



## MULTI-FACETED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MANJU KAPUR'S *HOME*

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### ABSTRACT

*Manju Kapur has boldly advocated woman's financial as well as emotional self-dependence to decide what can be the role of her marriage in her journey of self-realization. Woman, generally, plays two types of roles — conventional and unconventional and both suffer. The unconventional woman suffers for her violation of accepted norms of society or questioning them. She suffers unless she accepts the wisdom of traditional ways. And conventional suffers due to patriarchal culture. Tradition bound woman sacrifices her happiness for her family sake. Particularly Indian woman does not bother about her personal happiness. She is always considered to make others happy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur (1948- ) is a teacher of literature at Miranda House, Delhi University. She has won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for her Best First Book in Eurasia section for her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998). Her important novels are *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011). She has edited "Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves" (2014).

Manju Kapur's novels focus on female protagonists struggling to break the shackles of patriarchy and are in quest of identity against the dogmas of social and cultural critical thinking. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's preoccupation writing has been portrayal of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship. They have to exist subjected to patriarchy. Manju Kapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the situation of women in male dominated society. Her novels present the struggle of women to establish an



identity. She has attempted to make a space that women have to occupy in domestic relationship.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) won her the most acclaimed Commonwealth Prize for the Best First Book. Manju Kapur shows women in search of their own space. *Difficult Daughters*, written in 1998, is set on the time period during the last years, which were leading to the socio-political catastrophe, the Partition of 1947. This novel is also set within the historical context exemplifying the struggles which women faced during in the early 20th century. Her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) is about what happens when old customs lose their power and the woman no longer believes that her life should be determined in a narrow fashion.

*Home* (2006) is the next novel of Manju Kapur selected for the research study. Manju Kapur has made significant contribution to Post-Independence Indian English fiction. Her fiction is not only a story which is to entertain the reader but also to educate. Each of her novel reflects the different types of women who struggle in cultural conflict, patriarchal domination, identity crisis, immigrant experience etc. One such novel is *Home*. It tells how the women suffer in patriarchal family. It narrates how the women break traditional boundaries and walk through the path of success in their life. The heroine Nisha in *Home* searches for cultural identity in the midst of her patriarchal family. *Home* touches a rather complex area covering woman's emancipation and empowerment.

*Home* explores the complex topography of the Indian family. Manju Kapur, in all her novels, highlights on how women in the Indian society are bereft of proper education in the name of tradition. Lack of education makes them dependable and vulnerable to both the inner world of the zenana and the outer world. Through her novels, Kapur raises the seminal issues of women in a very befitting manner. She also delineates the grim and pathetic reality of Indian women. She advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. Hence, progress and development of a society depends on the emancipation and empowerment of both the sexes. *Home* is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise and secrecy that lie at the heart of every family. The novel *Home* deals with Nisha's challenges in cultural identity and her struggle against patriarch. It also exhibits the theme of Post-colonial Literature.

Manju Kapur takes us through a brisk and strangely captivating account of three generations. Banwari Lal comes to India after partition and, with the help of his wife's jewellery, carves out a sari business in Karol Bagh, Delhi. Success comes slowly, and in the early years he is forced to marry his daughter, Sunita, to a man of dubious credentials. Even as the family gets richer, Sunita is abused and then, perhaps, murdered by her husband - leaving behind a son, Vicky, to be brought up by the Banwari Lals. This is fast moving story woven around two



childless sisters Sona and Nisha. One is married into a moneyed family with a bunch of pokey relations. The other girl is married to a lowly paid bureaucrat with perpetual monetary problems. The story narrates the tale of a joint family in Karol bagh, Delhi. The main character or the Patriarch of a cloth business is Banwari Lal. He believes in the old ways. He is the firm believer of the fact that men work out of home, woman within. His two sons grow up to handle the business well according to the wishes of their father.

