



FEMINISTIC ASPECTS IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL-HOME

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ABSTRACT

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. Kapur intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Her novels present the longing struggle of women to establish an identity. Her female protagonists crush and define the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert their identity and achieve self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life. A feminist tradition is strongly apparent in her novels. The search for control over one's destiny is the key theme. Manju Kapur speaks for the middle class and even has been earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp-eyed, finally turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations. Kapur's third novel 'HOME' beautifully weaves "conflicting loyalties intrigues triumph" as well as the "small rebellions and intense power struggle" which constitute the universal human experience. The novel, a saga of Indian family life spans three generations whose destiny and dreams are glued to the Banwarilal cloth shop. We find Manju Kapur has beautifully portrayed the women characters in general and Nisha the protagonist in particular. Nisha has to struggle for establishing her identity and to survive in this male dominated world. The novel explains the patriarchal society and one of the daughters breaks the rules with the changing social equations. Despite individual ambitions and legal restrictions, there is a growth of the old house and cloth shop 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 lies at the heart of every family. The protagonists of all the novels of Manju Kapur are seen as a women struggling against all odds. Manju Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of woman at deeper level in her novels.

Key words: Feminism, Patriarch, Protagonist, Suffering

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Manju Kapur taught English literature in Miranda House College, Delhi University for over 25 years. She has written 05 Novels, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *Custody* (2011). She has also edited *Shaping the world: Women Writers on Themselves* (2014).

Manju Kapur's novels acquire a significant new meaning when read in the point of view of crisscross dogmas of cultural critical thinking. The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Kapur has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the

predicament of her women protagonists. The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. Her novels explore the complex terrain of the Indian family and reveal many issues that are deep rooted within the family: the revolt against the age old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage and the women's struggle for the survival. Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the confines of 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. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunged into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds.

Manju Kapur's third novel *Home* was classified as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in *The Sunday Times*. This novel was shortlisted for the Hutch crossword prize. It is an engrossing story of family life amid the bustle and commerce of the Banwari Lal cloth shop. The prime focus of the novel is the home which is deployed both in its physical manifestation and its metaphysical dimensions. The prevailing idea of the homogeneous space of home is contested as it becomes the arena of class, caste and generational clashes as the old and the new generations struggle to exist within the common house. In this novel 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 Sunitha, to a man of dubious credentials. Even as the family gets rich, Sunitha is abused and then her death in a kitchen fire, leaving behind a son Vicky, to be brought up by the Banwari Lal. Vicky becomes a bone of contention. Banwari Lal, his grandfather feels guilty about what happened to Sunitha and hence responsible for him, but his sons and their growing families have less reaction to

make space for Vicky. Sona's (the first daughter in law of Banwari Lal) childless state is coincided with the death of Sushila who leaves Vicky behind. One would imagine Sona to be delighted but she shows disdain towards boy and finds it painful to accept him when he is thrust upon her by the elders. With the death of the benevolent Banwari Lal, the shop is modernized and the family house changed into self contained flats. The joint family and even the business are fragmenting; the price of both cohesion and fragmentation being paid in different ways by different characters.

Nisha – the protagonist of the novel *Home* is the prized daughter of the family who is the only one to put up a mild battle against the regression attitude of her family. Kapur presents the joint family system as both the preserver and destroyer of an individual. In Nisha's case, the effect is adverse and the irony is highlighted, as her life takes an unexpected turn for the worse. Fate delivers a cruel blow to her, first when her love is thwarted by the family, and the boy is low caste and poor and second, when she suffers from a peculiar skin disease that robs her of her initial good looks. Meanwhile from being the center of the family's attention, Nisha is suddenly relegated to an inferior position because other younger daughter-in-law's entry into the family. Nisha is unmarried, not as pretty as earlier and this is the time when the joint family set-up especially seems to crush her spirits.

As a new woman, a more assertive, self-assured and confident one by equally footing with man, she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner. As a young collage girl she applies her power to work as a business woman. She is really the representative of new women in the millennium. She feels that a girl should be contending everywhere provided she is allowed to give a direction to her aspirations. When her affair generates restlessness in the household because according to Nisha's family since Suresh belongs to a low caste he is in no way eligible to marry her, Nisha defends Suresh and rebels by saying "Who cares about castes these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market." (*Home*: 199). She sobbed with indignant emotion, "Sell me and be done with it, what you are waiting for?" (*Home*: 199). Nisha

