

**Predicament of a Woman in Manju Kapur's *Home*****Nida Ansari**

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**Abstract**

Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist. She was born on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1948. She is an archetypal representative of the postcolonial women novelists. She was a professor of English Literature at her alma mater at Miranda House College, Delhi. But she is retired from there. She joined the growing number of Indian women novelists, who have contributed to the progression of Indian fiction i.e. Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kamla Das, Geetha Hariharan, Anita Nair, Shobha De. Her novels reflect the position of women in the patriarchal society and the problems of women for their longing struggle in establishing their identity as an autonomous being. Her works not only give voice to the society's effort to improve its women population but it is for every woman's self-consciousness in order to improve the society. She has written five novels, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), and *Custody* (2011). Kapur's most memorable female characters are Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun and so many others. All of them strive to assert themselves. These characters give us a rare glimpse of modernized Indian women who are in their aggression may enter into a scandalous relationship with her married neighbor, the professor or develop lesbian relationship as Virmati does in *Difficult Daughters* and Astha in *A Married Woman*. But Nisha in *Home* is different from her predecessors.

**Keywords-** Oppression, Empowerment, Modernity, Ignorance

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This paper attempts to explore Manju Kapur's *Home* as a story of a modern girl, Nisha who struggles in her life to get higher education and establishes her own identity by running a boutique of her own and does not want to be a slave at the hands of her parents or husband therefore she pleaded to be allowed to continue her business even after her marriage and during her pregnancy. But when she denied, she does not turn violent against the elders but ultimately compromises with the situation without any further resistance. As Clara Nubile in the *Danger of Gender* observes: "In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of the patriarchal system."(Clara, 271)

Although, in the life of woman, the quest for self has become a much debatable phenomenon. There is no doubt. Like many other women writers, Manju Kapur voices the trials and tribulations of her female characters, who no doubt, recognize the prime essence of family bond but also conscious of their individuality.

Women are treated as no entity, several times in their life. Their sentiments and emotions are often ignored but as far as their honesty to themselves is concerned they must be vigilant for their chastity and responsibilities. Poojatolani says:

Even today, thousands of girls sit within four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to close their own lives, decide for themselves whether they want to be homemakers or move. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for a pizza with friends. (Poojatolani)

As Simon de Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . which is described as feminine."

Allen and Barbara in their essay, *Why Men Don't Listen & Women Can't Read Maps* say: All things are not equal, men and women are different. Not better or worse - different (Allan & Barbara, 2001:pp.3.5). So, women were suffering from economic and socio-cultural disadvantages in the male governed society. The society was patronized by patriarchy. The

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women were silent and remained only as rubber dolls for others to move as they wanted. They had been deprived of their basic rights, their aspirations to their individuality and self-reliance.

*Home* is the third novel of Manju Kapur. The novel unravels the story of an ordinary middle-class joint family in Delhi. It brings to light the still prevalent parochial attitudes towards the upbringing of the girl child in India. *Home* is a brilliantly woven story of two Meerut born sisters, Sona and Rupa, closely studying the attitudes of the daughter, Nisha. The novel begins with the contrasting predicaments of the two sisters both are childless. Sona is daughter-in-law in the joint family of Banwarilal while Rupa is married to an impecunious government servant.

Banwarilal has two sons, Yashpal and Pyare Lal and a daughter, Sunita. Sunita is already married to Murali, her husband and she is already married before the beginning of the novel and a mother of a boy named, Vicky.

Sona is the wife of Yashpal. Her mother-in-law always scolds her because she is childless after the ten years of their marriage. Yashpal always consoles Sona whenever his mother scolds her of her childlessness by saying that, when they have children, her mother stop taunting her. By the time, Pyarelal is also married to Sushila, who gives birth to a boy within a year of their marriage. During this period Yashpal's sister dies in the kitchen accident. As the family receives the news, they leave for Bareilly. As Sona's mother-in-law mourns. Sona tries to console her. Thus: "The old woman glared at Sona and speak, "You think sleep is possible? What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you." (Kapur, 22)

