

Integrity of Nisha in Manju Kapur's *Home*

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Abstract

Manju Kapur's women are the personification of 'Integrity' representing the new voice of a new social order. The present paper discusses how Kapur's *Home* successfully presents the real picture of women in a male-dominated society. Here the protagonists are tossed about in the brawl between tradition and modernity, conservatism and newness, the call of morality and the claim of tradition. The tension between these notions of integrity and the desire for personal fulfillment forms the thematic foundation of the novel.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, *Home*, cultural brawl, gender discrimination, social integrity, male domination

In her third novel, Manju Kapur takes us through a brisk and extraordinarily captivating portrayal of three generations. Chowdhury says, "*Home* reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress". Manju Kapur is one of the brightest stars of Indian women writers of English. She has joined the growing number of modern Indian women writers who have significantly contributed to the progression of Indian fiction and the emancipation of women. She is the mouthpiece of Indian women in the modern twentieth century. She is a woman capable of deep analysis of women's emotional and psychological problems resulting from the sufferings of women in their homes.

Kapur's novels present the longings and struggles of women to establish their own identities. Her female protagonists crushed by the patriarchal society, define the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert their identity, achieve self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in their lives. She is a supporter of the feminine issues. The feminist tradition is strongly apparent in her novels. Women's destiny does not seem to be created by God, but by the society in which they live. In the modern society, Women have changed their destiny on many levels. Even-though women do continue to suffer. Marriage, dowry, sexual issues, male egotism, family pressures, misunderstanding between the couple are the major issues in their lives.

In this novel, Kapur pictures women characters as victims of their fate. Nisha has to struggle to establish her identity and to survive in this male dominated world. The novel explains how patriarchal society has harsh rules for women. And one of the daughters breaks the rules with the changing social equations, one's individual ambitions and legal restrictions. It is the growth of the old house and cloth shop that are of immense importance, because the novel asserts emphatically that the interests of a business family come before personal concerns. *Home* is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise and secrecy that lie at the heart of every family. Home is supposed to be like a temple for getting peace, intimate relationship, and relaxation. But for married women it is not the place to talk of the oppression, hurdles and difficulties faced by them. In this novel, Kapur portrays the sufferings of characters who are middle class married women within their families. After marriage, married women think of being involved in their families without any hesitation. But the family members' speech and their attitudes towards them make them yearn to change the conditions of their lives.

The protagonists of the novel are women struggling against all probabilities. Sona is the first daughter-in-law in the family who didn't get the proper respect and given the recognized place in the family. Because everything has been judged by money. Money is the main thing and evaluates the life of a person. Sona didn't bring dowry from her mother's house because they were not able to give a huge amount of money and gifts. But her co-sister in that family brought much dowry including money and property. Sona was affected psychologically; she couldn't talk to anybody. This made her live in isolation. And the home is woven and knit tightly together by the patriarch Banwari Lal.

Manju Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels. But then, all sort of things happening outside do affect what is happening inside the home. *Home* is the story about the home of Lala Banwari Lal, a patriarch who has faith in living in a joint family. He is the head of the family and runs a sari shop in Karol Bagh. He thinks men must work hard outside the home and a woman must be a slave to do all the household chores. She should not speak in front of him, because women should work at home without questioning. He has two sons Yashpal and Pyarelal, and a daughter Sunita, who is married.

The novel spotlights on three female characters such as Sona, Rupa and Nisha who claim their identity in their own ways. The story starts with two sisters; one is attractive and the other is average. The beautiful elder sister Sona is married to the elder son of Banwari Lal while the younger one, Rupa is attached to a junior Government officer of less esteem. At the starting stage the story spins around the lives of Sona and Rupa before it focuses on the whole family. Each sister believes that the sisters want to be good enough in their own economic levels. Rupa has just a spouse and a father-in-law in the family but Sona belongs to a joint family.

The main strain of Rupa's life is a wicked tenant who lives upstairs in their home. He declines to pay his rent on time. They have officially spent a considerable measure of cash looking into the issue to expel him. Rupa and her husband, Prem Nath stay a childless couple all through the story. They don't have a child and the family blame only Rupa, not the husband. In the society, people gave importance to money, status etc. In any case, she is fortunate she is not subjected to bear the taunts of in-laws for having no child, like Sona, who after the passage of two years, is still not pregnant.

