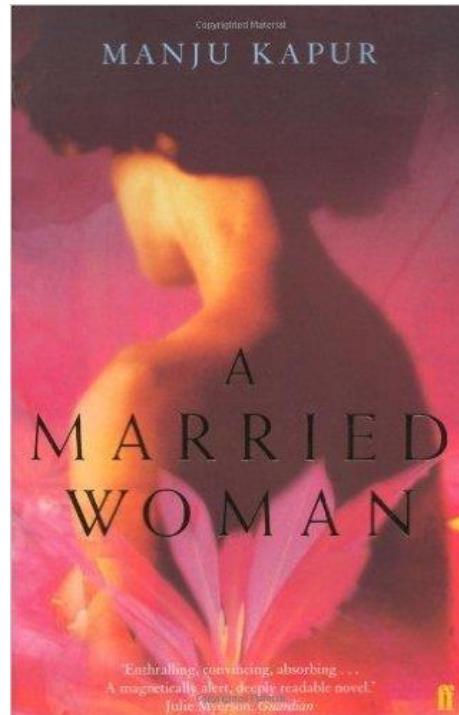


## A Study on the Controversies and Compromises in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

R. A. Rajasekaran and G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

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### Abstract

The focus of this paper is on the tension we could easily identify in Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman*. There is a cunning admixture of controversies and compromises in this novel. Self and the Other come into conflict and also make compromises. Astha's marital relationship with Hemant, her husband, seems to make her lose her self. Her dealings with her husband and relatives, followed by her daring extra-marital relationship, and masculine hegemony are analyzed. Aristotle's three notions, "deep content" consisting of *hamartia* (sin), *anagnorisis* (realization), and *peripetia* (reversal) are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Self and the Other conflict, masculine hegemony, Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman*, Aristotle's notions.

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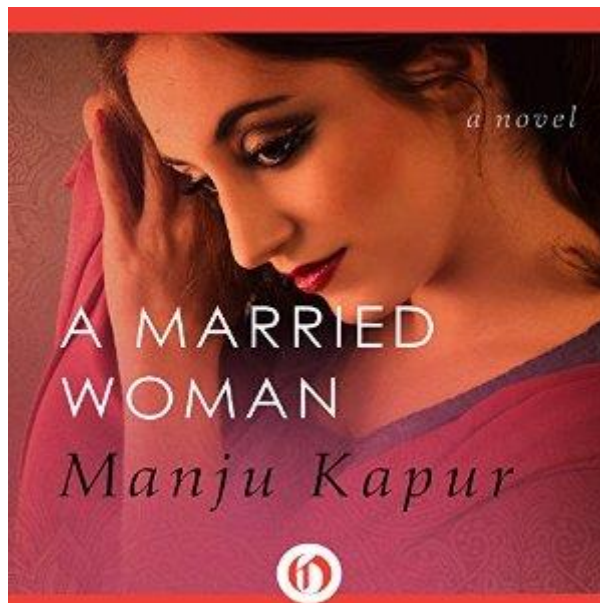
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## Self and the Other

There is a discernible tension in Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman*. The tension in this novel is due to the cunning admixture of controversies and compromises. It is a dialogue between the "self" and the "other". The "self" symbolizes the andro-centric creed while the "other" symbolizes the gyno-centric species. On several occasions, this binary opposition crops up and mars the harmony of families by driving a wedge into the otherwise unruffled abodes of peace.

## Astha's Marital Relationship



The protagonist Astha's marital relationship with her husband Hemant forms the nucleus of the novel. There is a strain in their relationship because of the andro-centric mindset of the latter. As Astha happens to be an English teacher, she is well-read and well-informed. She knows for certain that she is treated as the 'other' – the lesser mortal. She thinks that she has lost her 'self' for the sake of her husband, children and in-laws. She thinks that she has lost even her entity an individual. This irks her and irritates her. As a result of which, she becomes a grumbling woman. Though she tries hard to reveal her mind to her husband, she fails to do so. The unheard voice of Astha always remains unheard. Her woes too continue unabated.

## Husband Hemant

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Hemant, a typical business man of the competitive world, is quite unmindful of the sentimental mindset of his wife. The husband who fails to discern the unheard melodies of her soul-mate will have to lose her. More so, the one who does not succeed in listening to the music of the heart throbs of his wife can never be a successful husband.

### **The Divide between the Couple – Extra Marital Affair**

The divide between the couple widens so much that it can be hardly bridged.

There is no change for the better in their life. Hemant remains a non-descript person incapable of love and sharing. As a result, the fear of being let down gnaws at Astha and leaves her with a feeling of rejection. This rejection often throws her into occasional bouts of depression.

After a considerable period of lamentation, she develops an extra-marital affair with the widowed Piplika.

### **Manju Kapur’s Description and Explanation**

According to Kapur, a woman falling in love with another woman is nothing but an “exigency” for the betterment of the plot of this novel.

In her personal interview to her student Neha Dixit in *The Hindu* (April 3, 2011), Kapur explains the logic behind the inclusion of the lesbian relationship of the protagonist Astha:

In *A Married Woman*, I was looking at how women relate to each other. It turned out to be sexual only because of the plot’s exigencies. Female friendship did not seem to look very interesting when I was writing it; but when I changed it into an affair it developed its own dynamics, disappointments, expectations. So to that extent, perhaps, I was not true to my initial theme. Some people tried to ask if I was trying to emulate “Fire”, the movie and that made me very angry.

### **Masculine Hegemony Embedded in the Man-Woman Relationship in the Backdrop of Aristotle’s Notions**

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As a true feminist Kapur wants to deconstruct the masculine hegemony embedded in the man-woman relationship by introducing the lesbian episode. Though she says that she has introduced the lesbian relationship in order to strengthen the plot, she falls back upon the Aristotlean “deep content” consisting of *hamartia* (sin), *anagnorisis* (realization), and *peripetia* (reversal). According to Aristotle, this is the “raw material” for any narrative.

In his critical essay entitled “Narratology”, Peter Barry says that Aristotle in his *Poetics* identifies three elements in a number of stories:

Aristotle’s three categories are essentially to do with the underlying themes and moral purposes of stories, being very much about what might be called ‘deep content’, since in an important sense they all concern ‘inner events’, a moral defect, the recognition of its existence and the consequences of its existence. The presence of these three is easy to discern beneath many narratives, acting as the generative force of their moral impact (Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*” P.218).

### **Deconstructing the Masculine Hegemony**

Kapur might have found it very difficult to deconstruct the masculine hegemony of Hemant without incorporating the element of the *hamartia* (sin) in the manifestations of Astha - Piplika lesbian relationship. Astha is entangled in a controversy because of this relationship. The novelist creates a storm in the life of the protagonist. She does not condemn nor does she glorify such a relationship. At the outset, the protagonist thinks that her lesbian relationship is more of a correspondence resulting in their oneness – an act of fusion of their souls. But in due course of time, she recognizes that she is not able to sever the relationship of her husband, children and in-laws. The initial passion for the widow wears away. Normally, such a relationship ends up in an elopement as it happens in the case of a man and woman – Shagun and Ashok Khanna – in Kapur’s *Custody*. But here Kapur fails to sustain the relationship of Astha and Piplika in a similar vein.

There is a controversy in the deviant relationship. When the passion for the relationship withers away because of the pressures from within and without, it becomes a compromise. Kapur highlights the point that such relationships cannot be sustained in the Indian context.

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