

# ***Constraining Female Desire and Ambition in Manju Kapur’s “A Married Woman”***

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## **Abstract**

Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* is a poignant feminist novel that examines how patriarchal norms, domestic responsibilities, and cultural expectations suppress female desire, ambition, and individuality in Indian society. Set against the backdrop of 1990s India — a period marked by rising religious nationalism and socio-political turbulence — the novel follows Astha, an educated, middle-class woman whose roles as wife and mother gradually consume her identity as an artist and thinker. This paper analyzes how Kapur constructs Astha’s personal journey as a reflection of broader gendered and political oppression, focusing on key themes such as marriage as containment, the repression of artistic and sexual expression, and the internalized guilt that stifles nonconformist identity. Through long-form literary analysis and engagement with feminist and postcolonial theorists, the study argues that Astha’s story is not merely a tale of unfulfilled longing but a nuanced critique of a culture that idealizes women’s silence, obedience, and self-erasure.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, female desire, creative suppression, queer resistance, Indian feminism, domestic ideology

## **1. Introduction**

Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* (2002) is a powerful feminist narrative that interrogates the societal expectations imposed on Indian women, particularly in relation to marriage, sexuality,

and creative autonomy. Set in the politically charged atmosphere of post-Babri Masjid India, the novel centers on Astha, a middle-class Delhi woman whose personal growth is thwarted by the twin forces of domestic conformity and cultural orthodoxy. Kapur constructs a portrait of a woman divided between her assigned roles as wife and mother and her repressed desires for intimacy, independence, and self-expression. Astha's journey is emblematic of what Ipshita Chanda describes as the "politics of gendered socialization" where women are trained "to desire desirelessness" (Chanda 36). From her early years, Astha is conditioned to view marriage not as a partnership but as a duty: "It was a woman's destiny. A husband, children, a home to run. What else could she want?" (Kapur 7). This quote captures the insidious nature of patriarchal conditioning — the internalization of societal norms that redefine female ambition as selfishness and desire as deviance. Critics such as Ashok Kumar argue that Astha's life becomes "a mirror of the countless Indian women who are denied the right to be individuals" (Kumar 105). Her eventual foray into a same-sex relationship with Pipeelika represents a moment of defiance, but it also reveals the limitations placed on non-conformist desire within a heteronormative framework. As Sreemati Ghosh notes, Kapur's treatment of lesbian love is "not meant to shock but to humanize a woman's pursuit of sexual autonomy" (Ghosh 40). Despite this moment of liberation, Astha ultimately returns to her traditional domestic role, a retreat that underscores the powerful grip of cultural expectations. Kapur's critique extends beyond the private sphere into the public and political. The novel's backdrop — the communal unrest of the 1990s — functions as more than context. It mirrors the ideological constraints that stifle Astha's voice. As Anuradha Paul contends, *A Married Woman* "weaves the personal and political into a seamless fabric where the oppression of the female body parallels the suppression of dissent in the national body politic" (Paul 46).

This paper explores how *A Married Woman* exposes the multifaceted suppression of female desire and ambition in Indian society. By examining Astha's emotional, sexual, and artistic struggles, the paper demonstrates how patriarchal power operates not only through overt coercion but also through emotional obligation and social conformity. Drawing on feminist

critical perspectives and close readings of Kapur's prose, the analysis reveals that Astha's narrative is not merely a story of personal conflict, but a commentary on the systemic silencing of women's truths.

## **2. Patriarchy and the Politics of Marriage**

Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* unpacks the quiet violence embedded within the everyday institution of Indian marriage, where emotional care, affection, and domestic responsibility are used not to empower the wife but to restrain her. Astha, the protagonist, is not forced into marriage through explicit coercion, but through deeply normalized expectations. Her journey into domestic life is framed as smooth and dignified, but it is in fact a slow surrender of her voice, agency, and artistic spirit. The narrative makes it painfully clear that marriage, while not oppressive in its outward appearance, operates as a soft system of control. This control is evident from the very beginning of her marital life, where even the illusion of choice is denied to her. Kapur writes:

“Her parents had arranged the match, checked his income, background, and prospects, and told her she would be happy. She had met him once before the wedding, at a restaurant, where he had complimented her appearance, and assured her that he was broad-minded, believed in letting his wife live her life. She had smiled and nodded, reassured that all her questions had been answered without being asked. At twenty-four, marriage was not a question of desire but of timing. She had not imagined alternatives.” (Kapur 12)