Sona performs each duty as a daughter-in-law as she is prepared from an early age to love, serving and complying with her in-laws. In the meantime, Yashpal's younger brother, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. Their marriage is welcomed by all since it is arranged by the parents. Sushila brings a huge dowry with her including a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. Sona realizes what she has not understood in the three years of her marriage. Sushila has been much respected by the elders in the family, only because of her dowry. In Sona's life is a question mark. She feels herself inferior to Sushila, as Sona's parents did not give her dowry at the time of her marriage. The newly married couple starts living upstairs where Sona wishes to shift. But the system of joint family remains the same. All take their meals together.

Sona struggles to have children in order to establish her place in the family and rejects the responsibility for Vicky. Sona finally gives birth to a girl baby. Everybody is happy because after ten years she has become pregnant. They feel "It is good to have a girl in the house". (35) Girl is considered as Lakshmi for the traditional family. "And now the womb has opened," comments Rupa, 'a baby brother will come soon'. (36) The boy child is seen as 'Kul-Ka-Deepak'. Sona's delivery of her next baby, a son is welcomed and made much of, more than the first. Sona's mother-in law declared, now I can die in peace. All in the family expect and wait for a male baby to be born. They think only he will take care of the family. Nisha, who will marry and go to some other place, when she goes from here, will take all the property. From the beginning they look forward to having a male child and differentiate between the male and female children. Both of Banwari Lal's sons can hold their heads high in the society, because they both have sons.

Due to the gender differences, the family never let Nisha go outside and play with her brothers. The family of Banwari Lal is traditional and patriarchal. They believe that men work out of the house, and women within the house. His two sons follow the ways of their father without any question. Nisha, the main protagonist and the daughter of Yashpal and Sona, emerges as a self- dependent woman in the novel. She refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and male dominated family structure and tries to carve out her own individual identity. She spends a restricted childhood where she is not allowed to play or go out by her own choice. She is provided with nice dresses and everything else yet, unfortunately her outfits did not match her

inclinations. “It was evening, the time children drink their milk and go to play. When adults move out of bedrooms darkened against the glare by heavy curtains”. (60)

Manju Kapur has portrayed those confused growing up years of Nisha in a heart-rending manner as Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in the early years of her life. It affects her psychologically and mentally; she cannot reveal the matter to anyone. Rupa believes there is something at their home which is frightening and disturbing the innocent mind of Nisha. Nisha is sent to her aunt’s house. Her aunt Rupa, and her husband, take full care of Nisha. In the traditional family of Banwari Lal girl’s education is considered as secondary. But Nisha’s education begins properly at her aunt’s house. Her uncle, Prem Nath helps her in her studies and spends much time in telling her stories and teaching lessons.

A change appears in Nisha’s behavior after she leaves her own home. Her aunt and uncle try to talk on the issue of Vicky with Nisha’s father. But no one in the family is ready to believe in such tales about Vicky, whom they look upon like their own child. During Nisha’s education, her brother gets married. Now it is Nisha’s turn. Her mother knows that she is Manglik and it is not as easy to find a Manglik boy for her. Nisha is told to keep a fast for her future husband by her mother. Nisha is of modern thinking and does not believe in traditional beliefs. She is not ready at all to spend her whole day without food and water like her mother. As the family believes in superstitions, Nisha is also forced again to keep ‘Kava Chauth’ fast for the long life of her husband. Nisha has been influenced by her Maasi’s updated thinking about life.

Nisha’s stay with them has conditioned her mind according to the ways of her uncle and aunt. Rupa has a business of pickles. Nisha sees her mentor in her aunt and wants to lead a life like her. Sona does not understand her daughter. Sona is very similar to Kasturi in *Difficult Daughters*, where Kasturi, the mother of the protagonist Virmati, stands opposed to her daughter’s happiness and wishes. Both Kasturi and Sona are the forces of patriarchy within their homes. A daughter in the family must learn all the household activities and cooking. Sona didn’t give any importance to her daughter’s studies. She concentrates more on cooking. The traditional mother wants her daughter to be like her. For her doing kitchen work is more important than studies, because whatever she studies, it won’t be of any help to her. The main concern of Sona is Nisha’s marriage. Throughout the time of Ajay’s marriage, Sona wants Nisha to look beautiful so that some boy or his family may choose her. When Nisha returns home after living for a long time with her aunt, Sona discovers with horror that at the age of sixteen, Nisha does not know how to cook. The girl always tries to defend herself and her aunt. This clash between Nisha and Sona is a clash between modernity and tradition.