refuses to follow the age old traditional marriage. She wants no more to be a doll to be sold in the market. Nisha's quest for identity and freedom as a human being significantly express Manju Kapur's feministic approach. Later when they holds meeting with Suresh, but the meeting prove to be fatal for Nisha. She realizes, "Raju was right, Suresh was a chutia, a total fucker, if he loved her, he had no right to decide her future on his own" (Home 214). Significantly enough, Manju Kapur, here has pointed out the traditional male governed approach. Nisha suffering from skin disease and being sitting idle at home are problems for her. Loneliness compels Nisha to feel that she would go mad sitting inside the house. She wants to work in their shop like her brothers. She pleads her father; this reveals her inner quest for independent existence. It also seeks equality of sex. She denies the patriarchal system in a very cool, calm and composed manner with a sane and serene approach, meanwhile she gets an idea to start business of Salwar-suits. With this idea, she demands a year from her father to prove her ability. She pleads "Give me a chance to show you what I can do." (Home: 286) Here is a new woman; she appears to be self-assured and confident. She dares to pronounce her volition and conviction. Yashpal trusts her without making difference between his son and daughter. Both are treated equally. Nisha is allowed to start her business only because of her dire misfortune. Yashpal agonizes over the thought that, "The woman of the house had never worked. Not one. And here he was sending his beloved daughter out into the world because she did not have her own home to occupy herself with." (Home: 269). Being a business woman, Nisha tackles every problem on her own. Though she takes help of Pooja and Mother in charge of Nisha's creations, she does not allow them to interfere in her decision. This proves Nisha to be dashing and darer in decision making and self-assured. Meanwhile a marriage proposal came. She says her mother, "If I am going to marry him I should be able to say what I like." (Home: 299). This shows that she no more wants to be mere sexual object. She reveals her freedom in the meeting with Arvind. Nisha does not want to trap her entire life into home. So she abides condition to her groom that she should have

freedom to run her business even after their marriage.

Nisha as an individual could create separate room for her in home and society. She is an educated and spirited new women, could refuse to be treated as an object instead that tried to establish her own identity. Her quest for self-identity, struggle for economic independent existence and her equality with men depend upon Indian social ethos. The ending again beautifully brings out how life can look up again-with a slight re-adjustment of one's expectations after suffering a blow. Nisha finds her happiness when she least expects it. She becomes an entrepreneur woman; she works spontaneously for two years. It brings to her sense of achievement in life helping her to create her own identity, her own voice and her own place in the society and home. This success leads her to get marry and fulfill her quest for home.

Feminism exposes the systematic social injustice caused by gender discrimination. Manju Kapur who occupies an important place in the world of Indo-English literature tried to deal with physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women's pitiable plight in her novels. She raises the innumerable issues that are deep-rooted within the family-revolt against the age old traditions. The search for identity, the place of women in Indian society etc., she confesses in one of her interviews, "Yes, I am a feminist writer in the sense that my works are woman-centric. My novels focus on the needs and desires of women from different backgrounds and in different situations. Women yearn for recognition for their work, particularly since domestic labour so often goes unappreciated. They want concern and a sharing of responsibilities." (The common wealth review, 159)

Kapur's fiction stress on the women's need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self realization independence, individuality and self actualization, displacement, dispossession, un-belonging quest for home and resettlement dominate the novel's matrix. The family's home is shifted from Lahore to Delhi women leave their natal home to settle in their marriage homes. Nisha is shifted to her aunt's house and returns back after more than a decade to ultimately relocate herself to her husband's house.

Vicky leaves – “the house his mother’s death had made hateful to him” (Home.77) to live in Banwari Lal’s house when he is despised. Finally he leaves his grandfather’s home to settle elsewhere. Individuals are thus uprooted from their environs and are forced to house themselves in new places. Ancestral ties are served and new attachments made while struggling to cope with the isolation and un-homeliness that swathe the people. As generational disparity becomes evident and signs of rebellion erupt, the whole dynamics of family relationship and individual rights get reconfigured. Ultimately the old strain under the increasing pressure of the new and finally fragments itself.

The utopianism related to home is fractured as it engulfs the people’s lives. There is a lessening of the home with a gradual attenuation of the atmosphere. The fictional personages are abhorred, controlled and pushed to the periphery physical home becomes problematic and there is continuous sense of being un-homed and not being at home. Maaji feels her life useless after her husband’s death. Sona feels her home usurped by others. Nisha, Vicky and Asha are constantly reminded that their present home is temporary. Nisha’s sexual victimisation makes the home unsafe, undesirable, and deflecting and delusion of its security.

The novel presents Manju Kapur’s understanding of human characters and her maturity as a novelists, “My own feeling is described me any way you like, as long as I am relevant, as long as I am read, I don’t really care cultural trends, gender relations, class equations, all of them are seen brilliantly in the novel.” says Manju Kapur. The novels appeal 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 make perception. She described the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for their triumph. Manju Kapru presents in their novel the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured, assertive and ambitions women making society aware of their

demands and in this way providing a medium of self expression.

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