



GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL "HOME": A PERSPECTIVE

K.V.S.MAHESWARA RAO

Lecturer in English, A.M.A.L.College, Anakapalle, Visakhapatnam District., Andhra Pradesh
koramvsmrao@gmail.com



Article Info:

Article Received:18/11/2013

Revised on:21/12/2013

Accepted for Publication:30/12/2013

Article published online : 31-12-2013

ABSTRACT

The 21st century Indian English Novel is deeply concerned with the family and the personal or inner world of individuals- man and woman. The contemporary Indian Women English Novelists have taken a lead in portrayal of the condition of Indian women who, living under patriarchy, have to undergo trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influences of tradition and modernity. This paper throws light on the problems of women in a patriarchal society where men are the dominant sex; the cultural construction and social mechanism perpetuate gender inequality and how gender discrimination becomes a pivot in the growth and development, happiness and sorrow of the characters with reference to Manju Kapur's *Home*. It reflects various facets of the struggle of women's autonomy. Kapur has vividly portrayed how gender operates within the framework of a joint family shaking it to its foundations. The family of Banwari Lal is traditional and patriarchal. In the family men are committed to bring up the family line and women to enable the men to achieve their goals. His sons and their wives who have been brought up and trained in this stereotype accept and bear unquestioningly this tradition of the family. Kapur finally brings out how women live and struggle under the oppressive mechanism patriarchy of a closed society.

Key words: Individuals, Contemporary, Patriarchy, Tribulations, Social Mechanism, Discrimination, Autonomy, Unquestioningly.

Feminism is a philosophy that challenges patriarchal anarchy, social organization and control mechanism. It therefore opposes women's subordination and oppression in home and society. Women's oppression begins with gender and hence analyzing gender issues becomes crucial in studying any text with a feminist approach. Analyzing gender begins with identifying how gender is not god-given, natural or innate but socially constructed. According to Mary Klages, "Gender is constructed through binary oppositions that...divide the world into male and female and valuing male over female." (Klages 12)

Manju Kapur in her third novel *Home* deals with the problems of Indian women in a male-dominant joint family. Kapur skillfully brings out how gender issues are deeply rooted and stem out

from social norms and traditions in which women are made captives and thereby to an extent capturing the men too from being their real selves. According to Radha Chakravathy, "Gender issues are central to Kapur's worldview in the lines of the female figures. We encounter questions about marriage, motherhood, women's education, women's work in and out of the home, the body, sexuality, the different forms of violence against women ranging from emotional blackmail to dowry deaths and sexual abuse." (Chakravathy 119)

Social structure conditions one's thinking. A person becomes that, under which circumstances he or she lives. *Home* focuses on three female characters- Sona (Daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal), Rupa (Sona's sister), and Nisha (Sona's daughter) who claim their identity in their own ways. There is

a comparison between two sisters Sona and Rupa and their lives. They born in the same house, but are totally different in their thinking after their marriage. It is result of the atmosphere of their new families. Like many other Indian women writers, Kapur voices the trials and tribulations of her female protagonist, Nisha who, no doubt, recognize the primal essence of family bond but is conscious of her individuality.

Banwari Lal, the patriarch of the family, firmly believes that men are committed to bring up the family line and women to enable them to achieve their goals. His sons and their wives who are trained in this stereotype accept unquestioningly the tradition of the family to an extent. They belong to a class who believe that “their marriages augmented, their habits conserved.” And so their children were trained to follow the convention that they had to protect and be perpetuators of the flow of money into the family. Their marriages were arranged with great care. Marriage becomes the centrality in a woman’s life right from her childhood where she is taught to fast for the longevity and wellbeing of her future anonymous husband. Dowry became an integral part in their weddings and the value of living together, their mantra. In Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of the Night*, she says, “A woman without a husband has no home.”(1992: 38) For the women, marriage is a social obligation, a necessity and, therefore, desirable and inevitable. Jane Austen, in her letter of March 13, 1816, wrote, “Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.”