As time passes, Banwari Lal dies. The whole burden of the family comes to Yashpal, being the elder one. His sister Sunita married to a drunkard. She is killed in a kitchen accident. Her son Vicky is brought home. Sona, Yashpal's wife, is given the responsibility to bring up Sunita's son as she is childless. Her ten years of childlessness bears fruit when she gives birth to a daughter Nisha and later a son Raju. Nisha is sexually abused by Vicky, her cousin. So she is sent to Rupa's home so that she forgets the incident Rupa's husband Premnath educates and guides her well. She grows up. After trivial hurdles in studies, she joins a college where she meets a boy and decides to marry him. The boy jilts her. Her love-affair is quickly snubbed by the family. Finally, she gets into the business of readymade garments. Yet her false stars could not comply with her early marriage due to the psychological burdens of 'home. These tensions fall so heavily on her that she develops skin eczema. That nearly ruins all prospects of her marriage. The novel ends with Nisha getting married to a childless widower and her giving birth to twins - one male and the other female.

The novel *Home* also exposes many questions that are embedded within the family. There are questions like – the revolt against the ancient traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage; and, last but not least, a woman's struggle for her survival. The novel projects deep understanding of human nature. Kapur presents a touching account of the sexual confrontations thrust upon the delicate body of Nisha. Nisha's friendship with Vicky and then the seduction by Vicky with her creates the horror in her mind. Vicky victimizes Nisha and deprives of her mental composure and sleeps in the coming days. Nisha's dearth of maturity, inability and her physical fragility constricts her conflict with the perpetrator. Yet she firmly fights Vicky's attack and voices her aversion. When the victimizer wields brute force to make her succumb to his evil designs, she could no longer hold control over her body. A good example of the misuse of religion to downscale women is Sona's narration of Vat Savitri Katha to Nisha and the other women in the family.

The opening chapter of the novel entitled 'Sisters' describes the two sisters - Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta. We are informed that both of them were childless. Of them one was rich and the other poor. Sona is the eldest daughter-in-law of a cloth-shop owner named Banwari Lal. Rupa is the wife of an educated but badly paid government servant named Ramesh. Both of them are irrespective of their social and familial backgrounds. Both of them



had difficulties in their personal lives. Rupa is the younger sister. She had difficulties that are easily narrated. Sona's difficulties were unheard agonies in a joint family.

The traditional business of the Banwari Lal family is selling saris. When the business 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. The daughters are confined to the family home. The envy and suspicion grip parents and children alike. There is the need for escape - whether through illicit love or in the making of pickles or the search for education. This becomes ever stronger. There are two female characters Sona and Rupa. They are sisters. One is good looking and the other merely plain. Sona is the beautiful elder sister. She is married to the elder son of Banwari Lal while the younger one, Rupa's husband is just a junior Government officer. Sona is not able to conceive even after two years of her marriage. Her mother-in-law comments her occasionally: "What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you." (18)

Sona performs every duty as a wife and daughter-in-law. She was trained from an early age. Meanwhile, Yashpal's younger brother, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. She belongs to a well-to-do business family of Karol Bagh. Their marriage is appreciated by all the family because it is arranged by the parents. Sushila brings a huge dowry with her including a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. This is the typical Indian tradition, specially the Indian mentality to show the richness through the dowry from both sides – families of bride and bridegroom. As Yashpal the eldest of the two sons of Lala Banwari Lal of Delhi's Karol Bagh falls in love with Sona, there occurs much debate in the Banwari Lal household regarding the love marriage. After he falls in love with Sona, Yashpal spent the night in the thoughts of love. The next morning he gives the address of the girl's house to his father. She considers her as the girl on whom his happiness depended. He wants his father to go and talk to the family regarding the marriage without any delay. Even he threatens his father of leaving the shop and living rest of his life by the banks of Ganges if he could not marry the girl.

