



PORTRAYAL OF FAMILY LIFE, STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN MANJU KAPUR'S "HOME"

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Abstract: "Home" is a novel by Indian author Manju Kapur, published in 2006. It is a thought-provoking novel that follows the journey of Nisha as she grapples with the challenges of balancing family and personal fulfillment in the context of Indian society. It explores themes of love, desire, and the choices women must make to find their own sense of purpose and happiness. In this novel, Kapur portrays women characters in a multifaceted and nuanced manner, reflecting the complexities and challenges faced by women in Indian society. The Novel delves into the lives of women from different generations within a North Indian family, highlighting their struggles, aspirations, and the evolving roles they play in a traditional and patriarchal society. The novel's female characters are richly developed, showcasing a range of experiences, personalities, and desires. Through their experiences, struggles, and aspirations, Kapur challenges traditional gender norms and underscores the importance of women's agency and autonomy. The novel ultimately celebrates the resilience and strength of women as they navigate the complexities of their lives in a changing world. The novel raises questions about the role of women in Indian society and the sacrifices they often make for the sake of their families. It also emphasizes the value of discovering oneself and going after one's own aspirations and dreams, despite what society expects.

The novel "Home" provides a thought-provoking examination of the tensions between tradition and modernity, family and individual aspirations, and the roles and expectations placed on women in Indian society. Through the characters of Nisha and Veena, Manju Kapur offers a nuanced portrayal of the changing dynamics of Indian families and the choices women make in their pursuit of happiness and fulfillment.

Index Terms – Indian society, Kapur, Nisha, Complexities, challenges etc

I. INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur is an Indian author known for her famous works in Indian literature in English. She has made significant contributions to contemporary Indian fiction, particularly in the exploration of themes related to family, marriage, and the roles of women in Indian society. Her works often address themes such as women's rights, the clash between tradition and modernity, the evolving role of women in Indian society, the struggles and challenges faced by Indian women, and the complexities of family relationships. Through her storytelling, Kapur provides readers with a window into the lives, struggles, and triumphs of women in contemporary India, making her a prominent voice in literature in English.

In most of Manju Kapur's novels, the female characters are not common women who believe that marriage is their destiny and that they must submit to their husbands. In contrast to other women in this category, Kapur's female characters defy social norms and restrictions to reinvent themselves as fresh, self-aware women. Kapur discusses the issues faced by Indian women living in joint families. In her literary writings, she has provided a fresh perspective on Indian women. Her writings address the root causes of the issues that Indian women face in a patriarchal and male-dominated culture. Because of the varied socio-cultural contexts and traditions, a new kind of growing and evolving feminism that is distinct from feminism in the West can be seen in her works. Her works generally focus on the problem of patriarchy and imposed gender norms that silence and restrict women's voices and freedom. The protagonists of Kapur's stories are wives and daughters who contest and criticize their assigned social roles. They are the women who searched for self-identity in a male-dominated society. Her novels deal with the issues that Indian women experience in their daily lives: polygamy, arranged marriage, joint families, the dowry system, and child marriage. As a post-colonial writer, she understood the role of women in a patriarchal society and dealt with women's issues. Kapur makes her woman character a figure that fights against taboos, social and joint family restrictions, and traditional limitations imposed by the patriarchy. She made an effort to give women a voice in household relationships. The need for women to forge their own identities is present in most of her writings. They encourage the urge to lead an autonomous life. Her female lead characters appear to be protesting male dominance and the marginalization of women. They desire greater accountability than their husbands and kids provide them. They are courageous, vocal, adamant, and active, not solitary rebels. Manju Kapur's idea of women's liberation and autonomy is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural and economic space and paradigm in the Indian-women context. The main characters in her novels are caught in a constant dilemma between personal needs and institutional and social duties and responsibilities. Most of her novels reflect human desire, longing, gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion, and rebellion against the unjust treatment of men. Kapur's novels manifest women's struggle for liberation from economic, political, and social bonds.

Manju Kapur's famous novel *Home* (2006) was shortlisted for the Hutch-Crossword Book Award in 2006. The story revolves around the life of Nisha, a young woman who marries a man named Vikas and moves into his family's home. As Nisha tries to adapt to her new role as a daughter-in-law and navigate the dynamics of her joint family, she grapples with issues of identity, autonomy, and the tension between tradition and modernity. The novel delves into the challenges faced by Nisha as she seeks to find her place in her new home and society, ultimately highlighting the intricacies of Indian family life and the evolving roles of women in this context.