In a patriarchal family structure, a young woman’s prestige or recognition in her husband’s home is based on her fertility in general and the birth of a male child in particular. When Sona failed to conceive for ten years, her position in her family became miserable. Every gesture of the mother-in-law suggested that “the daughter-in-law had no right to exist, and if she had to live, why in their house? Only when the men came home at night was there the semblance of a caring family”(Kapur 11). To make things worse, the second daughter-in-law Sushila had no problem in conceiving and she bore two sons. This forced Sona to perpetual fasts and numerous rituals. Finally she gave birth to a daughter, Nisha and then eventually to a son, Raju.

It is a generally accepted notion in patriarchal societies that their girls are liabilities and once they are married their burden is cast off from their shoulders. The girl’s future is based in her husband’s house, where she is destined either for happiness or for sorrow. The girl’s connection with her paternal home is irrevocably cut off as in the case of Banwari Lal and Sunita. With the death of Sunita however, her son Vicky returns to the family as an object of pity and concern. For Banwari Lal’s sake, his sons and their wives stoically welcome and accept him. But the margins are clearly drawn and Vicky, though lives with them inside the house, is an outsider, carefully and systematically marginalized because he is their “sister’s son”. He is hated by all others in the family and is termed ungrateful.

Kapur’s novel *Home* revolves around the story of Nisha, the young daughter of Yashpal and Sona. Kapur raises multiple issues which often raise the eyebrows of modern woman. Gender discrimination begins very early when her colour was commented upon right at her infancy. Nisha gets a lot of gifts in gold and silver during her naming ceremony and Kapur deftly points out, “With this gold, Nisha’s dowry was begun” (Kapur 40). She insists on her mother to allow her to go out and play cricket. But Nisha’s mother reminds her of the duties a woman has to perform. She comments, “This is the life of a woman to look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food she has cooked with her own hands” (Kapur 126). She believes that a girl’s real education is in the kitchen. Moreover, a girl has no right to choose her place of happiness. Nisha was shocked to discover that “her mother’s idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time anybody ate” (Kapur 126).

Manju Kapur hints to certain other evils also which go on breeding in these middle class joint families. Home is usually supposed to be a place where people feel relaxed and comfortable but Nisha in her own home is sexually abused by her own cousin, Vicky. Home turns out the most unsafe place of her and she begins to have nightmares. Nisha then goes to live with her aunt Rupa and for sometime her search for home comes to an end because there she feels comfortable. After few years, Nisha returns home and she finds herself unwanted and undesirous. Then she decides to go to an ashram and devote herself to homeless widows.

At least there she can live with dignity and respect. Anupama Chowdhury says, "*Home* reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress."

Nisha grows up to be a rebel as she is caught between her emancipation which education assures and tradition represented by the family around her. As she wants to look like a modern film-star, she cuts her long hair. According to P.C.Pradhan, "Nisha's understanding of 'personal worth', 'pure mind', and 'feelings of the heart' in connection with marriage is against the traditional patriarchal values" (Pradhan 119). But Nisha's family does not approve this. She then feels desperately lonely, which in turn triggers her venture into entrepreneurship, and eventually she is captivated to the pressures of marriage and motherhood. Thus gender has its impact on Nisha beginning with crushing her individuality and finally reaches a state wherein her sense of autonomy is hopelessly and mercilessly crushed along with her potentials in the name of virtue. Julie Mullins in *Children in Need* says, "Discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality. It results in millions of individual tragedies, which add up to lost potential for entire countries. Studies show, there is a direct link between a country's attitude towards women and its progress socially and economically. The status of women is central to the health of a society. If one part suffers, so does the whole."

