



Male Constructs and Female Choices in Manju Kapur's *Home*

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An Abstract

Manju Kapur is an eminent Indian English novelist. Kapur's examination of women's freedom and autonomy are deeply deep-rooted in the Indian socio-cultural and economic spaces and paradigms of the country. The protagonists in Manju Kapur's novels are caught in the constant difference between the personal needs and the institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. They challenge the male domination and patriarchal mechanisms of close watch and control over women's body. The women in Indian society are trying to be themselves. But they do not wish to break up the family ties. Women are portrayed as an loving mother and devoted wife and servant of their husbands. The female protagonists of the Indian novels are mostly educated, but they are caged within the restrictions of a traditional society. Their education leads them to think independently. They struggle between tradition and modernity. Manju Kapur tried to deal with physical, psychological and emotional conditions of women's pitiable plight in her novels. In *Home*, Manju Kapur has attempted to focus from the childhood of the protagonist, Nisha. The journey of the protagonist to get a new identity leads her to the realization of herself. On her parents' wishes she agrees to the marriage after her marriage also she wants to continue her business. She tried but she could not uphold both family and her business. At the end of the novel, after the birth of twins she realizes herself that as a woman she should take care of family and children. This paper purports to examine how women are portrayed in the traditional joint family and society. It portrays how the novelist makes her characters as bold enough to survive in the male dominated society. The growth of self-confidence and self-assertion is clearly pictured.



Keywords: tradition, business, male domination, identity, realization

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Manju Kapur is an eminent Indian English novelist. She was born on October 25, 1948 in Amritsar; India. Her writings mirror man- woman relationship, human yearning, gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion and protest. Kapur's evaluation of the extensively contested site of socio-cultural life in modern, urban, postcolonial India is implicit. Manju Kapur's observation of women's liberation and autonomy are deeply deep-rooted in the Indian women's situations within the socio-cultural and economic spaces and paradigms of the country. The protagonists in Manju Kapur's novels are caught in the constant difference between the personal needs and the institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. They challenge the male domination and patriarchal mechanisms of close watch and control over women's body.

The female characters created by Kapur are characterized by the adoption of a critical and impulsive attitude. It questions their position and as a consequence attempt to redefine cultural and social stereotypes and values in order to create a space of their own. And this brings a redefinition of their identity as well as a disagreement and confrontation to the social context and a widespread and powerful patriarchal ideology.

Manju Kapur highlights the factors which control the autonomy of the female to live, grow and actualize herself the way men do. The female protagonists resist and overcome the ideological suppression and reshape ideals and existing value systems to re-invent themselves in a meaningful way. In this sense, her novels are a significant contribution towards the realm of



Indian English fiction and feminist psycho analysis in India. She has written five novels : *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The Custody* (2011). Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* has won the Common Wealth Prize for first novels for Eurasia Region and was a number one bestseller in India. *The Immigrant* has been long listed for the DSC Prize for South-Asian literature. Her novels are remarkable for the uninhibited expression of sexuality in terms lesbianism, pre-marital sex, the sexual act, incest and extra-marital relationships.

The novel *Home* is the story of three generations of women in the outlook of their lives in a large joint family of Delhi. It depicts the upbringing of the girl child in India. She traces the painful expedition of the heroine Nisha from childhood into adulthood in the form of buildings roman. *Home* details Nisha's search for a home that is a search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately to women in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security, nonetheless, it sometimes does not provide them any physical security. The novel unravels the story of an ordinary middle class joint family's life in Delhi. *Home* begins with the story of Sona Lal and Rupa Gupta who were childless. Sona, the protagonist's mother is an ordinary girl, married to the affluent Banwari Lal family. Once Sona's mother came to Banwari Lal's shop to match a blouse in preparation to attend an uncle's wedding, at that time Banwari Lal's younger son Yashpal falls in love with her. Yashpal tells his father that he wants to marry her though his family is a traditional one they accept his son's wishes.

