

MODERN OUTLOOK OF INDIAN WOMEN FOR EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF MANJU KAPUR'S *HOME*

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur is one of the most renowned Indian woman novelists of the modern India. She has realistically portrayed the vulnerable condition of women in the Indian society and at home, dominated by patriarchy and traditional cultural habits. But at the same time, she has highlighted how such Indian women move heaven and earth in order to become educationally empowered with the sole aim of establishing their individual identity and independence. In order to achieve their life's desire, her women cannot but meet with a lot of obstacles that lead them to their mental sufferings and silent pain. Besides, Manju Kapur has also brought out her women's inner spark of revolt against the attitudes of patriarchy as well as matriarchy senior in age. The protagonist Nisha of Manju Kapur's *Home* has to struggle in her life just because of the rules set for the women in the closed Indian society. Nisha not only respects her traditional upbringing but also she never entertains any idea of violation. However, she does not remain silent by accepting all types of her discrimination and sufferings without voicing her concern. She also thinks of her own predicament and takes steps in order to make her educational dreams come true. As a

consequence, she can establish her independence. Her attempt becomes successful only after her having established her own independent individuality. But at the same time, she cannot but become the great sufferers at the hands of her patriarchy and matriarchy senior in age and experience. However, she also realizes her own responsibilities to achieve her desired end. Till her dream comes true, she never minds her own sufferings. Thus Nisha has a strong of inherent dynamism in her character. All modern women should be like Nisha that they can establish their individual identity through educational empowerment. But the pity is that all young modern women cannot act as Nisha has done. It is because of their different nature of traditional brought up. However, all should realize that it is only their educational empowerment that provides them with an indelible individual identity.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Matriarchy, Silence, Pain, Individuality, Empowerment

Manju Kapur's novels circumscribe the condition of women education since Independence till the present era

Analysis:

Manju Kapur portrays the life of contemporary but empowered Indian woman Nisha in her novel *Home*. While doing so, she depicts her heroine's varied experiences and difficulties during her life first as a daughter and then as a married woman. Her heroine Nisha is the representative of the diverse range of modern women including college girls, housewives, and career-oriented women, because they also face unique challenges in their day today life. Like Nisha, modern women no longer appear to be dependent, frustrated, submissive, or conservative. Instead, they act as bold and determined individuals in order to achieve their goals in life without any fear. Winifred Harper Cooley has said, "The finest achievement of the new women has been personal liberty". Their attempts become successful because of their personal liberty they enjoy. This is quite clearly seen in Nisha of Manju Kapur's *Home*.

Nisha is the only daughter of Sona and Yashpal born to them after a period of ten years. From childhood till her womanhood, she has to face gender discrimination silently in various ways not only from men but also from women. It is because all have expected that a boy would be born but they have got disappointed when Nisha was born. However all console themselves thinking that next baby to be born should be a boy. Though all feel disappointed, they console themselves that the female baby would bring fortunes. After the birth of a female child, Sona's sister Rupa comforts her saying "Now your wound has opened . . . a baby brother will come" (*HOME* 37). Sushila, the wife of younger son Pyarelal also consoles Sona stating, "Our house is always blessed with the sons. Hence, you do not worry about that" (*HOME* 37). All the Banwarilals should have considered the birth of a female child as a sign of prosperity but they do not. Among all the Banwarilals, it is only women but not men who are more vociferous in their negative attitudes towards the birth of a female child. It is natural for men to show gender discrimination but it is quite unbecoming of women to show their unpleasantness for the birth of a female child.

Being a child and innocent, Nisha is quite ignorant of the ways of the world as well as the attitudes of the elders both men and women towards her for being a female child. For every female child, her home should be a place of protection from all dangers, which will unexpectedly emanate from both outside and inside. She is not at all allowed to go all alone out of her home without any elders accompanying her. If she is inside her home, the elders would take care of her wherever she is. As far as Nisha is concerned, though her family is a joint-family, which has more number of both men and women, her safety in all respects is not taken care of well. When she is all alone, her cousin Vicky approaches her stealthily, takes advantage of her loneliness and attempts to abuse her sexually. Being a child, she is not aware of his intentions. Hence, she cannot raise her voice aloud when he sexually begins to harass her. Moreover, holding her tight, he warns her not to voice his violation on her chastity in public because "it was their secret" (*HOME* 58).

