



## Women in Manju Kapur's home

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### Abstract

Manju is one of the famous Indian novelists who raise their voice for the woman emancipation and stand against their oppressive condition which compel them to follow the man-made compressed norms of the society. The story of Manju's novel Home is the story of woman who has been suffering and exploited either physically or mentally. In this novel there are three female characters-Sona, her sister Rupa and Sona's daughter Nisha-who try to establish their presence by raising their voice in their own ways.

**Keywords:** suffering, exploitation, feminism, patriarchy etc

### Introduction

Manju Kapur has emerged as an eminent persona among the woman writers from India, like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Anita Desai who raised their voice vociferously for the women identity in the traditional man dominated society. They have tried their best to short out the problems of woman's identity through their women characters. Although women are considered the creator of "SRISTI", they are deprived of the fundamental rights in every fields of life. Her protagonists from Virmati to Nina have chosen their independent course of life in a male dominated world. In her novels every shade of feminism from passive and submissive to rebel feminism has been presented. Her female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged in a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. The writer clearly show the dilemma of women who carry the burden of being female as well as the added responsibility of being mothers to members of their own sex. Dr. Ashok Kumar has rightly stated in his essay Manju Kapur's The Immigrant: Dilemma of the Second Sex:

"Manju Kapur has been making consistent effort to make her women independent and bold. But even the rebel feminism has done no good to the heroines of Manju Kapur. She turned out to be the Jane Austen of Indian English novel but with contrary effects." (Dr. Ashok p.63)<sup>[1]</sup>

The irony of Manju Kapur's women is that they go through the transitional phase in their life and tend to become different from a traditional woman wanting to break out into new paths. When it comes to reality that they lack courage and resume to patriarchal hegemony. What happens to Virmati, Astha and Nisha is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman even if educated. In an interview with James Kidd she explains how a woman has to adjust herself to maintain balance between the family relations. She has to have a holistic approach to everybody in order to keep herself or her family free from the daily unnecessary quarrel.

The novelist attempts to represent the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward self-assured,

assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression in her novels. Through her novels Manju Kapur has raised her voice against the patriarchal set up which is responsible for oppressing the women identity by providing them a secondary position in the society.

The novel Home deals with the story of a traditionally patriarchal Indian family of New Delhi, which was headed by Banwari Lal, a cloth businessman who lives with his family in Karol Bagh. Banwari Lal is an conventional person and severely believes as per the 'Tennisonian philosophy of gender based work division' that 'He' (Man) is made for the sword and 'She' for the needle, 'He' for the battlefield and 'She' for the hearth. According to Banwarilal Men work out of the home, women within. Men carry forward the family lineage, women enable their mission. His sons follow their father's ethics but their wives do not agree with this doctrine. He has two sons and one daughter i.e. Yashpal, Pyare Lal and Sunita. Sunita is already married to a person named Murli who has no match with Banwari Lal in any ways. It seems that Sunita likes the boy that's why she is married to him.

The marriage of Sona and Yashpal is carried out. Sona's mother-in-law is not pleased and she passes taunt causes Sona's frustration but Yashpal consoles her saying that 'when we have children, mother will forget all this'. But unfortunately Sona could not conceive for a long time. By this time Pyare Lal is also married to Sushila who gives birth to a 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. 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 consoles 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. (Home.18)

Already mentally disturbed Sona has to hear the taunt of her mother-in-law. A woman's position in her husband's house is not secure unless she begets a male-child because she is

known only as some body's daughter, wife or mother. She has no identity of her own in the words of Sahukar and Patel:

A childless marriage is a source of serious disappointment and sooner or later, leads to serious trouble. The position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes secure only after the birth of male child". (Sahukar & Patel 81) <sup>[3]</sup>

After ten long years, Sona gives birth to a daughter Nisha. Sona feels it is because of Devi, but her task is not fulfilled until she gives birth to a son. In the male dominated society boys are considered as productive persons and the society puts more value on them while girls are given secondary preferences and considered as burden.

The problem aggravates very much when Sona's daughter Nisha is declared a Mangli, an ill-fated one. This was not good news as Manglis are considered horribly difficult to marry off until and unless they find a man having equally unfortunate stars. This may surely result into unhappiness or death. She grows up as a beautiful girl. The woman and girl subjugation starts not only from her birth but also from the womb. After Nisha, Sona gives birth to Raju. She feels that her sad days of disgrace and resentment are gone forever with the birth of her little son Raju. 'Gone was the disgrace, the resentment, gone with the appearance of little Raju, as dark pain- featured as his father, but a boy, a boy (Home.49) <sup>[2]</sup>.