The mother wants her daughter to be rooted in the tradition that would make her life worth living. Having a social structure around you like a fence, or a prison, conditions one’s

thinking. A person becomes moulded by those circumstances in which he or she lives. We see that two real sisters- Sona and Rupa, born in the same house, are totally different in their thinking after their marriage. It is the result of the atmosphere of their new families. One considers a working woman as an emancipated individual, while for the other it is shame. During a protest, during the first year of her college, Nisha comes across a boy, Suresh, at the bus stop. Though she is a woman modern thinking, she remembers the life of tradition in her family. This induces some irritation in her mind. She falls in love with Suresh but in her mind, she always reminds herself of the patriarchal set up of her home; and yet, she is not afraid to do the things she likes.

This made her to earn money of her own. In modern society, women want to be economically independent. Then only all the women can manage and overcome their problems. She further wants to do fashion designing course. She wants to be economically independent. It is her first step towards empowerment. Her idea of working and earning is bitterly opposed by her mother. Manju Kapur seeks freedom for the Indian women but within the Indian socio-cultural values. She always reveals the process of oppression and gender differentiation within the institution of the family and the male centered Indian society.

Nisha is a victim of gender discrimination when she feels that she can't work outside like her brother. She requests her father, "If only you could take me with you, Papaji," she continues, "I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do". (267) This reveals her inner quest for independent existence and self-identity. She counts herself equal to her brothers. She denies the patriarchal system. At her request, her father allows her to join a play-school, near her home. Instead of going to shop and attending the customers, it is the better option for her.

But Nisha soon gets fed up with the children at the school and leaves the job. Another example of woman's submission has been presented by Manju Kapur through Nisha's struggle to adapt to the profession not of her own choice. The author has depicted through the character of Nisha that it is not easy for a woman to choose the profession of her own choice. In order to do so, she has to struggle a lot in her life. Society deprives her of this right just because of her being a woman. Tradition-bound society has made certain restrictions and laws which she is not allowed to cross. Working in shop is not considered to be a good profession for a woman.

Focusing on the change of women's position, Manju Kapur has presented changes in the moral foundations of the Banwari Lal's family. The novel touches the realities of life in which owing to the modernization the 'old fashioned' shop of Banwari Lal is replaced by a modern type mirrors showroom and the 'home' is fragmented into flats. Anita Sethi in her review of *Home* writes, "As tradition battles with transition, the older members of the Banwari Lal family

struggle to adapt to the seismic changes rippling through the country, from Nisha restyling herself with a new haircut and clothes, to buildings being bulldozed to make way for chandeliered shops”.

Nisha defies the social structure and defines womanhood entirely in different terms that suit her aspirations. She does not dance to the tunes of conventions and wishes to live a carefree life. With the help of her father, she starts her own business, a boutique, named “Nisha Creations”. First time in her life she feels proud since her father trusted her as he would have trusted a son. She takes money from her father to start the business, but she vows to return every single penny to her father. She hires a tailor on monthly pay and collects material for suits from her father’s shop.

Nisha’s friends and customers like her suits and dresses. She gets heavy orders and becomes a successful and known ‘businesswoman’ of the Karol Bagh market. She is now economically emancipated. Kapur brings out some disturbing home truths in this novel which still exist in our society and are a part of the social structure. The only ray of hope is again her aunt and uncle. With her uncle Prem Nath, she plans to meet Suresh. At first her uncle consoles the girl, “His family should have met your family”, for Nisha, it is a traditional approach, so she answers back, “Uncle this is the modern age”. (201) Finally, they go to meet him in a restaurant.

Their meeting results in the destruction of her hopes and love. After three years of thinking that Suresh is her future, now Nisha has to adjust the idea of another man in his place. Now starts Nisha’s journey towards emancipation. She wants to do something valuable. She complains, why should I sit at home every day waiting for proposals; she wants to do a fashion designing course. She wants to be economically independent. It is her first step towards empowerment. Her idea of working and earning is bitterly opposed by her mother.

The novel touches the realities of life in which owing to the modernization the old fashioned shop of Banwari Lal is replaced by modern type mirror’s showroom and the ‘home’ is fragmented into flats. Nisha is very conscious regarding her workers, the raw-material for dresses and the genuine prices. Within a year she returns half of the loan money to her father. She keeps an eye on the workers. In her absence, she arranges her mother, Sona, to look after her workers. She is very much alert about her status as a reputed businesswoman. Meanwhile Nisha’s marriage is fixed with Arvind. He is a widower, and she sacrifices her life for the sake of the traditional family and her mother’s wish.