After the unpleasant incident, Nisha feels that her home is the home of terrifying nightmares, which has greatly affected her mind. Moreover, she cannot voice her sexual violation as she has been warned. Moreover, she is too small to bring it to the knowledge of her mother. She cannot actually spell out what kind of act has been meted out to her body by Vicky. She is too young to understand it. However, she cannot feel that his act is something nauseating and irritating. Hence, she starts spending every night keeping awake and whenever she tries to sleep, she cannot do in fear. "The minute her head hit the pillow, she refused to lie down or close her eyes in fear" (*HOME* 64). She has hidden Vicky's act of sexual abuse in her heart as a result of which she has been restless and sleepless. Since then, she has never eaten anything too.

Sona fails to fix the causes for the strange behaviour of her daughter. She sends her to the house of Rupa, her sister, thinking that the change of place would bring some relief and comfort to her. As she has expected, Nisha feels greatly relieved of her tension in the house of her aunt Rupa.

Nisha found her [safe and secure] in an atmosphere, which was very different from the one, which [her house had] she had lived in. As the only child [in Rupa's house] she was the centre of interest, concern and attention . . . gradually her bad dreams drew infrequent in their cessation. (*HOME* 68)

There is a saying that only a mother knows what the ailment of her daughter's is. But as a mother, Sona does not know the cause of her daughter's discomforts whereas Rupa, a barren woman, can find out that "the demon [in the form of Vicky] that lay in her home should be the cause of her mental disturbance-otherwise, such a small girl would not willingly leave her mother" (*HOME* 68).

After her schooling and a period of eleven years stay in the house of Rupa, Nisha has come back to her mother and home. The freedom and individuality, which she has enjoyed at the home of Rupa, cannot be enjoyed at her home because of her mother. It is because her mother Sona expects her daughter to be in the kitchen so that she can be of some help to her mother in the preparation of food. She also insists on her being homely so that she could turn out to be a good

wife to her husband and a loving mother to her children. All other things except cooking can never be of any use to her entire marital and familial life during her sojourn on earth. As a daughter, Nisha feels helpless and looks shocked on hearing her mother's insistence on her homely duty. Her house is no way better than that of Rupa, but when she insists on her pursuing education in a college. Her mother cannot say except allowing her daughter to pursue a degree course in a college till the time comes for her marriage.

Nisha is not like other traditional girls because she is a mangli. Being a mangli, she can marry only a man who is also born as a mangli. Hence, she cannot love any man and marry him. When her parents decide to get her married, they cannot find a man even among mangli tribe whose horoscope can match with that of Nisha. Till a mangli man whose horoscope matches with that of Nisha is found out, her parents allow her to go for higher studies lest she should not brave any misfortunes that will befall on her. Rupa, her sister, strengthens this view of her parents saying:

If anything happens to Nisha later, her higher education will come to her rescue so that she can tide over her predicament for being independent. It would be a shame [for us] not to educate her further [for her independence]. Let her pursue English honour, not too much [hard] work [but only lies in] reading story books. (*HOME* 140-141)

A grown-up and college going girl falling in love with a boy of her liking is spontaneous and it is not premeditated one. It is her individual choice and no one can dictate her that she should love this boy or that boy. It is her personal affair and it may or may not pave the way for her marriage, which is a religious ceremony. Just because a boy says "you love me" a girl cannot love him. The feeling of love comes from her heart and the heart alone makes her decide the lover. Regarding her spontaneous choice of a lover, what Rashida Rowe has expressed is true:

[A girl] falling in love is like finding a part of her which she has not realized that it has been missing. When she happens to come across any young man suddenly, she feels that her missing part is the young man. It is he whom she thinks makes her complete but also feel whole. (*HOME* 6)

Therefore, her love does not know any status or caste or religion of the lover, nor does it mind it because her lover is her other part, which is a side rib of her man from which she has been created.