1.1 SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on the exploration of family life, struggles, and challenges faced by the protagonists depicted in Manju Kapur's "*Home*". The novel portrays a patriarchal society, a denial of women's freedom, and the struggles and challenges faced by Indian women in joint families. The study is helpful in a society where women are silenced, segregated, and blamed for causing strife and severing family ties. Many scholars have tried to explore, investigate, and describe the struggles, challenges, and inner and outer conflicts of the female characters in the novel and attempted to make a thematic analysis. Despite several types of research available, no one has taken into consideration the contribution of female characters to sustaining the family bond and resolving the conflict. The stratification of males and females within family institutions continues from one age to another throughout the world, and disparities create an imbalance between men and women. These disparities between them occur due to customs and traditions, superstitions, and prejudices that society has been following for a long time.

1.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The present research work, entitled "Portrayal of Family Life: Struggles and Challenges Faced by Women in Manju Kapur's "*Home*," examines diverse realities, ideologies, family life, struggles and challenges faced by Indian women, and perspectives of feminist literature from the family point of view. The study of the selected novel neither allows the inclusion of other literary genres nor studies the other novels of the writer. Only the selected novel of the writer has been taken for analysis, and the study does not deal with any other issues in the selected novel apart from the perspective taken for research. Kapur explores distinct ideologies and perspectives on family life, struggles, and challenges faced by the Indian women represented in her novels.

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A lot of studies have been conducted on thematic, feminist, psychological, and familial components of Manju Kapur's works, but the earlier study reveals that many aspects of family life, female struggles and the challenges faced by the Indian women have not been taken up and investigated yet. Hence there is still a gap in the previous research done which can be noticed in the review of the following works.

Anupama Chowdhury takes a political perspective in analyzing the novel "*Home*" in her article "Dynamics of Politics and Poetics of Home: A Study of Manju Kapur's *Home*" which concludes that the novel shows a disturbing home in which the joint families can both destroy and preserve our development, individuality and intellectual progress. The scholar points out how Kapur projects positive and negative aspects of joint family culture in Indian society.

Romika Batra Sukhija in her article entitled " Postmodern Feminist Reverberations in Manju Kapur's *Home*" says that Women in "*Home*" have taken recourse to multiple strategies in their effort to underline the notion of selfhood. Likewise, they adopt different strategies for self-assertion too, thereby denying a singular, one-dimensional view of Feminism. Kapur does this by challenging the rigid ideas and conceptions of the relationship between men and women that feminist literature upholds. In her novels, women are taken advantage of not just by males but also by other women who belong to the same species. Manju Kapur delicately addressed the differences between women in her novel *Home*.

V. Mahalakshamma in her article "Women in Manju Kapur's *Home*" says that The 'New Woman' personified by Manju Kapur's women is the new voice of the new social order. They have cast off the weight of constraint that has held them back for so long, and they now wish to breathe freely and occupy a respectable position. She expresses how Kapur's *Home* effectively depicts the reality of women in a society that is ruled by men. The protagonists are torn between tradition and modernity, conservatism and novelty, and the demands of tradition and the call of conscience. The conflict between these ideas of identity and the need for personal fulfillment serves as the novel's central theme.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS:

Female sensibility, family concepts, and relationships with men are all depicted in Manju Kapur's works against the backdrop of Indian society and culture. The protagonists are undoubtedly victims of the Indian patriarchal system, but they protest and rebel anyway; eventually, of course, they give in to sexism. They submit to patriarchal rule out of a desire to preserve man-woman relationships for the sake of their families and their children, not out of any innate weakness. The majority of the women portrayed in the works are conventional societal structures' victims.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present research work aims at analyzing the selected novel of Manju Kapur from the perspective of family life, conflict, struggles and challenges faced by Indian women and attempts to reveal the reasons for healthy relations for the sustenance of happy family life. The following are the objectives of the study.

- i. To explore the family life, conflict and the challenges faced by the Indian women in the selected novel.
- ii. To find out the basic reasons of conflicts that may arise in the family

- iii. To analyse the female characters, their sensibilities depicted in the novel of Manju Kapur and
- iv. To understand the struggles and challenges faced by the Indian women especially in the joint families.

3. METHODOLOGY:

Analytical and interpretative research methodologies will be used for the analysis of the selected novel. Both primary and secondary sources will prove to be fruitful for the analysis of the novel. The primary sources would be the original works by Manju Kapur, which would be read; relevant data would be collected, analyzed, and interpreted critically to arrive at formidable conclusions. The secondary sources would be critical works on the works of the author, e-sources, consulting libraries, scholarly journals, INFLIBNET, academia, etc.