This moment is more than just narrative exposition; it is a microcosm of the larger social framework that teaches women to defer, to adapt, and to suppress their instincts. Astha does not actively choose marriage; she submits to a pre-written script. Her reassurance comes not from conversation but from compliance. The phrase “she had not imagined alternatives” is especially revealing — it does not reflect a lack of intelligence or ambition but a lack of cultural permission

to imagine otherwise. Scholar Ipshita Chanda contextualizes this in her feminist theory of gendered socialization, writing, “The Indian woman is shaped by structures that teach her to desire her own disappearance — to find worth in self-negation, and power in silent endurance” (Chanda 36). Astha, like many Indian women, does not resist the structure because she has never been shown how. She believes, as she has been told, that domestic fulfillment is the highest form of achievement.

As the narrative unfolds, Kapur shows how Astha’s emotional and creative energies are redirected toward caregiving and silence. While her husband Hemant is not violent, he praises her only when she conforms. He tells her, “You’re doing so well, Astha. Our children are happy, the house runs smoothly, you don’t complain — unlike other women, who are always dissatisfied. It’s a blessing to have a wife like you” (Kapur 78). On the surface, this is affectionate. But underneath, it is a chilling reminder that Astha is being rewarded for shrinking. She is not praised for thinking, questioning, or creating — she is praised for her ability to remain quiet. Scholar Sangeeta Singh expands on this in her analysis of gender and space, noting, “The emotional economy of Indian middle-class households is built on the invisible labor of women, whose identities are validated only when they do not disrupt, when they do not ask, and when they do not dream” (Singh 122). What Astha receives in return for her silence is not love but convenience — a domestic harmony purchased at the cost of personal stagnation.

Kapur makes this stagnation almost tactile through metaphor. In a pivotal passage, we see how deeply Astha has internalized her own containment:

“She had not thought of painting for weeks. There was no time, no encouragement, and no space to be alone. Her hands, which once held a brush with joy, now cooked and cleaned. She had stopped arguing with herself about it. The children came first. Hemant’s needs came next. Her own desires — they came somewhere after everything else. It was not that she had no ambition. It was

that ambition had nowhere to go. It sat like a folded piece of cloth, untouched in a drawer she rarely opened.” (Kapur 93)

Here, Kapur doesn’t need to show dramatic conflict to make her point. The tragedy is not in what is taken, but in what is forgotten. The image of ambition as “a folded piece of cloth” is heartbreakingly ordinary — clean, tucked away, and unused. This metaphor encapsulates how socially sanctioned domesticity doesn’t destroy women’s dreams by force but by suffocating them in layers of routine. The loss is made even more painful by its quietness. Nothing explicitly stops her from painting — but everything in her world makes it impossible.

Even moments of introspection are invalidated by Hemant. When Astha expresses emotional fatigue or dissatisfaction, her concerns are not met with dialogue but with soft dismissal. “‘You’re tired, that’s all,’ he said, brushing her hair with his hand. ‘You think too much sometimes. It’s not good for you. Just relax. Everything is fine’” (Kapur 104). The surface tenderness of this moment masks a deeper emotional silencing. He reinterprets her distress as irrational, suggesting that thinking too much is the cause of her unrest. This is a textbook example of what feminist theorist Anuradha Paul refers to as “emotional coercion” — where “a woman’s unhappiness is never treated as legitimate; it is pathologized, dismissed, or attributed to her inability to be content” (Paul 47). Kapur critiques this cultural habit of redefining women’s dissatisfaction not as a call for change, but as a personal flaw.

Astha’s growing alienation becomes clear in a moment of private breakdown:

“She sat on the bed and tried to write again, like she used to in college. But the words wouldn’t come. Her hand felt foreign on the page. The silence in the house was not inspiring, it was suffocating. And in that silence, she began to cry, quietly, as though even her tears needed permission.” (Kapur 127)

This passage encapsulates the emotional climax of domestic repression. The silence is not peaceful, but oppressive. Her identity — once defined by her voice, her art, and her thought —

has been displaced by chores, roles, and expectations. Even her private emotional expression is restrained. She cries not freely, but “as though even her tears needed permission.” Kapur here illustrates not only the erasure of the woman’s voice but also the internalization of that erasure.

