

## Concept of Self in Manju Kapur's *Home*

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### Abstract

*Home* by Manju Kapur is a novel in which the protagonist is an educated middle class woman who fights for her identity and emancipation from her roots. She is brought up to befit in a typical patriarchal frame but she understands her the ways of the world and works to incarnate her own place and identity. Home is a place where a girl child feels safe and learns the traditional values of her family which after her marriage, she carries to her new home. Nisha, Manju Kapur's protagonist is a bold character that passes through a number of ebbs and flows since her childhood days. Crumbled with the burden of traditional values, she raises her voice against the traditional values, and her family, not only for her higher education but also to establish her own identity.

**Keywords-** Identity, Roots, Patriarchal Frame, Tradition, Home

Manju Kapur is widely praised as the finest of her generation of Indian writers in English. She is known for bringing the inner turmoils of a woman who silently pulls herself out of the closet of patriarchy in order to search her own self. Her works like any other important work of art, have been created not in a state of vacuum, but are endowed with the efforts of the author who is acutely conscious of her social

milieu and responds to its various aspects in an artistic manner. Her works offer a commentary on the conditions of woman while focusing on the overwhelming and seemingly incomprehensive power of family and society. Her most acclaimed novels contain *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *The Immigrant*, *Home*, *Custody* and *Brothers*. Her main engagement is to study human existence and human predicament, her exploration being a quest for self. Manmohan K. Bhatnagar comments in his book *Feminist English Literature*, "She is the novelist of psycho-emotional situations and her theme is the individual against himself and against the milieu." (Manmohan K. Bhatnagar: 110)

Besides being a novelist, Manju Kapur is a woman first who belongs to the same Indian patriarchy as her fictional characters do. She has keenly observed the position of women in the society. She has created her characters to represent true picture of Indian woman confronting all patriarchal oppressive environment. Kapur, having a sharp eye on the evolvement of a woman from a traditional to a modern one or pulling herself from the margins of the society to the center, Kapur's another novel 'Home' also explores Indian society to find out deep rooted issues within the families such as revolt against the tradition, quest for identity, the problem in the institution of marriage and women's struggle for her survival as well. Home is a testimony of just family with all its advantages and disadvantages. It is also a story of Nisha's quest for identity and survival.

Since the day, the concept of society came into existence, woman is considered as a subordinate of a man. She is always denied justice, social security, economic liberation and political awareness. As Beauvoir comments, "the situation of woman is that she – a free autonomous being like all creatures nevertheless finds herself in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other,"

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(*The Second Sex*, 1986:167) But the Women Liberation Movement of 1960's helped women to think over their condition in society and treatment of equality along with men. Kapur's 'Home' accounts the journey of a woman who struggles to pull herself from the margin to the center of the society.

As in various other socio-cultural situations, women were discriminated more on the basis of sex. Kapur comments: "...This is the life of a woman to look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food she has cooked with her own hands." (*Home*, p, 126) Since ages, women are in practice as their duties to owe domesticity under the patriarchal pressure, whereas Betty Friedman's 'The Feminine Mystique' questions why a woman in a patriarchal system continues to domesticity and childcare. She observes: "For woman, as for man, the need for self fulfilment -- the autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation -- is as important as the sexual need..." (Friedan, 1971:282)

Actually 'Home' begins with the contrasting predicaments of two sisters--Sona and Rupa, both are married, one to a businessman other to a government employee. Each of the sisters has her own fate ---Sona is enjoying all the material comforts and supports structure of the extended business family while Rupa is enjoying the independence of a nuclear family free to take up an entrepreneurial venture, into homemade pickles without being taunted for her childlessness. But Sona the elder sister is forced to play the role of foster mother to Vicky, son of Sunita, Sona's sister-in-law who died in an accident. She is repelled by Vicky, unable to give motherly love to him.