From the very childhood Nisha is taught not to go out in the sun, mix with boys or play in the streets like boys. She is a girl and she must take care of her fair, complexion, which is also thought as an essential pre-requisite of a future bride in traditional Indian society. Sona was also pressurized in the very tender age of ten years that she had to fast for future husband but here Nisha protests, as there is an age of for everything. When the child should be thought of her studies, she is forced to think of husband. She says 'Why should I? That's for older women; she did not want to spend the day without food or water (Home.92)'. Sona recalls her days and astonishes on the impudence of only ten years girl who has started arguing. In her time Sona had never questioned anything her mother asked her to do. Simon de Beauvoir comments on the complex mother-daughter relationship:

In the daughter, the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste. In her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation with herself and when, the otherness of this 'alter ego' manifests itself, the mother feels herself betrayed (Beauvoir P. 533) <sup>[4]</sup>

Woman is softest and safest subject to be tortured either it is sexual or mental by her own relatives. The girl is unable to tell anybody such type of incestuous relation. In this novel a minor girl, Nisha, becomes the sexual victim of her cousin, Vicky. Now Vicky is fifteen and he begins to take interest in Nisha. He is always on to look out for opportunities to get Nisha alone. Nisha was too young to understand what was happening with her. The crime committed by Vicky is not less than an animal that has no sense of good and bad. This is an admonishing and abominable deed done to this innocent character. Vicky shows an impropriety just like an apparition. An intent look came on his face, his gentle fingers kept up a steady stroking. He began to trace the elastic of her panties all around the leg.

'What are you doing? Chee, that's dirty, take your hand away, 'Nisha cried, but Vicky was in no state to hear her. Panting slightly, he pushed his hand inside, touching the

place where she did su-su, tracing the slit that divided her. Nisha wriggled even more frantically-'I'll tell every body how dirty you are'-but his grip tightened, and his arm pressed her thigh down so that both her legs were parted, and the slit was looser. A su-su she could not help came out and wet his hand. She tried to draw her legs up and away from him, but he forced himself closer (Home 56-57).

Nisha was definitely good looking, but her horoscope was also of course bad and in the long run stars had greater staying power than beauty as she was declared Mangli and mangli, destined to marry unfortunately, destined for misery, unless a similar mangli could be found, with a similar fate and horoscope. To do this would take time, and during that time perhaps an education? Not too much just a bit and Nisha enters in Durga Bai College for doing English Honors. English is the subject chosen for relaxation and unwinding the tedium of school education. As a result of her family's careless attitude towards education, like all the other girls in her community, Nisha too becomes indifferent towards her studies because it was certain that the course of her life would be planned by the family she would get married into that is why she falls in love with a boy of her own college. The pressure, which is put by the male, dominated patriarchal society on woman to adopt and follow the customary norms or stay prepared sometimes for the harmful consequences.

Soon Nisha meets a boy Suresh who is studying in Khalsa College of Engineering. They become friendly within two or three meetings. Both fall in love and wonder here and there in each other's company but she is not allowed to marry him after much begging and insisting that either she marry him or nobody. The cause was clear that the boy belonged from lower caste. A social taboo is much higher than that of natural phenomenon. Love does not see any social barrier and it can not be cut even by the farmer's scythe. It creates instantly if anybody wants to cut it, it changes into a catastrophe. This social taboo impacts gravely on the tender mind of Nisha and she now totally changes finally she remains unsuccessful in her studies. Her choice of a boy from a lower caste is a sign of the rejection of the traditional ways and values which an orthodox family adheres to. This reminds the conversation between Saru and her mother in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Saru recalls the conversation with her mother, when she confronts her with her intention of marrying Mannu: 'What caste is he? I don't know. A Brahmin? Of course not. Then, cruelly... His father keeps a cycle shop. Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?' (Deshpande, P. 96) <sup>[5]</sup>