4. FAMILY LIFE, STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES DEPICTED IN "HOME"

The novel "*Home*" offers a poignant portrayal of the struggles and challenges faced by women within the context of an Indian middle-class family. Manju Kapur masterfully portrays the intricate web of struggles and challenges that women face in a traditional Indian household, offering readers a glimpse into the complexities of their lives. Through her characters, Kapur highlights both the resilience and vulnerability of women in their quest for personal fulfillment and identity within the constraints of societal expectations. The novel provides a thought-provoking exploration of the evolving roles of women in Indian society and the hurdles they encounter along the way. The story is set in post-independence India and revolves around the lives of the women in the Mehta family, primarily the central character, Nisha Mehta. Nisha is depicted as a traditional and dutiful daughter who values her family's expectations and desires. She adheres to the cultural and societal norms of her Indian heritage and takes on the responsibilities expected of her as a daughter. Nisha's character embodies the tension between tradition and modernity that is a recurring theme in the novel. As the story unfolds, Nisha's character undergoes significant development. She gets married to Vikram, and their relationship becomes a focal point of the novel. Nisha's struggles, aspirations, and challenges in her married life are portrayed in a nuanced manner. Her character serves as a representation of the complex dynamics that can arise in arranged marriages, especially when the individuals involved have different expectations and backgrounds. Nisha's character grapples with her role as a wife, daughter-in-law, and woman with her own dreams and desires. She faces the pressure of conforming to societal expectations while also yearning for personal fulfillment and happiness. Her character serves as a lens through which the author explores themes such as gender roles, family dynamics, and cultural identity. Her journey is one of self-discovery and resilience in the face of societal expectations and personal desires.

In the novel, Nisha is shown as a brand-new lady who is more forceful, upbeat, and confident. Kapur presents Nisha as a strong, knowledgeable, and well-balanced woman. Her feminist consciousness has been largely repressed by patriarchy, yet it still exists. Despite her difficulties, Nisha has developed into a strong woman. Given the betrayal by her family and Suresh, she still retains her feminist identity. She can appreciate the extraordinary potential of a woman and her unique place in the family and community due to her drive for independence, fortitude in the face of challenges, and determination. The book deals with the realities of life in which Banwari Lal's "old-fashioned" shop is replaced by a showroom for modern-style mirrors and his "home" is divided into apartments as a result of modernization. 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". (Anita)

Nisha launches 'Nisha's Creations,' a store, with the assistance of her father. She was happy and feels proud because "her father trusted her as he would have trusted a son".(291) In the beginning of her business, she had to borrow money from her father, promising that she would return the money in a very short time. Nisha works with a monthly-paid tailor and purchases suiting materials from her father's store. Her suits and gowns are popular with her friends and clients. She receives large orders and establishes herself as a prosperous and well-known "businesswoman" in the Karol Bagh market. She has achieved economic independence now. She has abandoned social conventions in favor of showcasing her talent and is eager to take on any challenge. Nisha shows she is a trustworthy, hard-working businesswoman. Very soon, her shop will begin to shine in Karol Bagh. She has high standards for her employees, the fabric used to make the dresses, and the rates she charges. She pays back her father's loan in full within a year. She observes the employees. She arranges for her mother, Sona, to take care of the employees while she is gone. She is highly aware of her reputation as a successful businesswoman. She says, "My reputation will be ruined," despite not being careless in her work. How competitive is the market, do you know? (294)

After being married, Nisha has become confined to her house. Pooja, her sister-in-law, takes over her business in her absence, as her in-laws did not allow her to continue the business. Within a few days, Nisha's life started changing as her husband never discussed anything with her, either personally or professionally, in the context of their marriage. He is unable to comprehend her goals and aspirations. Nisha was free and, like a flying bird, was imprisoned in a cage of social expectations after her marriage. After one month of marriage, she becomes pregnant, and she wants to visit the store during her pregnancy, but her husband and his family do not allow her to go out at this stage. Her plan to go out during these days is not well received by her husband and mother-in-law. Her aunt Rupa, though very close to her, consoles her by saying, "You know, Beti, you can always start a business if you have shown a flair for it. But this time with your baby, this will not come again". (334)

5. CONCLUSION

The novel "*Home*" by Manju Kapur is a rich exploration of the complexities of family life and the evolving roles of women in a changing Indian society. It offers insights into the cultural and social dynamics of modern India through the lens of a single family's experiences. The novel delves into the various characters' lives, their struggles, and their attempts to find their own identities within the confines of a traditional Indian family. It also explores the themes of tradition versus modernity, the evolving roles of women in society, and the impact of societal norms on individual choices and happiness. Kapur reflects on how the characters have evolved and changed over the course of the novel, particularly in the context of their shifting identities and the clash between traditional values and modern aspirations. The novel offers a poignant look at the interconnectedness of family, the enduring impact of cultural values, and the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment in a rapidly changing world. Throughout the story,

Nisha undergoes personal growth and transformation as she seeks to find her place in her new family and assert her own independence. The novel "Home" provides a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of family life in India and the challenges faced by women as they navigate between tradition and modernity. In short, the novel offers a glimpse into the intricacies of domestic life in contemporary India and highlights the struggles and sacrifices made by women like Nisha as they navigate the complexities of family and tradition.

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