Astha’s story, while deeply personal, also reflects a broader reality. Scholar Ashok Kumar observes that “The educated Indian woman in postcolonial fiction is often portrayed as caught between what she is allowed to want and what she truly needs. In navigating this contradiction, she either learns to survive in silence or risks being marked as deviant” (Kumar 108). Kapur refuses to give her protagonist a melodramatic exit or a triumphant escape. Instead, she gives us the truth — that many women stay, not because they are weak, but because they are taught to believe they have no rightful claim to more.

### **3. Female Desire and Queer Resistance**

Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* is remarkable not only for its critique of heteronormative marriage but for its bold and empathetic exploration of female same-sex desire — a theme rarely centered in mainstream Indian English fiction. Astha’s relationship with Pipeelika becomes a turning point in her emotional and sexual awakening. While her marriage teaches her silence and surrender, her bond with Pipeelika opens a temporary space of resistance, tenderness, and self-recognition. This relationship does not just disrupt Astha’s life; it redefines what it means to be seen — as a woman, as a body, and as a mind with needs.

Astha’s first encounter with Pipeelika is not charged with passion but with intellectual and emotional curiosity. Pipeelika, a widow and activist, embodies everything Astha has been denied: autonomy, political agency, and a life beyond domestic expectations. Their intimacy develops slowly, moving from companionship to desire, as Kapur writes:

“Pipeelika’s presence made Astha feel awake in a way she had not felt in years. When they sat together, there was no pressure to perform. No role to play. Pipeelika did not need a meal, or her clothes ironed, or her mood managed. She

listened. She spoke. She challenged. And when she touched Astha's hand one evening, it was like something inside her had remembered how to feel. Not as a wife or a mother, but as a person." (Kapur 164)

This is one of the most powerful emotional revelations in the novel. The relationship is not sensationalized; it is rendered as quiet, tender, and deeply personal. Kapur makes it clear that Pipeelika does not "liberate" Astha — instead, she becomes a mirror through which Astha begins to rediscover herself. Feminist theorist **Adrienne Rich**, in her influential essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," speaks to this kind of awakening: "The lesbian continuum includes a range — through each woman's life and throughout history — of woman-identified experience" (Rich 648). What Kapur offers in *A Married Woman* is not just a queer storyline but an act of reclaiming emotional intimacy between women as a valid, radical form of existence.

However, this radical space is ultimately unsustainable within the limits of the patriarchal, heteronormative order. Astha is constantly pulled back into the orbit of her roles as a mother and wife. Her longing for Pipeelika is silenced not by law or violence, but by guilt — a feeling so ingrained that even her most authentic moments feel like betrayal. Kapur writes:

"She wanted to go with Pipeelika. To leave the city, the duties, the endless circle of expectations. But every time she thought of her children, her chest closed in. She imagined them coming home from school to an empty house. She imagined their questions. Their disappointment. She imagined Hemant, bewildered and betrayed. And she imagined the neighbours. The headlines. The shame. So she stayed. She told herself it was the right thing to do. But something in her died quietly, the way small things do when no one notices." (Kapur 194)

This passage is a masterclass in psychological realism. The rhythm of Astha's internal monologue — the listing of imagined consequences — mirrors the suffocation she feels. What

kills her relationship with Pipeelika is not lack of love, but the overwhelming pressure to conform to what is “respectable.” Here, Kapur powerfully illustrates how patriarchy doesn't need to punish women overtly; it teaches them to punish themselves.

The tragedy lies not in Astha's choice, but in the fact that she never believed she had one. Scholar **Anuradha Paul**, writing about sexual politics in *A Married Woman*, argues: “Kapur does not romanticize Astha's lesbian desire as an escape route. Instead, she positions it as a fragile, momentary rebellion against the lifelong burden of obedience” (Paul 48). Pipeelika, who is willing to embrace her identity and confront the world, becomes the counterpoint to Astha's internalized fear. This difference is not rooted in strength or weakness, but in circumstance. Astha is a mother, a wife, a woman raised to please and preserve others before herself. Her queerness is real — but the world she lives in has no room for it.