Woman has to remain on fast and eats nothing for all day for her future husband. She wishes to get a good match. She always remains in fetter of tradition through out her life. That is why Sona takes fussy care in including Nisha in every religious rite and ritual. Nisha had been forced to observe her first Karva Chauth fast for her future husband even as a ten-year-old child. A good example of the misuse of religion to rationalize women is Sona's narration of the Vat Savitri Katha to Nisha and the other women in the family. It highlights how the ideals of womanhood sold over and over again, in the numerous myths and legends that form the Hindu collective unconscious insidiously enter, capture and mould the minds of women in this country leaving them enveloped in unawareness and satisfied in their secondary status. Sadly, Savitri's determination, her courage, wit and will power get eclipsed and ignored in the

urge to present her as a selfless and sacrificing woman, in the manner Sona does. To those who may argue that such primitive ideas about women are no longer prevalent and are non-existent in the modern-day context, Sudhir Kakkar, an eminent psychologist and cultural theorist answers:

The ideal of womanhood which, in spite of many changes in individual circumstances in the course of modernization, urbanization and education, still governs the inner imagery of individual men and women as well as the social relations between them in both the traditional and modern sectors of the Indian community (Kakkar.57)<sup>[6]</sup>

The another dark side of woman subjugation which the fiction offers as the parts of its discussion starts from her adolescent period and continues up to her old age is her menstruation in which she remains somewhat upset and as per taboos she is not allowed to cook, worship, or serve anybody food during her monthlies. The Pyare Lal and her wife, Rupa, feel happy to know that still Nisha does not know about the taboos of the Sona's family because at Sona's a woman could not do any work which requires sanctity.

Raju and Puja went to Honeymoon after marriage. Pooja goes and comes without anyone's permission. Sona thinks that her son has become a slave to his wife and is bent on stabbing his mother in heart. Condition is getting worse day by day and there is a great dispute among the family. Parents think that it is very bad for Nisha to remain at home all the time. She should join a school so that she feels better. She starts going to school to teach. Parents are continuously searching a Mangli boy as a suitable match for Nisha, but they are not getting success in it. Soon Nisha feds up of the teaching job and plans to start a business. She consults to her father. Yashpal at the time of dinner says to Nisha 'Beti' he started, 'business is not an easy thing (Home 291)'. This is different Nisha starts business and it flourishes day by day. Demands of suits increase in the Market. During this period Yeshpal finds a manglik boy for Nisha. Soon boy and his mother came to see Nisha and pass her. Although boy is a widower and agrees on Nisha's condition. '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 everyday (Home 303). Arvind lives in Daryaganj and have a business there. He accepts that Nisha need not to stop her business and he will hire a room near Karol Bagh so she will not feel any problem to continue it. They registered the marriage in the court.

When Nisha comes to her in-law's house after marriage she has to perform the rites of touching the feet of her mother-in-law and then she moves into the kitchen to see the arrangement of the kitchen. As per custom there the education of female child is considered less important than that of male child. That is why her mother-in-law suggests her that household is the main affair of the girls and education is meant for boys and male members only. 'What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful for entire life (Home.206)'. In her father's home also every member of the family even her mother and brother impose code of conduct on woman. Both Pooja and Nisha, the daughter and daughter-in-law of Sona face the same discrimination as faced by Sona. She herself being a woman does not allow them to assert their identity. In the name of tradition and respect for patriarchal culture they are not allowed to take part in the main affair of society. They are enclosed in the four walls of home.

To sum up, The story of Manju's novel Home is the story of woman who has been suffering and exploiting either physically or mentally. In this novel there are three female characters-Sona, her sister Rupa and Sona's daughter Nisha-who try to establish their presence by raising their voice vociferously in their own ways. The story that had started with the tale of Sona and Rupa finally finds its calling in Nisha who spends her childhood, scarred by incestuous abuse at Auntie Rupa's home. But it is her later pursuits in life - studying English Literature in an university, falling in love with a low-caste boy, forcefully standing up to her conservative family, despairing at being jilted by the lover, her courage in struggling with the meanness of life, her attempts at finding her place in an uninformed society that refuses to recognize the promise of her merits, her petty jealousies, unarticulated complaints and simmering frustrations that inevitably accompanies a life riddled with disappointments -that become central in the novel.

Manju Kapur's novel, Home covers the burning topics like-dowry, bride burning, social stigma of barrenness, superstitions, castism, schooling and economic autonomy which cause the woman subjugation more extent, make their life unbearable in the world society in general and in Indian society in particular.

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