannot neglect her family responsibility yet tries to come out of patriarchal pressures. They struggle for independence and liberty but they are forced towards family by patriarchy and their own fears. It is not a complete revolt against patriarchy. When Hemant has a heart attack, Astha has to perform her responsibility to the best of her capacity. Astha's involvement in Pipee and her care for Hemant though he is not ready to change himself shows Astha a subaltern.

Astha comes to know about Pipee's decision to go to U.S.A. in connection with her Ph.D. which becomes unbearable to her. She becomes terrified and tears come out of her eyes and she begins suffering from headache. After Pipeelika's disappearance Astha feels exhausted and drowsy. Apparently she seems normal but within she is changed a lot within.

Women in patriarchal families observe moral standards about sexual conduct and any deviation from the assigned responsibility is viewed with dissatisfaction. A woman loving another woman is considered harmful and such relation always brings women under stress. Such relations show that the male is not all that significant in their life. They seem to gain more sexual gratification when they are together than their male associates.

From this moment, Astha begins to forget that she is a married woman having two children. She spends much time with Pipeelika. Astha ignores her home duties because there are Mala and Bahadur, the family servants to take care of her children and Hemant. Their level of understanding to each other makes them share their sentiments of happiness, terror, rage, love. This is an act of challenging the male authority over woman.

By this act of lesbian relationship, Astha wants to prove that to satisfy the desire; a woman need not depend on man. Astha and Pipee's relation challenges the male dominated world. They are familiar with each other's likes and dislikes and their togetherness in Ayodhya brings them closer. Astha spends a lot of time with Pipee and she feels herself stronger and more convinced in the company of Pipee. Ekta Yatra from Kashmir to Kanyakumari for the sake of communal harmony brings them much nearer to each other. In spite of the resistance at home, she goes to Ekta Yatra leaving her children and family behind. They spend good time during the yatra. One day Astha comes to know about Pipee's lesbian relation with Neeraj and Sameera. She is totally disheartened by Pipee's severe obsession and past relations. Now, she hovers over whether to permit herself in an unimaginable love or not.

In the description of Astha and Pipeelika's relation Manju Kapur subverts Indian sexual morality. She projects her female characters out of the sexual moral taboo. In sexual moral taboo woman is taken weak and emotional in Indian socio-cultural context. It is the ideology of male dominated society to make women subaltern section of the society. Women are taught that they are beautiful, delicate and emotional. Their beauty is glorified to make them delicate and emotional. In reality this is the double standard of patriarchal society. In the process of daily living delicacy and beauty become the parameters of weaknesses of women. Manju Kapur tries to deconstruct the ideology of sexual morality by projecting sexual relation between two married women for their satisfaction

Astha justifies her authority by pointing out Hemant's casual nature towards her who is always busy in travelling for the trade causes. She maintains that Hemant needs her body to gratify his wishes where she is left unsatisfied so she accomplishes her own sexual craving by living with Pipeelika. The two women Astha and Pipeelika stay together during an all India *yatra* planned by the Manch. Further they engage themselves in a lesbian relationship but unluckily they estrange from each other and their future remains unknown.

In their womanly contact habit Astha and Pipeelika discharge their personal agony and suffering in a sense of devotion to each other, thinking that their own identities are endangered under the shade of mother, wife and daughter. They become others' belongings to be shared. In their lesbian relation Pipeelika gets settled down in the world of forgetfulness while Astha takes a sweet vengeance on her husband. In this act of revenge, sex, little thrill, little eagerness and much imagination, she has a big jerk in her mind and this cripples her married life.

Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* carries the transformation from subaltern standing to feministic movement with more ideological and notional connotations. The novel is a torch bearer of women's liberation. The novel can be read on three levels - feministic level, historical level and lastly at the level of deconstruction and post modernism. Kapur handles the subject of gender disparity in Indian background and points out the social reality that woman is always trapped by social discrimination. Kapur focuses the women's suffering due to domestic problems and strain by patriarchy which deprives them of consolation and peace of mind.

The reality of subaltern consciousness in Manju Kapur's novel depicts how women find themselves in the confines of patriarchy. No doubt they find ways to extend and affirm their self-identity and they defy pro-men Indian society. They try to rise above their depressing conditions, emphasize their individuality and aspire for independence through education and some other specialized and social works. They do not succumb to tyrannical forces and try to come out of such situation as courageous, strong-minded and vigorous persons. The relationship between Astha and Peeplika is depicted in order to show the subsistence of new option in man-woman relationship. Both of them try to find fulfillment, pleasure, comfort, happiness and achievement in different ways. They do not hesitate to share their bodily impulses by involving in sexual

satisfaction. Both Astha and Peeplika prove that their bodies are not commodities in the male dominated society. Their relation with each other shows their independent status and separate notions of identity.

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