Nisha is also like any other college going girl who has been blessed with a maturity of mind to decide her own personal pursuit besides education. Like any other girl, she is smitten with love for a boy during her collegiate education. He is Suresh but he is socially inferior to her in status. In showing her love, she does not see his social status but she finds him her other missing part. Her love being real, she has a spontaneous choice. She has asserted her individuality in expressing her love for him. She is seen being with him and roaming here and there in the university together. She also changes her hair style according to his liking but at the same time she is not indifferent to her studies. She establishes her separate identity by giving up her traditional dress of salwar kamees. She fashions her hair style to appear as a modern girl and starts wearing jeans and T shirts

like any other modern girl of the college. Though modern in her way of life, she bluntly refuses to concede to the demand of Suresh for pre-marital sexual relationship. Her refusal reveals the inherent traditional trait in her character and individuality.

Nisha has been in love with him for three years without any obstacles and she has kept her love affair as a secret. She is determined in her pursuit of love to show her individuality. She also decides that Suresh is only to be her husband even if there is any opposition from her family. When her parents come to know of her love affair, they are against her wishes. They bring to her knowledge the reality, by saying that he is no match to her, that he is neither a mangli nor a boy of higher caste, and that he is not at all equal to her in social status. As they think that she can never be trusted because of her teenage, they express their unwillingness for her continuation of her collegiate education. Nisha objects to the attitudes of her parents in connection with her love as well as in continuation of her studies. She exercises her individuality through her rebellious voice, questioning their right to judge her untrustworthiness. She is adamant in expecting her parents to listen to her heart's desire to be fulfilled. She looks more rebellious and argues with them more vigorously by citing their love marriage as an example as well for her defense. She asks them why she cannot marry a man she loves as they have done. She questions them saying that they have not followed the advice of their elders but they want their daughter to follow the tradition. Her anger becomes uncontrollable but her parents start citing the caste differences between their daughter and Suresh. She also pours out her feelings freely:

I am not a fool. It is love, which has driven you both [Yashpal and Sona] to marry in spite of opposition. I have also seen in the films a myriad combination of socially unequal background between a boy and his love: rich-poor, Hindu- Muslim, Hindu-Christian, high-class and low-class, and educated and uneducated. Love is the bridge over the great [social] divide. (*HOME* 149)

She finds fault with her parents for their hypocrisy and inimical attitudes to love marriage and different social background of the lovers.

Nisha's rebellious attitude to follow her own ways of life with regard to her love lands her in trouble. Her voice for her individuality is denied hearing. She is kept under house arrest, thereby preventing her from going to college and meeting her lover:

All day, she remained in the house, virtually a prisoner of the words of her parents. She was distrusted too much to be allowed to put a foot outside. A padlock was put on the phone, only incoming calls could be received without the key. (*HOME* 201)

She begins to demonstrate her voice of protest for her confinement through her behaviour. She neither eats much nor talks much but all the time she is keenly noticing happenings outside her room. She does not care about her university examination. However, her decision to marry Suresh is disposed by the Almighty Himself when she is afflicted with a skin disease. Her skin gets discolored and tarnished, and she has lost her facial beauty. On seeing her condition and

predicament, her parents have to listen to her voice and accept her marriage with Suresh. But their response to her entreaty is too late because Suresh is not ready to marry Nisha in her disfigured status. He thus betrays her trust and love and his act of betrayal greatly intensifies her pain further.

Nisha does not know whether there will be another man who is ready to marry her in spite of her broken relationship and her spoiled beauty. Till such a man comes and marries her, she decides to do something meaningful in her life. She wants to be an independent individual completely free from parental bindings. Mustering courage and boldness, she informs her parents that she has been fed up with sitting idle at home, waiting for the arrival of some mangli man with his marriage proposal. She wants to forget everything that has happened to her by concentrating her mind on something, which could give her solace and independence. she states, "I do not want to be seen by all these people [that I am staying in the house idle]. Why can't I do some course? I want to study [a course on] fashion designing. Lots of girls do it, why can't I? Why should I sit at home, every day waiting for proposals? (*HOME* 226-227). Though Sona is not interested, her father shows his strong support for his daughter's independent life. He informs Sona that if she wants to work, she should be allowed to because, "My first duty is to her present life, not to her future [marital and] familial life. Otherwise, the karmas on our head will be too-too much (*HOME* 297).