Nisha is shut up inside her home after her marriage. Her sister-in-law, Pooja, takes over her business. In this marriage Nisha’s husband never shares anything, personal or professional with her. Nisha takes him to be a highly respectable and responsible person who understood

human feelings. But it was entirely different from her view of him. He never shares anything. It gives her more pain; he does not understand her desires and aspirations. Therefore, we can say that marriage, the promised end in a traditional society, becomes an enclosure that restricts a women's movement. Nisha was like a flying bird that has become a prisoner in the cage of social norms. Within a month of her marriage, she conceives. During her pregnancy, she seeks to go to the shop. Her husband and mother-in-law do not appreciate her idea of going out during these days. Even her modern aunt, Rupa, consoles her.

At last Nisha delivers twins - one girl and one boy and becomes a complete woman according to the frame of society. A girl in Indian family is pining under the burden of patriarchy. While she was living in her home, she feels herself to be homeless -shelter less. She strives to explore space for herself. She tries to be self-reliant in order to survive. Manju Kapur's *Home* explores the complex topography of the Indian family and exposes many questions that are embedded within the family. The revolt against the ancient traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage and last, but not least, a woman's struggle for survival.

The novel projects a deep understanding of woman's nature and shows Kapur's maturity as a novelist. The logical Indian newspaper mentions here about the Pollachi rape. Women have to talk about their problems in their personal lives, blackmail, torture, and rape. Then only the culprits of the society will become visible. In India, besides several restraints upon females, tradition and orthodoxy of religion, women are still the victims of crimes like physical and mental torture, sexual harassment, rape and dowry killings etc. 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.

The protagonist of the novel, Nisha lives her life in the shackles of responsibilities. The novelist not only describes the plight of woman in the joint family, but their sacrifices for the family. Thus, it is a novel about the quest of identity of three women, especially Nisha, who struggles against the conventional tradition of family. Her family is conventional and traditional. It does not adopt new ideas, nor does it give up old ones. Two sisters Rupa and Sona, have different opinions on the topics of education and career. Sona is a traditional woman who believes in the duty to the family. Woman has been created only for serving men; she is devoted to her husband. She sacrificed all her wishes, because of her husband. She loses her identity; she is a voiceless woman in the family. And this commitment is everything for her. Nisha's mother Sona considers marriage as the ultimate destination for her daughter. And she also wants her daughter to follow in her footsteps. She believes in the false ideas like the one that says people are suspicious of brides that are very educated. Rupa thinks that girls should be educated so that they can be individuals.

Rupa tells her that her husband says that a good degree gives you something to fall back on, to stand on your own feet. Rupa succeeds in convincing her to send Nisha to Durga Bai College. It was a girl's college and a nice place for a girl waiting to get married. Thus, Nisha is sent to the college not to get any new idea or pursue her studies but to pass her time till she gets married. Nisha is exposed to the outside world as she enters the college. In college she compares herself with her other classmates. She also wants to be like them. On her way to college, Nisha falls in love with a boy named Suresh. He is a student of nearby Khalsa College of Engineering. After many meetings with Suresh Nisha boldly wanders here and there. She is roaming on the university lawns with Suresh. With the apparent progress in the affair, Nisha becomes self-assertive and this boldness in Nisha is reflected in her changed costume. She tries to project herself as a modern or forward girl.

She knows that her conventional family setup will not accept her modernity, but still she decides to cut her hair. Kapur catches this sense of adaptability. Along with Suresh, Nisha goes to the beauty parlor, cuts her hair in open style. She looks extremely charming and beautiful. Suresh also appreciates it. Symbolically, she has become independent. Still, she is afraid of the soon to come consequences. She is worried how she could face her parents in her home. It seems to be a sense of revolt for her. She goes home in a disgusted manner. They greet her as she walks through the front door. Soon her family discovers Nisha's affair. She faces many difficulties. She is literally made a prisoner in her own house, not allowed to go alone anywhere. In Indian society, love marriage is not accepted because the people's mind from ancient times is made to work like that. Arranged marriage is accepted by everyone in the society with customs, tradition, and superstitious belief among the people. This has made her to be imprisoned in her home.

