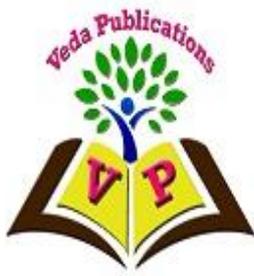


**SOCIETAL BIGOTRY AND EXISTENCE CONFLICT IN MANJU KAPUR'S *HOME***

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(Assistant Professor, English, Govt. MS PG College, Bikaner, Rajasthan.)[DOI: 10.333329/joell.7.1.5](https://doi.org/10.333329/joell.7.1.5)**ABSTRACT**

Women are the integral or most important segment of any society. She has the capacity to mould generations, she is the one on whose part the future of any society resides. Her importance can be seen in the sum of literature written about the lives of women. But she herself is the most insignificant one. The modern women, especially in India linger between the two extremes of tradition and modernity. Manju Kapur's *Home* is a clear picture of social hypocrisies, inconstancy of people towards a woman and truths concealed in a tradition soaked society about identity struggle for a woman. Nisha defies patriarchal notions which enforce her towards domesticity and asserts her individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. The life of a woman which is always entangled in petty struggles of life and where she has to sacrifice her individuality, suppress her inner will and aspirations; and is forced to agree on inescapable femininity. The paper analyses the position of a woman in a joint family, the space she needs for herself which is never granted, the free role of her spirit which is circumferenced with the decisions taken by the male of the family, with reference of Manju Kapur's *Home*. The novel is a story of three generations of women and their roles played in a joint family. Their adjustments or compromises with their own desires to maintain the family tradition are the points of discussions keeping in center the character of Nisha.

keywords: Society, Traditions, Hypocrisies, struggle, boundaries, identity, extremes, existence, conflict



Home is a place which carries much importance in everyone's life. The home is a place which gives identity to someone; which gives memories of joys and sorrows spent under the ceiling. Gaston Bachelard rightly portrays the importance of home:

Home is about identity. It is our first cosmos, the location of memories, of identity itself; indeed all space is imbued with ideas about home.

Bachelard, 1969.15

Sometimes this place of much importance becomes a confinement for few, basically the *women* of the family. Women are forced to suppress their inner will, aspiration and agree with the forced femininity. They are always entangled in petty struggles of life and have to sacrifice their individuality. It is apt to quote Indu Prakash Singh's article, *Indian Patriarchy: The Commodisation of Women*:

The domestic life of women is a daily sacrifice of self to a thousand insignificant trifles.

Singh, 2006.23

Manju Kapur's *Home* is a story that starts with the time of partition and extends to the post-modern era. Nevertheless, the time does not matter as which so ever is the era, condition of women in a joint Indian family has not changed a bit. The novel shows how a woman has to adjust or compromise with her own desires to maintain the family tradition. Kapur, on one hand shows the strength of a woman and on the other hand her helplessness before the set norms of the society. Like other novels of Kapur, *Home* also revolves around issues related to women in Indian society. The conflict a woman has to face between the expectations of the family and their own desires is presented in the novel. Kapur expresses her own views in an interview:

I think women's lives are complex, they are often torn between conflicting demands, plus sometimes there is tension between the demands of the outside and the family self.

Kapur Manju, 2008.121

The issue of necessity of marriage even in the present times is raised very intelligently by the author. From the birth of a girl, the parents start worrying for the future of the daughter. A girl has to blossom to attract good proposals for her, so that the parents can be relieved from their duty of marrying their daughter. Both Sona and Nisha become victims of this tendency from a very early age. They have to remain beautiful as only beautiful girls can attract good matches for them. The mentality of Sona's mother is shown at one place:

It was necessary for marriageable girls to blossom during such occasions, it being likely that among the guests a boy, or better still parent, would cast a glance and hold it steadily upon her person.

Kapur, 2006.2

Nisha, also as a child is always cared for the same purpose. Even as a child, she was not allowed to play outside home because it could ruin her complexion. This indispensable affair, marriage is so much engrossed in the veins of the society does not offer any respect for an unmarried lady. Shashi Deshpande echoes the same words in *That Long Silence*:

For women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws home. Wait until you have kids.