Even as their relationship dissolves, Kapur leaves behind a trace of what it meant. In one of the final scenes where Astha reflects on her time with Pipeelika, the narrative offers a rare poetic turn:

“Sometimes, in the quiet of the night, after Hemant had turned away in sleep, and the children's soft breathing filled the rooms, she would close her eyes and remember Pipeelika's hands. Not the way they touched her, but the way they held a book, the way they gestured when she spoke about justice. She remembered the warmth, the fire, the refusal to apologize. And for a moment, Astha felt like she had once lived.” (Kapur 221)

This is not a memory of lust, but of life. Astha is not recalling sexual passion but the experience of being fully present. Kapur does not offer a dramatic ending; instead, she gives Astha a fragile piece of truth — something to carry, quietly, in a life where she can't fully be herself.

The strength of Kapur’s portrayal lies in its refusal to simplify. This is not a coming-out story, nor a story of rebellion. It is a story of a woman who dares to love, but who has been so conditioned by duty, fear, and silence that she cannot hold on to it. In this, Kapur captures what Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as “the double colonization of women — by culture, and by their own internalized sense of responsibility to that culture” (Mohanty 77). Astha cannot break free, not because she is weak, but because the chains are invisible — woven into her motherhood, her marriage, her fear of letting others down. In the end, *A Married Woman* does not present queer love as a solution, but as a rare and fleeting window into what freedom could feel like. Astha does not become a different person — but she is no longer the same. She has, even if only for a moment, tasted what it means to be whole.

#### **4. Artistic Aspiration and the Erasure of Creativity**

Art, in *A Married Woman*, is more than a hobby or profession — it becomes a symbolic measure of freedom, identity, and interior life. For Astha, painting initially represents a space of self-expression, a place untouched by domestic demands or societal judgment. However, over the course of her married life, her art is systematically diminished until it is rendered decorative, utilitarian, or altogether forgotten. Kapur uses this silencing of artistic ambition to expose how patriarchy not only limits women’s bodies and choices but also colonizes their imagination.

In the early part of the novel, Astha’s connection to art is vital and vivid. Painting is not a distraction from her life; it is the thread that connects her to herself. Kapur writes:

“When she painted, she felt calm. The world narrowed into the feel of the brush between her fingers, the smell of turpentine, the white space slowly coming alive with color. It was the one time she felt she was not performing — not as daughter, not as wife, not as mother. In front of the canvas, she was simply Astha.” (Kapur

23)

This passage is crucial. The act of painting becomes her one authentic encounter with the self, unburdened by expectation. In the patriarchal structure of marriage, women are not allowed to exist as individuals. They are roles — constantly watched, interpreted, and evaluated by others. Art offers Astha a space where that gaze disappears. But this space is not sustainable. After marriage, her time, energy, and sense of ownership over her own life are slowly consumed by the demands of domestic life. She does not abandon painting; it is taken from her incrementally, through emotional obligation and structural indifference. Kapur writes:

“The easel gathered dust in a corner of the bedroom. At first, she would look at it and tell herself she would return soon. But the days filled up — lunches to pack, clothes to fold, homework to help with. Hemant was always tired, and the children needed her. When she finally sat down to paint, the colors no longer spoke to her. Her hand trembled. The lines looked false. She told herself she had lost the touch, and eventually, she stopped trying.” (Kapur 88)

This is not simply neglect — it is creative extinction. What dies here is not just her ability to paint, but her belief that she is entitled to space, silence, and time. Feminist critic **Linda Nochlin** famously asked, “Why have there been no great women artists?” and her answer was stark: because the structures of domestic life have historically denied women the physical and psychological room to create (Nochlin 150). Kapur echoes this truth with precision — not by stating it outright, but by showing its slow, silent unfolding in a woman’s everyday life. Astha’s creativity is not only suppressed but redirected. In one scene, she is praised for painting scenery for a school function, her talent reduced to unpaid decoration. Kapur writes:

“Everyone said the backdrops were beautiful. The children clapped, the teachers smiled, and Hemant said he hadn’t known she was so talented. She smiled back, said thank you, but inside she felt hollow. This was not painting. This was approval. She had become a useful wife — one who knew how to make things look pretty.” (Kapur 113)