Tender and funny, Manju Kapur's third novel is an engrossing story of family life, across three generations of Delhi shopkeepers. When their traditional business - selling saris - is increasingly sidelined by the new fashion for jeans and stitched salwar kameez, the Banwari Lal family must adapt. But, instead of branching out, the sons remain apprenticed to the struggling shop, and the daughters are confined to the family home. As envy and suspicion grip parents and children alike, the need for escape - whether through illicit love or in the making of pickles or the search for education- becomes ever stronger. Very

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human and hugely engaging, "Home" is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise, and secrecy, that lie at the heart of every family.(goodreads)

*Home* revolves around its protagonist, Nisha, daughter of Yashpal and Sona. Since her childhood she has to confront gender discrimination. When her brothers went to play outside or ride tricycle, she is not allowed to go out with them. Both mother and daughter are defying each other. They say:

The boy sullenly grabbed his cousin and tricycle and left.

Nisha set up a wail. 'I want to go too.'

'You can't' said her mother shortly.

'Why?'

'It is better for girls to remain inside.

'You will get black and dirty.'(52)

In her early childhood, Nisha is abused by her cousin, Vicky. He is the son of Sunita. Vicky has been brought up by this family. When this incident occurs, he was seventeen and is neglected and alienated right from the beginning of the novel and is destined to be the family's black sheep. After such horrific moments child's psyche is brutally bruised. She loses her appetite and remains frightened, gloomy and lost .Vicky scolds her, he says that if she expresses her thoughts with someone then family elders never let to go to school or play with someone and also beats her.

'Home' symbolizes security, safety and sense of belongingness and above all it depicts the identity of one's own self. But at the same time, it is observed that that sometimes home is not a place of comfort or security for a girl and it does not ensure them any emotional security as well as physical security.

After a thoughtful consideration the traumatized child Nisha is sent to live with her aunt, Rupa. Where she stays for ten years. Her aunt and uncle understand all that there a hand of Vicky behind her miserable condition.

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The first night the child was there, three adults hung about her, watching ever bite of puri aloo she put into her mouth. After she had eaten, Rupa changed her clothes, made her brush her teeth and wash her feet, put a little cream on her face, and replanted her oiled hair. (Kapur, 67)

After her schooling, Nisha is brought back to her home, to fulfill her familial responsibilities and to look after her old and sick grandmother. She renders her contribution as per the needs of the family.

Nisha is a *mangli*. A *mangli* cannot marry until a similar *mangli* boy could be found, with a similar fate and horoscope. Sona always keeping in her mind the *mangli* status of Nisha that her ten years old daughter should observe, as tradition demands, a fast. But when Nisha protests she retorts saying: “What kind of wife are you going to make if you can’t bear to fast one day a year for your husband?” (Kapur, 93)

Nisha, on listening to the story of Karwa Chauth, protests that the brothers in the story should be punished and not the sister. Then Sona scolds her by saying that any deviation from the stipulated norms may result in sad consequences. Sona wants her daughter to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a good wife. When Nisha return to her home after eleven years, their casual discussion turns to education. When her aunt suggests the importance of education which helps one to be economically independent. Sona rejoins that as it is Nisha she does not need any education. In anger Sona says: ‘She is useless, absolutely useless!’ Sona raised her voice. Really, her sister had no sense. She had made the supreme sacrifice of sending away her own blood for eleven years, and the woman returned a sub-standard female. (Kapur127)

Sona is a staunch traditionalist. Her thoughts always hover around her daughter’s marriage. She believes that the marriage is the supreme goal for a girl. It has become an obsession with her.

Sona wants her daughter to become a follower of Savitri, a symbol of sacrifice and service to her family. But still after securing an average percentage in her school exams she has given the permission to take admission join a Durga Bai College for taking up BA Honors on special

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request of her aunt , till some good proposal for marriage come to her, Nisha is a *mangli* , so family understands that search of a boy will take time.