As Sona failed to conceive for a long time, Yashpal her husband plans to visit a shrine at Chetai near Almora. It is believed that the goddess of this mountain is very powerful. Rupa and Premnath also accompany them for the same purpose. Soon Sona is blessed with a

beautiful girl, Nisha. This girl, Nisha, unfortunately at an early age becomes a victim of sexual harassment. Vicky, her cousin is the molester present right at home. In the meanwhile, Shushila gives birth to another son Vijay. Her elder son Ajay is elder to Nisha. After Nisha, son gives birth to Raju. These boys along with Nisha, the only girl of the BanwariLal family, are the representation of third generation. Being the eldest son of the second generation, Yashpal shoulders the responsibilities after the death of BanwariLal. Nisha also returns home to accompany her grandmother. Soon Ajay's marriage takes place and then Vijay's. As Nisha is mangli, she could wait for a mangali boy. Ultimately, Nisha is left with a solution of continuing her education. After a dialogue with Sona, Rupa, an emerging new woman interposes: "If anything happens in the girl's later life, she is not completely dependent," (*Home*, p, 140) She continues in a careful emotional manner: "It would be shame not to educate her further. Let her do English Honours, not too much work reading story books." (*Home*, p, 141)

Nisha joins Durga Bai College. Her only best friend Pratibha is an ambitious girl who was aspiring for Government job. After their few meetings, Pratibha asks about Suresh whom Nisha meets in bus and advises Nisha: "If you are going to be modern girl you have to be through," (*Home*, p, 146) Nisha pretends innocent and says: "You think girl and boy can't be friends." (*Home*, p, 147) In her college days, Nisha is bold enough to wander in the University Campus, sipping coffee with Suresh at the Canteen. Slowly it becomes her routine to spend time with Suresh. She cuts her hair on his suggestion like a famous heroine -- Suraiya. But she is equally attentive at her studies.

When her exams were around the corner, she says to Suresh, "I can't meet you. I have to study, I have to get second division at least." (*Home*, p, 152) He helps her with Saint

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Stephen Tutorials and she secured first division. This result helped them to continue their courtship with more enthusiasm. In her quest to establish her own separate identity, she changes her clothing from traditional salwaarkameez to modern jeans t-shirts by the end of the second year. She also begins to bunk class more than often.

During her third year, her affair was an open secret and began to be commented upon. She much worried about her future asks Suresh, "When is your family going to approach mine with proposal?" (*Home*, p, 187) With such discussion, they takes advantage of their privacy in a small room at Vijay Nagar where Nisha keeps her chastity showing maturity saying, "It is just as well there is something left for when we are married." (*Home*, p, 192) Towards the end of the third year, her parents got a letter regarding her short of attendance from the college. This way her love-affair was revealed by her parents.

The revelation made her untrustworthy specially in the opinion of Raju who calls her a crude fucker. To this, Nisha rebels, "Who are you to decide whether I am trustworthy?" (*Home*, p, 199) This way she reflects her modernity from time to time. She seems to be an ardent supporter of the equal footing of women with men creating her own identity similar to her brother.

Suresh also tries to persuade her parents but of no use. Two things – caste and poverty is much greater than the happiness of a daughter. As Ashok Kumar says, "But two things pose a great problem before her family – caste and poverty," (Ashok Kumar, p, 43) She says to her mother, "Who cares about caste these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market." (*Home*, p, 200) She sobbed with indignant emotion. "Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?" (*Home*, p, 200) Nisha, opposite to the norms of the society, wants life partner of her own choice

irrespective of the caste. This irritated her mother that she gives her a slap. As a consequence she is made a prisoner in her own home.

When she presented the whole issue before her uncle, Premnath, he consoles her, "Suresh's family should have met your family." (*Home*, p, 202) The meeting was arranged resulting in disappointment for Nisha. She realises, "Raju is right; Suresh is a chutia, a total fucker if he loves her, he has no right to decide her future on his own." (*Home*, p, 215) Suresh is educated but shaped by the traditional patriarchal society wanted to decide Nisha's future on his own just because he loves her.

Nisha secures a third division in the final year of her graduation. Suresh vanishes from her life and she is left with nothing to do. She consoles herself for the emptiness leaving her fate in the hands of her parents 'becoming a bird in the cage.' All these pains begin to tell on her health and slowly she develops a psychosomatic disease –eczema. In her attempt to survive and make a place of her own, she plans to do something meaningful and absorbing. She dares to complain, "I don't want to be seen by all these people, why can't I do some course?" (*Home*, p, 226) Nisha declares her plan, "I want to study fashion designing. Lots of girls do it, why can't I?" (*Home*, p, 267)

Loneliness compels her to request her father Yashpal, "If only you could take with you, Papa." She pleaded in a rush, "I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do." (*Home*, p, 268) This is clear cut manifestation of her inner quest for independent existence and gender equality.