Here, Kapur draws a sharp contrast between creation and performance. Astha is not being recognized as an artist; she is being congratulated for being helpful. Her work is valuable only when it serves the collective — never when it serves her. Scholar **Chandra Mohanty** writes of this dynamic in postcolonial feminist critique: “In the domestic sphere, a woman’s labor — even her artistic labor — is valid only when it reinforces existing hierarchies. Expression becomes acceptable when it is ornamental” (Mohanty 81). Kapur reveals this clearly: Astha’s talent survives, but only in forms that are non-threatening, beautifying, and safely apolitical. Astha’s artistic repression is further connected to her loss of emotional voice. Just as her hands no longer know how to paint, her inner self begins to lose language. In a deeply emotional moment, Kapur writes:

“She opened her notebook and stared at the blank page. Once, the words had flowed like breath — poetry, diary entries, secret stories. Now, nothing came. The blankness stared back. She felt stupid, slow. Perhaps she had always been like this and had only imagined she had something to say. She closed the book, embarrassed by her own silence.” (Kapur 119)

This is one of the most devastating passages in the novel. Astha’s internal censor — shaped by years of cultural silencing — now tells her that her voice was never real to begin with. She doesn’t just stop writing; she doubts she ever had the right to write. As **Adrienne Rich** puts it in *Of Woman Born*, “The most potent political act for a woman is to tell the truth of her own life — and the most dangerous lie is that she has no truth worth telling” (Rich 218). Astha has absorbed this lie completely, and it paralyzes her. Throughout the novel, Kapur offers moments of potential return — of Astha glimpsing her former creative self. But these are brief, flickering, and easily extinguished by duty. Even when she joins a theatre workshop with Pipeelika, her creativity becomes tied to another person’s presence. She does not re-enter the world of art as herself, but as someone temporarily permitted to play. Her creative life, like her desire, becomes fleeting — never allowed to exist as its own sustained truth. By the end of the novel, Astha’s

identity as an artist is not revived but mourned. She remembers her painting as one might remember a lost friend. Kapur writes:

“Sometimes, she dreamt of canvases — large, empty, waiting. She would wake with the feeling of color on her hands. But when she opened her eyes, the room was quiet, the easel gone, her brushes packed away. She did not even know where they were anymore.” (Kapur 234)

This final image is not dramatic, but it is tragic. It tells us what has been lost — not just time or opportunity, but a whole version of the self. Astha no longer remembers how to begin again. Her creativity, like her agency, has been tidied away, put into storage, out of sight. Manju Kapur, through these quiet moments, delivers a profound feminist commentary on how women’s art is domesticated, neutralized, and made to serve — never to speak. Astha’s erasure is not marked by crisis or catastrophe, but by slow compromise. It is this slow death of the creative self that makes the novel such a sharp critique of patriarchal domesticity. *A Married Woman* does not show us a woman denied success — it shows us a woman denied the right to even remember what she once hoped for.

## **5. Social Conformity and Political Backdrop**

While *A Married Woman* is a personal story of one woman’s emotional journey, Manju Kapur situates Astha’s individual experience within the wider socio-political framework of 1990s India — particularly in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition and the rise of Hindu nationalism. The novel’s political backdrop is not merely decorative; it mirrors and amplifies the pressures Astha faces as a woman attempting to assert a self beyond culturally sanctioned roles. The public atmosphere of rising intolerance, communal tension, and ideological rigidity parallels the private silencing of women’s desires and voices. From the beginning, Kapur places Astha’s story within the fabric of a society undergoing violent ideological shifts. Her husband, Hemant, begins working for a company connected to the right-wing nationalist movement. The family’s

financial security becomes entangled with the politics of exclusion and control. Astha's discomfort grows, not only because of Hemant's job, but because the values of the nation — discipline, obedience, loyalty — are being echoed in her own home. Kapur writes:

“Hemant began coming home late, talking about patriotism and responsibility. The company was working on a national education initiative, something that would restore pride in our heritage. He said it was necessary, now more than ever, to strengthen our identity. Astha nodded, made him tea, but inside, something twisted. The words were familiar — they reminded her of school, of prayers, of rules. They were the same words used to keep girls in line.” (Kapur 145)

Here, the connection between political language and gender discipline is unmistakable. The very rhetoric used in the nationalist movement — pride, heritage, identity — is also the language used to domesticate women. Astha recognizes the subtext, even if she cannot voice it aloud. Her silence, once personal, is now political. Feminist critic **Nivedita Menon** observes that “the nation and the home function through parallel mechanisms of control — both seek to preserve purity, continuity, and unquestioned loyalty. And in both, the woman is the keeper and the prisoner” (Menon 57). Kapur's novel embodies this truth; Astha is bound to a home that echoes the constraints of the state.