Yashpal's parents did not take this idea kindly. They were traditional business people. They knew that it was necessary to arrange the marriages very carefully. Because it was one of the many ways to get financial security as well as insure the family harmony. Among the other prerequisites of the arranged marriage were dowry, family background and understanding of the value of togetherness. Thus, Manju Kapur highlights the social dichotomy of arranged marriage versus love marriage. Sona accepts her sister-in-law's orphan son, Vicky. Finally, Sona gives birth to a baby girl. Everybody in the family is happy because "It is good to have a girl in the house".(35) Girl is considered as Lakshmi for the traditional family. In most of



the Indian patriarchal families, birth of a girl is considered the arrival of the Lakshmi. “And now the womb has opened”, expressed Rupa, “a baby brother will come soon.”(36)

Sona’s delivery of her next progeny, a son is enjoyed and welcomed more than the first. Sona’s mother-in-law declared, “Now I can die in peace”. (41) Both of her sons now have their sons. They can hold their head high in the society. When Sona holds her son, she feels exipated as she had done her duty towards the family by giving birth to a much awaited son. Sona feels the disgrace gone, "with appearance of little Raju, dark and plain featured like his father, but a boy, a boy." (48) Nisha the main female protagonist is in search of ‘home’. Home is a place she could call her own, where she could take her own decisions. She can do things that she wanted to in her own way, a place where she could ‘be’. But from the very start of the novel, she is uprooted from this haven that her father and grandfather created for her, in their own terms. She is not cared for her chastity in her home. She is sexually abused in this ‘home’ by her cousin Vicky. Being insecure and scared in her home, Nisha starts having nightmares. So she is sent to Sona’s childless sister, Rupa and there to some extent, she felt at ‘home’.

Nisha is a confident, self- reliant female. She is a bold and determined person. She defies patriarchal notions. She is married to a widower, Arvind who takes her to her real home, "Now you are home," said Arvind as they climbed the stairs. Marriage becomes a displacement for Nisha. From this situation, she was at peace to a situation of resettlement. In ten months time, she accomplishes the purpose behind her marriage. She gives birth to twins. She loses her economic freedom as well as status in society as a decision maker. The visibility in acceptable societal roles— as a wife, mother, sister, friend — is complemented by the desired invisibility as lesbian lover. The women themselves have very little agency in making their voices heard. In most cases, they have no knowledge of their sexual orientation.

The story of the novel *Home* centres on the two sisters Sona and Rupa. The real heroine of this novel is Nisha, the daughter of Sona. Nisha suffers greatly from her childhood till the end of the novel which is heart rendering. Sona is the daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal family. Kapur tries to portray the traditional families and the beliefs of these families in the horoscope. Unfortunately, Nisha’s horoscope says something negative about her. Marriage is one of the most crucial issues in the life of a woman as it decides her ultimate fate. There are many factors working in once being properly married in an expected family. The chief among them is the physical appearance of a girl. The centre of the argument in the discussion is constantly on a single issue. Kapur meditates on the need to do a job for a woman. It is found that the modern women like Rupa in the fictional works of Manju Kapur are well aware of the changing times.



The women in Manju Kapur's novels are usually of two types – traditional and modern. The traditional women like Sona in *Home* think that women's role is limited up to the marriage. They think that a woman should be trained in domestic work to be an ideal daughter-in-law. On the other hand, the modern women like Rupa think that the girls should be educated so that they can be individuals. It is true that unless they are allowed to go outside the four walls of the house, how they can come to know the world.

Kapur also questions the submissive and passive existence of women and their roles as subservient as well as obedient to the patriarchy. The attempt has been made how women like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman* and Nisha in *Home* go against the stream of the traditional way life and accept the new way of life with new ideology. The other women related with these protagonists are also different kinds of women playing the multidimensional roles at their own places. There is a transition occurring in the life conditions of the Indian women through the women characters in the novels of Manju Kapur. This transition is transforming the Indian women from traditional women into modern women. The change occurs in the lives of Nisha, Virmati and Astha who represent Indian women fraternity in Manju Kapur's novels. The new image of women presented by novelists under study is ambitious, lustful, power hungry and bold. She is an assimilation of western influences as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who despite of all kinds of upheavals, is able to strike a balance among diverse spheres of her life. All domains of her growth, social, political and psychological remain the focus of our investigation.

## WORKS CITED

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