Deshpande, 1989.30

After marriage dowry becomes the next prevalent issue and social evil in the societies. It is a system (made by society itself), that when a girl leaves her parental house and enters the house of her in-laws, she has to carry lots of precious gifts, jewels, money, household things and many more with her. In this context Elisabeth Bumiller in *May You be the Mother of a Hundred Sons*, writes:

Dowry seems to have an Indian tradition since ancient times, although in Sanskrit religious texts there are only references to parents who gave daughters 'decked with ornaments' at the time of marriage.

Bumiller, 1991. 48



It shows that in due course of time dowry has changed its shape. Traditionally, the custom was not that corrupt as it seems in present times. In *Home* Kapur has brought the custom of dowry very acutely. When Sona marries without any dowry, she has to face many problems through out her life. The dowry her younger sister-in-law Sushila brings a misery for her:

Silently Sona watched as Pyare Lal's father-in-law gifted a scooter to his future son-in-law and furnished the four rooms of the second storey with a fully stocked kitchen, fridge, cooler, double bed, dining table, chairs and an upholstered sofa set in red velvet. She realized as she had not realized three years ago, how poor in gifts her own marriage had been.

Kapur, 2006.12

Banwari Lal's own daughter Sunita suffers because of this dowry system and later becomes a victim of dowry death. Even the poor who cannot afford dowry for their daughters cannot escape this system, this is a reason why a girl child is not welcomed in India. Sunita is married to a greedy drunkard who always beats her and makes demands from her parents. Eventually she dies like many other Indian women, burnt in kitchen. Bumiller writes:

Women become victims of a society in which women are not only burned to death but are raised to see self-immolation as their only escape from miserable marriages.

Bumiller, 1969.46

Even Nisha, the protagonist of the novel cannot remain untouched by this covetous attitude of society about marriage money i.e. dowry. When she gets married and become pregnant, her husband talks about dowry even before the birth of the child. After dowry Kapur has raised the issue of female education. Throughout decades, girls' education is mentioned unimportant and taken only as a mean of time pass until they get married. The degrees they possess are not the guarantee of any successful carrier but only a source of attracting good matches. If one happens to read Indian Vedic manuscripts, he

can understand that female education was an important aspect of society in Vedic period. It was considered important for women to be educated because an educated woman can form the future generations very well. To quote S.P. Agarwal and J.P. Agarwal,

The question of the education of children cannot be solved unless efforts are made simultaneously to solve the women's education. And I have no hesitation in saying that as long as we do not have real mother teachers who can successfully impart true education to our children they will remain uneducated even though they may be going schools. She must have special knowledge of the home, care of children, their education, etc.

Agarwal, 1994.16

According to Gandhi the education of women is not important only for herself but for the coming generations also. In spite of this there are still many places where women education is unimportant. Kapur has well explored the problem in *Home*. Nisha is the only girl of Banwari Lal's family who goes to college and is well educated. She completes her B.A. as a regular student and with English Honours. Her brilliant record in school does not bring any change in her destiny, which is already decided by the elders of the family. She has to study until she gets married. And after the parental family, her future husband is going to decide her lifestyle. Rupa's comment is notable,

God know what use an education would be to a girl from a trader family, one who was only going to marry and produce children.

Kapur, 2006.124

Rupa's husband prem Nath is the only person who knows the importance of education. Nisha flourishes as a student at her aunt's home, but when she returns her own place, to her astonishment she finds that nobody is interested in her studies in her own family. All that her mother wants her to do is to learn cooking and to manage other household things. Sona becomes angry when she comes to



know that her only daughter cannot even cut vegetables properly, she says,

Spoilt you, do you hear? Useless- even ginger I have to do myself. Now quickly cutup the cucumbers for the salad here, do it like this, rub the top, take out the bitter, then wash, then peel, then slice, do the same with onions, tomatoes and green chillies.

Kapur, 2006.125

Nisha's astonishment is obvious by facing two extremely different attitudes about education in the two houses of two sisters. One who gave her all the time for studying and nothing else and the other for whom cutting ginger is more important than solving math's problems. kapur again and again emphasizes that the only education important for a girl is to make her family, her husband and her in-laws happy. This can be the only matter of pride for a girl.

Provincial, adaptable, shy, sweet, caring, homely, devoted, and trained to put the interests of her new family above everything.