Nisha has to remain indoors lonely by suffering from pain due to skin disease. There is no immediate chance for its complete cure nor does any man approach her home with his mangli horoscope to propose. Her dream of pursuing career oriented course does not materialize because of her sickness. She wants to escape from her loneliness and self-confinement. She thinks that if she moves with other people known to her, she can forget her pain. Even in her situation, she wants to do some other work outside lest she should become mad. She does not hesitate to voice her desire to be of some help to her father in his shop so that she could feel some kind of relief to her physical and mental trauma. She alone knows what the cause of her trauma is. Joyce Meyer in her work titled *Beauty for Ashes: Receiving Emotional Healing* has excellently stated about the trauma of human being. What she has said is quite relevant to the situation of Nisha, "God wants you [Nisha] to be delivered from what you have done [her premarital relationship] and from what has been done [skin disease and betrayal of her lover] to you" (*HOME* 63).

Though she knows that the girls coming out and working in the shops are against her family tradition, she wants to do it as a kind of some liberation to her mind, which is heavy with sadness and it is not as her voice of rebellion. If she works along with her brothers in her father's shop, she will be treated with respect and love, which her brothers enjoy. In this way, she decides to establish her individuality and she immediately informs her father of her intention with a tone of assurance, "Papaji, If only you take me with you [to the shop], it will be a great relief for me. I will not be lonely, and I will not think of my pain. I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do" (*HOME* 268). She is confident of herself and her ability in thriving in a business profitably. It is her positive attitude with which she

thinks that she could alter her entire life. She also informs her father that if a chance is given, she will prove her skill in business.

Appreciating her self-confidence, Nisha's father does not like her to work in his shop. He hears her desire of becoming a business woman positively. He provides her with a loan of twenty five thousand rupees to start a business of salwar suits, which will be sold with the name "Nisha's Creations." He has thus paved the way for her heart's desire to take a concrete shape. She becomes a business woman with all seriousness and responsibility. Within a year, she becomes a very successful business woman. She never thinks of her love and jilted lover nor does she look worried about her darkened face due to patches on her skin. She also displays her individual skill in managing her business. She takes every decision herself regarding its day today functioning. At the age of thirty and at the peak of her business, a marriage proposal comes from a widower Anand. As per her inner voice, she has now established her individual identity and being an independent individual, she decides to accept the proposal of Anand. She knows that she should marry another man and settle in life and then only her parents would feel happy. Hence, she is ready to accept Anand without bothering about whether he would be to her expectations and that of her parents. Anand, being her other missing part, becomes her husband through register marriage. Nisha feels herself a complete being after her missing part has rejoined her.

For every woman, her marriage is inevitable and essential because it provides her with safety and security in life. According to Arvind As Clara Nublie has pointed out in *Danger of Gender*: "Being a woman in Modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of marital and familial life in the different roles of a woman-wife-mother" (Clara 12). Nisha is no exception when she gets entrapped into an inescapable cage of home of her husband. Her life goes on in the direction, which her inner voice guides and as per her heart's desire. She has at last attained another status as the mother of twins. She feels proud of being a mother of one boy and one girl. She also gets unwavering love and affection from her husband as she has expected all the time in all the situations. Thus, she feels greatly satisfied with her role as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She is very happy to have a blessed and safe home for her happy familial life, bereft of any traditional restrictions. What her mother could not achieve she has achieved individually, a happy home with her own family, "I am always surrounded by my friends, relatives, husband, and babies. They are all mine" (*HOME* 337).

Sona, Rupa and Sunita in *Home* are other daughter characters but before they could establish their individual identity as daughters, they have attained their marital status. Hence, they are more known as wives rather than as daughters. Sona and Rupa are the blood sisters whereas Sunita is the only daughter of the Banwarilals. Of the two blood sisters, Sona is not only the more attractive but also the more fortunate. They are traditional in their way of living as daughters and they do not show any preference in the choice of their husbands. They accept the men their parents have chosen as their life partners. Sunita is brought with love, care and comfort for being the only daughter to the Banwarilals. She never voices her rights in choosing her husband and accepts a good for nothing drunkard as her husband.

Children born as female gender are to suffer when they grow up as women. They are not treated as equals to men. They are brought up with cultural habits and when they grow they should keep their habits intact. They cannot assert their rights stating that they are equal to men. Only when they educationally and professionally empowered, they enjoy equal rights along with men. Hence, educational empowerment for girls is a must lest they should suffer as secondary human beings.

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