As communal tensions rise, Pipeelika emerges as a political and ideological foil to Astha. A widow and academic, Pipeelika is engaged in grassroots activism and protest against the growing religious violence. She is not only Astha's lover but her window into a world of dissent and possibility. When Astha accompanies Pipeelika to a protest rally, she experiences for the first time the raw energy of political expression. Kapur writes:

“There were people shouting, holding signs, women with fire in their voices. Astha felt a tremor inside her — not of fear, but of something electric. She had never shouted before. She had never been angry in public. But here, among

strangers, she felt a kind of safety. No one asked her to smile. No one cared if she was polite. They cared if she believed.” (Kapur 171)

This moment is transformative — not because Astha becomes a radical, but because for the first time, she is allowed to feel without censorship. The protest space temporarily liberates her from the emotional surveillance of her home. Scholar **Anuradha Paul**, in her analysis of the novel, notes, “Kapur uses the motif of protest not to signal revolution, but to illustrate what it means for a woman to step into a public space where her voice matters — even if only briefly” (Paul 49). The act of shouting in a crowd becomes a metaphor for speech itself — a reclaiming of sound after a life of silence. However, this transformation is brief. The political energy of Pipeelika’s world cannot be sustained in Astha’s reality. Her home, her children, and her fear of scandal pull her back. The state of the nation begins to mirror the state of her marriage — one where conformity is demanded, and deviation punished. Kapur reflects this with chilling symmetry:

“The newspapers were filled with flames and bodies. People were talking in whispers and accusations. In the colony, women stopped visiting Muslim neighbors. In the house, Hemant began talking about security, about honor. Astha nodded, served meals, folded clothes. Her body moved through the motions, but her mind was elsewhere. There was no place for disagreement. Not outside. Not inside.” (Kapur 182)

The domestic and the political have collapsed into each other. There is no escape. Feminist and postcolonial theorist **Chandra Talpade Mohanty** argues that in postcolonial societies, “the woman’s body becomes the ground on which national identity is inscribed — she becomes the bearer of culture, morality, and stability” (Mohanty 82). Astha’s body — sexual, desiring, and creative — is denied legitimacy both by her home and her country. To act outside of these roles is to invite shame, disorder, and collapse. Pipeelika, unburdened by marriage or children, is able to leave — to go abroad, to protest, to speak. Astha cannot. Her silence becomes

not only the price of motherhood but the price of existing in a society where women who transgress are either invisibilized or condemned. Kapur does not allow for a dramatic rupture; instead, she shows how ideology seeps into language, routine, and relationships until no rebellion is safe. Even memory becomes censored. In the closing chapters, as nationalist violence escalates in the background, Astha retreats fully into the role assigned to her. But the residue of her political and emotional awakening remains.

“She no longer spoke of protests. Pipeelika’s letters sat unread. The easel was gone. But sometimes, when she turned off the lights and lay next to Hemant, she remembered a different kind of night. A night with wind and fire and voice. And though she said nothing, her body remembered. Her heart remembered. And it beat just a little faster.” (Kapur 237)

This quiet remembrance is all that survives. Kapur does not offer revolution — she offers residue. A trace of what could have been. And in doing so, she critiques not only marriage and motherhood, but also a national climate where fear, conformity, and silence rule both the household and the street.

## **6. Conclusion**

In *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur delivers a subtle yet powerful indictment of the systems — familial, societal, cultural, and political — that render women’s desires secondary, their ambitions invisible, and their identities fragmented. Astha’s journey is marked not by rebellion or victory, but by the quiet erosion of self through the emotional labor of caregiving, the demands of respectability, and the haunting echoes of unrealized potential. Her brief moments of awakening — whether through art, love, or protest — are consistently stifled by the internalized weight of motherhood, marriage, and moral duty. Yet, within these moments, Kapur preserves something rare: not just a critique, but a trace of resistance, however fragile. By placing Astha’s personal silence alongside the broader national narrative of ideological

conformity, Kapur reminds readers that the repression of women is never private — it is political, historical, and ongoing. *A Married Woman* becomes, in the end, not a narrative of defeat, but a documentation of endurance — of a woman who, though broken into roles and routines, carries within her a buried self that remembers, longs, and resists in silence.

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