Belonging to a traditional family, Yashpal thought it proper to keep her daughter away from the customers and allows her to join a play school. In the meantime, Pooja conceives and gives birth to a baby girl. With new

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tradition to the family, it begins to add a new pain to Nisha's life. Pooja does not allow her to touch her baby due her skin disease. This gives way to a new power struggle between Pooja and Nisha. Nisha again collects her courage and plans to start business of salwaarkameez. She requests her father to give her a year to prove herself. She pleads, "Give me a chance to show you what I can do." (*Home*, p, 287) According to Ashok Kumar, in Nisha's life, "A journey of business woman begins from this point." (Ashok Kumar, p, 82)

Here Nisha emerges as a new woman, self-assured and confident, daring enough to pronounce her violation and conviction. Yashpal helps her financially by giving her a loan of twenty five thousand rupees and a place in the basement. This time he trusts his daughter and treats her equally as his son without any difference. Nisha takes help of tailor Mohsin Khan and her aunt Rupa to establish her new business. Her father also suggests a good name for her shop "Nisha Creations." (*Home*, p, 82)

Nisha works hard for her business and pays half of her loan to her father within a year. Pooja as a sister in-law offers some help but Nisha tackles each problem on her own "Mummy, what have you done?" wailed Nisha. Even if he (Mohsin Khan) sleeps he never cuts less than five suits a day. I promised Gyan's twenty by day after, if he doesn't come, my reputation will be spoilt. Do you know how competitive the market is?" (*Home*, p, 294) This proves her dashing who holds reins of her life in her own hands.

After much awaiting a proposal comes for Nisha of a manglik widower. Arvind, a boy in his early thirties, wants to see her. "Why does he want to see me?" persisted Nisha, "I don't want to see me. You have chosen it is enough." (*Home*, p, 298) One can compare this situation of Nisha in *Home* with that of 'Ammu' in Arunadhiti Roy's *The God of Small*

*Things* (1997) who also falls in love with Velutha, a low-caste, Parvana boy. Unlike Nisha, Ammu 'a divorcee with two children' belongs to the upper caste, and her fierce love-making to Velutha is not acceptable to her parental family. The 'Love Laws' enacted by a tyrannical society that "lay down who should be loved and how much" (*The God of Small Things*, p, 259) proved to be fatal for the two loving souls drenched in deep love.

Who is going to come in her life now does not matter much to Nisha. She only wants freedom of expression in her life from her life partner. She says to her mother, "If I am going to marry him I should be able to say what I like," (*Home*, p, 300) This clearly shows up her mind that she does not want to be mere a sex object. She reveals this to Arvind in the meeting with Arvind

"I work" she offered.

"I know" (Arvind)

"I would like to continue"

"How long have you been doing this business?"

"Two years"

"Two years" more pause, more thought,

"You must have worked very hard."

"Yes," she said, "It is called 'Nisha Creations'," "Lots of women are doing readymade. I see small boutiques operating from houses all over Daryaganj." "I cannot give it up," she confined. (*Home*, p, 303) Nisha speaks her mind clearly that she must be allowed to work after marriage. Working spontaneously for two years inculcated a sense of achievement in life helping her to create her own identity and her own place in the patriarchal society and in home as well.

Nisha after restoring her confidence and gaining much financial independence marries Arvind. This marriage helps her to complete her life and establishes her identity in the society. They got their marriage registered and Nisha gets another 'Home' to entrap her.

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Nisha incarnates her own world and identity, becomes a daughter in-law, wife and mother of twins and enjoys a happy and fulfilled life. With the turmoils, the protagonist of the novel 'Home' proves herself as an educated individual rather than a woman who belies in creating her own space in spite of rejection and broken heart. In 'Emergence of New Women in Novels of Manju Kapur,' Laxmi Sharma is apt to say:

The emergence of new woman in the realm of social, economic, cultural and social aspects will also be probed. . . The concept of new women in Indian society varies from the one in the west.... (Laxmi Sharma, 2009)

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Kapur has portrayed Nisha as an educated confident and independent new woman paying much honour to Indian tradition. Like Nisim Ezekiel, she also believes in 'Home is where one has to gather grace.' (Nisim Ezekiel: Enterprise)

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