In marriage, usually the groom's family asks dowry. But the bride's family is a poor family. So they tell that they can offer nothing but their daughter whose heart is golden like her name. Pyre Lal and Sona's marriage were performed. According to Sona's mother-in-law the concept of bride,

The bride had to bring dowry, come from the same background and understand the value of togetherness. Falling in love was detrimental to these interests. (3)



As the wishes of Maji's are not fulfilled by her first son, Sona's mother-in-law does not please her and always taunts her. Her mother-in-law treats her with disrespect for having bewitched her son by her good looks and forced him into marriage. This makes Sona unhappy but Yashpal consoles her by saying that once they have children, the mother will forget all this. But unfortunately Sona could not conceive for a long time. By this time Pyare Lal (Yashpal's brother) is also married to Sushila who gives birth to a baby boy within one year of the marriage. Sona feels very bad and thinks that it may be the result of her past Karma, Sona keeps fast but it is of no use.

In India, it is difficult to imagine a married woman live without her own child. In the patriarchal society, women must produce children, especially a boy, to carry the line of the family. Therefore most of the women in such families are always forced to give birth to a son. Kapur starts her novel with a scene where both the sisters Sona and Rupa who were childless. It is human nature for all before marriage they ask about the bride's dowry. And after marriage, they ask about the child especially the mother-in-law who is keen about it. During this period, Yashpal's sister burns herself and dies. As the family receives the news, they leave for Bareilly. Here Sona's mother-in-law mourns; Sona tries to console her,

Sleep now, Maji, sleep you will make yourself ill if you cry like this and it will not bring her back. The old woman glared at Sona and spat out, you think sleep is possible? What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoy life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you. (56)

Sona feels sad because all the time her mother-in-law ill treats her with her words. At the beginning, she was cursed for not bringing dowry and now not bearing a child. Yashpal feels that she is not feeling well so he makes a plan to visit a shrine at Chitai near Almora. It is a famous shrine. The God Devi in these hills has miraculous powers. Rupa and Premnath also join with them. After two months, Sona discovers that she has conceived. She believes that it is all because of the Devi. It is only after ten years when she gives birth to Nisha and later to Raju. After the marriage, Sona suffered in her in-law's house but after the birth of a child she feels happy.



Manju Kapur portrays the traditional woman Sona who always feels for not becoming a mother to her child. She becomes secured of her respectful position in the Banwari Lal family after the birth of Nisha. She fulfills herself as traditional woman.

Indian women writers portray their characters who accept their traditional values without raising their voice in the society. Rupa in Manju Kapur's *Home* accepts her life as it is. Though she is childless she never gets depressed like Sona. She starts a pickle business and leads her life.

After ten years of hard prayer and fasting Nisha was born. In a traditional family the birth of girl child was considered to the goddess Lakshmi. The nurse tells that this child will bring great wealth to the family. Usually in the traditional family after the birth of the baby they want to know about the child's future. But Nisha was born as mangli. It is not easy to found a bride to that girl which is noted from these lines;

The baby's horoscope was cast: the configuration of the planets at her birth made her a mangli. This was not good news, manglis were horribly difficult to marry off. Unless they found a man with similarly unfortunate stars unhappiness or death was the sure result. (39)

Banwari Lal who is the patriarch of the family is the believer of traditional values. But his son Yashpal does not believe these horoscopes of his daughter. Nisha was born as a mangli so her mother Sona never allows her to leave the house. Her mother thinks that if she goes out of the house she became dark so no one could marry her. Nisha argues her mother that "I want to go too" (51). But her mother convinces her that "You will get black and dirty" (51).

In a joint family the family members never give much attention to the children. Vicky, Nisha's cousin tries to abuse her. As a child she could not understand the touching concepts. She cannot understand Vicky's intension. She becomes mentally disturbed and nobody could understand why she is not eating, sleeping. So Nisha is sent to her aunt Rupa's house. Rupa and her husband take care of Nisha. At Rupa's house she feels comfortable with the environment. Rupa and Premnath understand the reason for Nisha's depressed condition. In Rupa's house she



is brought up as a brilliant student. After her grandfather's death Nisha is asked to come back to her home to accompany her grandmother.