Nisha refuses to follow the traditional arranged marriage. The novelist expresses how in the Indian family a girl has no right to make decisions for herself. She has to sacrifice all her wishes for the sake of her family. Nisha is fed up with the loneliness, decides to engage herself in some work. Nisha begins to work in a nearby play school. She works in school from eight-thirty to twelve-thirty. As it is not enough to pass the time of her full day, she wants something more. She considers the possibility of doing other things in the world. She wants to open her own business in order to establish herself in terms of corporate life. Since she is the daughter of a businessman, it was not difficult for her to go through the acid test of business life. She thought herself to be better than Pooja. Thus Nisha's creation was started by Nisha herself. She took twenty-five thousand from her father. She promised him to pay every rupee within time. She learnt the graphs of the market carefully. She managed the market with her full insight. She valued her credentials well. Nisha succeeded in her business. She understood the different shades of complications in the business.

She pays half of the twenty-five thousand which she had taken to start the business. Gradually, she learns the value of life. Now, she stands on her own feet. Later, she pays back the twenty-five thousand loan. As a mother, Sona is conscious only about her marriage. She supports the business life of Nisha, but she is extremely conscious of Nisha's future life as a married woman. For her, a girl should be familiar with cooking, nourishing children, feeding them and managing the household affairs. On the one hand, Nisha's business is blooming day by day, and on the other, the family is anxious about Nisha's marriage. Finally, they approach a widower and ask him to be her bridegroom. Family wishes to compromise because of Nisha's working girl status, thinking that a groom's family would not agree at all. Though Nisha is born and brought up in a metropolitan Indian middle-class family, she tries to build her own independent identity. She could have easily followed the convention and lived happily. But she is destined to show her skill and ability to work equally. Her purpose behind establishing her Nisha's Creations is not merely to pass time.

It indicates her desire to be financially independent. This is how Manju Kapur explains the route of complete equality, struggle for economic independent existence, and her equality with men shows her marching towards modernity. Nisha flourishes as the most beautiful girl and she is the girl of the new generation. But right from her childhood Nisha starts showing signs of rebellion from the very beginning as "unfortunately her outfits did not match her inclinations". (52) But unlike other women in Banwari Lal Family, Nisha is very intelligent in her studies. Her mother is aware of her intelligence, but her ultimate aim is to get her married. Whether it is the mother or the brother all impose this code of conduct upon Nisha: It is better for you to remain inside for Nisha you are a girl, She has nothing better to do than sit around and read. Even in such a family Nisha takes admission in Durga Bai College to do English Honors.

Sona is highly skeptical of educated girls and thinks that People are suspicious of brides that are very educated. On the contrary Nisha feels that a girl should be content anywhere provided she is allowed to give direction to her aspirations. She does not want to remain the slave of society and customs. So the first time Nisha was told she had to fast for her future husband, as fasting for the would-be husband and his family from an early age is considered a virtue. Nisha wants to become economically independent and should not be treated as slaves by others. Everything is possible in a woman's life only through education. Nisha is the best example of the modern Indian woman in the twentieth century. In ancient times, the rich women did not have to study. But in the modern times, Government has given many opportunities for the development of women. All the women should be going for higher studies. It enables them to get economic independence and become freedom fighters against patriarchal society.

The present study examines Manju Kapur's *Home* with images of women reflecting on them. Her female protagonists are fighting hard for their rights in a patriarchal society. Her

women protagonists are struck between tradition and modernity. The study explains Manju Kapur's indubitable ability to explore the psyche of the present day urban, educated middle-class women. Manju Kapur has portrayed memorable women characters. All her novels consist of a variety of women characters and her novels are women character centric. Her women characters bring forth the various shades of the lives of women. Through her women characters, she shows a mirror to the society saying what the condition of middle class women is in a patriarchal society. In the first phase of Indian women novelists, the major focus was on social reformation. The second phase of Indian women novelists is more focused on the challenges and predicaments of women.

The novel appeals to her not only as a writer, but as a teacher as well. As a writer of new generation in an atmosphere of the nation's socio-political flux, Kapur has recorded the truth in her fictive narrative with zeal to change the Indian male perception. She describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and peril for their triumph. Manju Kapur presents in the novel the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women towards self-assured, assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium of self-expression. The journey of Nisha's life starts as a business woman with self-assurance and confidence in her performance.

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