Soon Nisha meets a boy Suresh, who is studying Khalsa College of Engineering. Both of them fall in love and they started spending time with each other. She is now totally changed. The family questions her on change of behavior. She is now taking interest on her appearance. Suresh admires her beauty and compares her with the film actress, Suriya. So, she first time dares to go to the beauty parlor and let her hair to be cut because she thought that it is not enough to have fair skin and good features. When Nisha entered through the front door, her mother is very furious by her appearance. She says: “ Who gave you permission to cut your hair , suddenly you have become so independent, you decide things on your own, where did you find the money, the time, the beauty parlor, where did you find all these things?” (Kapur 150-53)

At the time of the reconstruction of their ancestral home because they are in joint family and the children are growing. So, they feel uncomfortable to adjust in such a small house and they move to Hotel Palace Heights. By now Nisha is in her third year, her parents receive a letter from the college that their daughter is short of attendance and will not be able to sit for exams. Finally, a day came and Nisha reveal the truth about her relationship with Suresh. Yashpal enquires the matter but he found that Suresh is not from the same caste and he is unfit for Nisha. Ultimately, the chapter of Suresh has to be closed. Nisha in her aggression shouts on her mother. She says: ““who cares about caste these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market, ‘she sobbed with the indignant emotion. ‘Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?’” (Kapur200)

After bearing a lot of mental tortures Nisha undergoes mental trauma, which is reflected in the form of eczema. It is very hard for the family to see her suffer like this. This disease affects her a lot and it is not cured for a long time. Parents have been worrying that their daughter getting older with the passing of time and the son’s future blocked because of this.

One day the marriage proposal comes from a richer family and they do not want to delay Raju’s marriage. Proposal is accepted and by now Nisha finds herself unwanted and alienated in

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her family. Her skin disease split her personality and blemish her fair skin. Her sister-in-law, Pooja spends no time with her as well as with family. Pooja do not want Nisha to touch her baby. She cried and says, “You see, Masi,” said Nisha the minute her mother was out of earshot, ‘there is no place for me in this house. If it is only marriage that will get me out, and then marry me off to anybody, I don’t care.’”(Kapur 281)

Condition of the family getting worse day by day and great dispute among the family members .Parents thought that it is very bad for Nisha to remain at home all the time which cause her more mental tortures. So, Yashpal wants her daughter to teach in a school. One day, at the time of recess Mrs. Tyagi, a teacher shows Nisha, an embroidered suit which her sister had made at home. This clicks the new idea into her mind. After getting the idea she is fed up by teaching in the school. So she persuades her father to help her set up the business of readymade ladies suits. This caused another storm in the family because the women in their family never entered into business. Sona says: ‘She is going t get married, why waste time money in all this?’ A business was not like teaching, resignable when the bridegroom reached the door. (Kapur 290) “Sushila Chachi upstairs was censorious. Why was Nisha allowed to do the business? If tomorrow her daughters-in-law upped and said they wanted to do the same, what face she had to refuse?” (Kapur 290)

Nisha’s parents continuously searching a *mangli* boy for her but they are not getting success in it. Nisha did not care and what the people thought. She starts *Nisha’s Creation*, this name is suggested by her father before starting the business. She starts her cloth business in the rented basement of their flat and it flourishes day by day. Demands of suits increased in the market.

During this period Yashpal finds a *mangli* boy, Arvind who lives in Daryaganj and have a business there for Nisha. Although the boy is widower but he agrees on Nisha’s condition. She replies on the matter of business. Nisha says, “I cannot give it up,’ she confided. This was the only thing she could visualize in any marriage that she had to come to the basement every day.”(Kapur 303)

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Thus through the character of Nisha, Manju Kapur' *Home* reflects that a woman's primary duty is being a wife. Nisha leaves her duty to fulfill her duties as a good wife, a daughter –in-law and mother. In our society, a woman on her way cannot survive outside the system in which a place has been assigned to her, a woman cannot manage. Indian society does not tolerate individualism, except in the case of Sanyasihood. Feminine individualism is not acceptable. Here we can have an example of Nisha. It has become clear what would be the result of women's education in the society where individual freedom is strictly limited. Education contributes to the social promotion of a girl only in as much as it allows her family to find her a better husband. Education is not an end in itself but a long term investment. This is what Manju Kapur has depicted in her novels.

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