After eleven years Nisha returned home to assume her place as daughter of the house, to learn the difference between weekend visits and full-time stay. Now there was less interest in her school, no pampering, and long hours expected in the kitchen. (124)

Nisha always argues with her mother for giving equal rights to play outside, allow to college, to go work. Sona wants her daughter to be like her as a traditional woman. Sona is a conventional woman who considers marriage as an ultimate objective for her daughter. She also wants her daughter to follow her. She believes in the false ideas that people are suspicious of brides that are educated. But her aunt Rupa succeeds in convincing Sona to send Nisha to Durga Bai College. It was a girls' college and a nice place for a girl waiting to get married. Because Nisha is mangli it is hard to find a bride in the same star. So Nisha is sent to the college not to pursue her studies but to pass her time till she gets married. Since girls were not permitted to work in her family Nisha completes higher education as a mere time pass. This is revealed in the following lines:

Her family's antidote to college to college proved sustaining. Higher studies were just a time pass, it was not as though she was going to use her education. Working was out of the question, and marriage was around the corner. (141)

Since Nisha's family is a traditional one, her idea of becoming an entrepreneur is against her tradition values. The women in the family are never allowed to work. So Nisha requests her father for allowing her to open a cloth shop. Her new shop is named as 'Nisha's Creation'. Nisha hires a tailor named Mohseen Khan and begins with her work to make salwar suits. She gets help from her aunt Rupa Masi. The quality of her production helped her to get settled in the readymade clothes market. Within a year, Nisha repays half of the loan amount of twenty-five thousand that she took from her father.



Yashpal, father of Nisha who was a trader himself appreciates the talent of his daughter in the trade. He finds her as an intelligent and independent than Raju. But it is his duty to settle her daughter to get married. Her accomplishment lies there, no matter how successful her business was. So he searches a suitable bride for her daughter. Nisha declares that the family should allow continuing her business. But it is against their customs they gave ad to the *The Hindustan Times*:

Wanted own business, graduate, mangli boy, over 1.65, from kaiyasth community, own property, for only mangli daughter, UP kaiyasth, migrated from Lahore, graduate from a prestigious woman's college, extremely fair, beautiful, homely, 1.60, 20 years. (224)

Because Nisha's demanding allows her family to give ad on the news paper. But her mother Sona tells her daughter that all the husbands would not be looking for business woman.

In the patriarchal society, girls are related in an ideal womanhood right from the beginning. Mothers teach their daughters the womanly qualities. There are many incidents the author has given in the novel. Sona, when she comes to know that her daughter is missing some feminine qualities. She makes her daughter learn how to be a good wife in future. This is what expected from the Indian women. Kapur portrays her women characters in two types - traditional and modern. The traditional woman Sona thinks that women's role is limited up to the marriage. She thinks that women should be trained on domestic work and to be an ideal daughter-in-law. But Rupa as a modern woman thinks that girls should be educated. In *Home*, Kapur presents the familial complexities faced by Indian women in shaping their independent identity through the portrayal of Nisha. It is found that urban middle class women are still bound by the patriarchal predominant in the society and women cannot escape from it.

The journey of the protagonist to get a new individuality leads her to the realization of herself. Nisha wants to continue her business after her marriage also. She tried but she could not maintain both family and her business. At the end of the novel after the birth of twins she realizes herself. She understands that as a woman we should take care of family and children.



Since she belongs to the traditional family she sacrifices everything for the welfare of her family. Through the life journey of the protagonist, the theme of Self-Realization is dealt. The author describes her women characters' position in the society and family and how to survive and achieve in the male dominated society. The journey to the identity at last leads her to realize her self.

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