Kapur, 2006. 135

The girl becomes a belonging to the groom's side. It is the bride's family who has to sacrifice their daughter. Only a girl and the family can understand the pain of departure. With wet eyes and aching heart they bid farewell to the daughter, having the happiness in the background of fulfilling their responsibilities for the daughter. Only a girl leaves her house a boy never leaves his house to go to his in-laws home and it is only a girl who has to change her whole personality to adjust in her husband's house.

Kapur has successfully covered all these traditions in *Home*, the traditions, which force women to live according to other people's wish. Sona adjusts herself according to the family traditions. Rupa, who is married to a badly paid government servant, has to compromise even to her smallest desires. She spends her life as per the economic traditions of her new family. Sona's mother-in-law, maji, is the woman of the very first generation in the

novel. Like many other women she spends all her life in misery but without complaining about it she copes with them and devotes herself to her husband and his family. Kamala Das in her poem *A Feminist Lament*, echoes this condition in the following lines:

An ideal woman, they said, was but
A masochist. Trained from infancy
To weal flannels of cowardice
Next to her skin, trained to lie inert
Under a male committed by vows to
Feed her, clothe her and buy for her
The 1000 sq. ft. flat with a lift for storing the
debris of passing Years.

Das, 2000. 158

Nisha, does not silently accept whatever is given to her but ultimately she also becomes a victim of the so called traditions. To compromise on everything be it studies, job, marriage is her destiny. From the tender age of ten years, she is forced to start the Karva Chauth fast. Like all other women she is also taught to bear children in the very first year of her marriage. These chain of traditions never leave any Indian woman. Nisha's decision to start a business is also not welcomed. Being a girl, she is not allowed to move out of the house alone. Her being independent is not a matter of proud for her family. Bidyut Mohanty writes in his article, "Women and family in India and China",

Confucianism in China and Brahminism manifested in the Manusmriti in India treat women with discrimination which are dominant ideologies. Of course, Buddhism preaching equality between sexes did prevail in both the countries but have only a tangential impact on patriarchy.

Mohanty, 1998.31

Not only in India but in the other parts of the world also women are treated unequal and inferior being. Again, sexual assault is a trauma which shatters the minds of the victims.in the modern world where people claim themselves to be advanced and open minded, women are very much unsafe.she cannot live alone; she cannot walk alone



in streets; she cannot let herself alone even in her own home between the family members and the relatives. The issue of child sexual abuse is raised by Kapur in *Home*. As a seven year old child, Nisha faces the ugly face of sexual abuse. She faces harassment by her own cousin Vicky. She is terrorized even by the hint of the act.

And quickly, so quickly that she didn't know how it happened, he introduced it to her. Terror-stricken, she looked at the black thing sticking up, and then quickly looked away.

Kapur, 2006. 57

The following years become sleepless and restless for the child. She has to leave her mother's home and care in order to remain safe. Her smile is snatched away from her face and her nights were filled with horrible screamings. She becomes mentally and physically ill. Karen A. Duncan writes,

The trauma of sexual abuse is often hidden within a family's history and can span generations. Children are vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual abuse when certain risk factors exist within their family. For example, children are engaged when a known perpetrator exists within the family and his behavior is not exposed directly by the family or he is not reported for prosecution.

Duncan, 2004.51

Sona is busy in the upbringing of her son Raju and neglects Nisha completely. Kapur has beautifully portrayed how a child is snatched away of its childhood in her own home and raises a question before the society that if a woman cannot be safe in her own home, where shall she find shelter. Man is safe everywhere but woman, nowhere. It is apt to quote Sylvia Plath's poem "The Bee Meeting",

In my sleeveless summary dress

Have no protection.

And they are all gloved and covered

Why does nobody tell me?

Plath, 2000.166

Covering all these incidents, through the delineation of mother, daughter, wife, grandmother, business partner and many other roles, Kapur has presented the female struggle; the social hypocrisies and the female strength of doing multifaceted tasks and their multidimensional talents. By presenting these different characters, she has picturized the problems shared by almost all women. In Nisha, Kapur has shown "a traditional and modern girl", who goes to college, makes friends, falls in love, modernizes herself in her looks by cutting hair and changing the dressing sense. These are the characteristics of almost all Indian women who are tasting the flavor of modernity but ultimately reconcile with family traditions and live for family values; values which are decided by only a single sex of the family.

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