Kapur effectively depicts that if women fall a prey to the rules drawn by the society, it also draws the men into the same pit choking their individuality out of them. Even the men are expected to behave and act in ways befitting their gender stereotyping. The main concern of Sona is Nisha's marriage. The mother wants her daughter to be rooted in the tradition that would make her life worth living. Once the relationship between Suresh and Nisha is broken, Nisha's journey towards emancipation begins. She wants to do something valuable. She wants to be economically independent. It is her first step towards empowerment. Her idea of working and earning is bitterly opposed by her mother. It is an example of woman submission has been presented by Manju Kapur through Nisha's struggle to adopt the

profession of her own choice. If women suffered from economic and socio-cultural disadvantages, the men suffered from an inability to express their originality. Both were reduced to mere rubber dolls in the hands of society to move as it pleased. Both were deprived of "their aspirations to their individuality and self reliance" (Warake 269).

Nisha, the main protagonist and the daughter of Yashpal and Sona, emerges as self-dependent woman in the novel. She refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and make dominated family structure and tries to make her own individual identity. She defines womanhood entirely in terms that suit her aspirations. With the help of her father, she starts her own business and feels proud of herself. She is able to accomplish to an extent the prerequisites for women's freedom, put forward by Simone de Beauvoir: "economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society" (Simone 126).

Manju Kapur has depicted through the character of Nisha that it is not easy for a woman to choose the profession of her own choice. In order to do so, she has to struggle a lot in her life. Nisha is a victim of gender discrimination when she feels that she can't work outside like her brothers. This reveals her inner quest for self identity and independent existence. She counts herself equal as her brothers. She denies the patriarchal system. Malti Agarwal observes, "Manju Kapur's depiction of her heroine, her travelling the labyrinth of rules and regulations of traditional middle class milieu and stepping out to start earning for her existence are superb. A girl in Indian family is whining under the burden of patriarchy. She while living in her home feels herself homeless- shelter less. She strives to explore space for herself. She tries to be self-reliant in order to survive."

Nisha's plights as an unmarried daughter and then as a married woman show that the patriarchy in Indian society operates mainly through the agency of women and takes the women into its fold because Indian women are perhaps the most plastic personalities in the world. Manju Kapur's *Home* touches the realities of life. Defying patriarchal notions, those enforce women towards domesticity. Nisha asserts her individuality and self-reliance through education. She nurtures the desire of being independent. She wants to shoulder

responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. In spite of getting education and freedom Manju Kapur's heroine, Nisha does not blossom into new woman in the real sense. Though she dares to cross one patriarchal threshold, she is caught into another, where her freedom and self identity are restrained.

Works Cited

- Anupama Chowdhury, "Manju Kapur's *Home*: A Feminist Reading." *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, Vol. XLV. Cuttack: Bani Press, 2008.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Tr. H.M.Parshley. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986.Print. P.126
- Chakravarthy, Radha. "Home: Review by Radha Chakravarthy" *Indian Horizons* 53 (Summer 2006): 117-119. Print.
- Hariharan, Githa. *The Thousand Faces of the Night*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1992.
- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum Books, 2006. Print.
- Malti Agarwal, "Manju Kapur's *Home*: A Chronicle of Urban Middle Class in India." *Impressions: Bi-Annual E-Journal of English Studies*, No1, January 2007. Web. 12 Feb. 2011. <http://impressions.50web.org/ma.html>.
- Manju Kapur, *Home*. New Delhi: Random House, India, 2006.
- Mullins, Julie. "Gender Discrimination: Why is it still so bad and what can you do about it." *Children in Need*. Web. www.childreninneed.com/magazinw/gender.html
- National Resource Centre for Women. Article. Web. <http://www.nrcw.nic.in/index2.asp?sublinid=319>
- Pradhan, P.C. "Challenging Patriarchal Ideology: Interpretation of Feminist Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Manju Kapur" *The Atlantic Literary Review* Vol.10 NO.4 Oct-Dec 2009: 108-122. Print.
- Warake, N.S. "Quest for Identity and Survival: A Study of Manju Kapur's *Home*" *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies* 24(Jul-Dec 2010):268-278.Print.