

# Struggle for Survival in Manju Kapur's "Home"

P. Elizabeth Kalpana

Department of English

PSNA College of Engineering and Technology

Dindigul- 624 622

Kalsat30@gamil.com

**Abstract:** The family is the chief institution that has survived all the way through the ages in India. Like most other less industrialized, traditional, eastern societies, it is a collective society that emphasizes family integrity, loyalty and unity. In India we also have class and caste; rural and urban; westernized, which means modern, liberal, and so on. And then we have more traditional people, who can either be poor or rich or middle-class. Families reflect societies – social moves, cultural trends, gender relations, class equations – all of them are seen brilliantly in the novel "Home" by Manju Kapur is an engrossing story of family life amid the bustle and commerce of Banwari Lal cloth shop.

*Home* details Nisha's struggle and search for a home i.e. searches for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately to women in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security. Nevertheless, it sometimes does not provide them any physical or mental security. The novel unravels the story of an ordinary middle class joint family's life in Delhi. All these are usually kept under the carpet to defend family's honour. A lot of issues go behind the curtains while maintaining the outer picture of being a big and blissful family. The author has tried to bring some of those issues to the forefront and due to this, "Home" does not remain a simple story of a Karol Bagh saree seller, but gets a more universal colour and makes an revitalizing family saga. Home reveals a distressing home and a fact that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress.

**Key words:** Industrialized, Families, struggle, relaxation, universal, individuality.

**Indian writing** in English is flourishing abundantly by leaps and bounds in every field of literature particularly in the field of fiction, in recent years has centered round the unsung plights of Indian women. The blooming and blossoming of Indian women writing novels are far more singular striking. A host of radiant women writers have traced in their novels the role played by women to stabilize their identity in a conflicting environment. The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society were reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur.

**Manju Kapur**, a professor of English at Miranda House is a new entrant in the world of Indian English fiction. This emerging new novelist has five novels to her credit. Manju Kapur's foremost novel, *Difficult Daughters* published in 1998, received the Common

wealth Award for the Eurasian region. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was called 'fluent and witty' in the *Independent* published in 2002, Manju Kapur maintained her earlier practice of narrating the tales of Urban Middle Class in India. *Home*, her third novel published in 2006, was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in the *Sunday Times*. Her fourth novel *The Immigrant*, 2008 was short listed for the India Plaza Golden Quill Award and the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2010. Her fifth novel *Custody*, published in 2011 gained a great popularity among the reader community.

Manju Kapur takes us through an energetic and strangely fascinating account of three generations. **Banwari Lal** comes to India after separation and with the help of his wife's jewellery, carves out a saree trade in Karol Bagh, Delhi. Success comes slowly, and in the early years he is enforced to give his daughter **Sunita** in marriage to a man of dubious testimonial. Even as the family gets wealthier, Sunita is abused and then, perhaps, murdered by her husband - leaving behind a son, **Vicky**, to be brought up by the Banwari Lals.

Banwari Lal, feels guilty about what happened to Sunita and hence feels accountable for Vicky, but his sons and their budding families have less reason to make room for Vicky. Of the two sons, **Yashpal** falls in love with the stunning **Sona** and employs incisive emotional blackmail to get his parents to accept her. The other son, **Pyare Lal**, has a suitable arranged marriage, and all the sons, daughters-in-law and, in due course, grandchildren pull their anecdotal weights in the cramped family house and the family sari shop.

Kapur's portrayal of the male characters is more persuasive than in her earlier novels, and she has some tremendous descriptions of spaces outside the instantly domestic, such as canteens and the Banwari Lal shop. The family of Banwari Lal is traditional and patriarchal. They believe that men work out of the house, and women within. His two sons follow the ways of their father without any question. The head of the house, Banwari Lal, is ready to do anything for the honor of the family and to maintain its unity. He believes, "United we stand, divided energy, time and money are squandered". (H,7) At

first his principles are challenged by his elder son, Yashpal, who falls in love with a customer and then marries her. The disagreement of the 'love marriage' is the very feature of conventionality.

Home' explores the complex topography of the Indian family and reveals many issues that are entrenched within the family and the revolt against the age-old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage and lastly the women's struggle for her survival. The novel 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. The story begins with two sisters: one is good looking and the other is merely plain. The beautiful elder Sona is wedded to the elder son of **Banwari Lal** while the younger one, Rupa is emotionally involved to a junior Government officer of less value. At the initial stage, the story revolves around the life of Sona and Rupa before it focuses on the whole family. **Rupa** has only a husband and a father-in-law in the family whereas Sona's is a joint family. The only tension of Rupa's life is a iniquitous tenant who lives upstairs in their house. He refuses to pay his rent on time. They have already spent a lot of money on the case to evict him. **Rupa** and her husband, **Prem Nath** remain childless couple throughout the story. But she is lucky enough because she is not subjected to bear the taunts of in-laws for having no child like Sona. Her mother-in-law remarks her occasionally of what Sona knows about motherhood?. Sona performs every job as a daughter-in-law as she is skilled from an early age to love, serves and obey her in-laws. Meanwhile, **Yashpal's** younger brother, **Pyarelal** gets married to **Sushila**. Their marriage is appreciated by the entire family because it is arranged by the parents. Sushila brings a huge dowry and Sona feels herself inferior to Sushila, as Sona's parents did not give her dowry at the time of her marriage.

Sona's fight to have children in order to establish her place in the family unit and rejects the liability for **Vicky**, the orphaned son of the daughter of the family. Sona gives birth to a baby girl. Everybody is joyful because "It is good to have a girl in the house". (H,35) Girl is considered as Lakshmi for the traditional family. "And now the womb has opened," continued Rupa, 'a baby brother will come soon.'" (H,36) Sona's delivery of her next offspring, a son is enjoyed and welcomed more than the first. Sona's mother-in-law declares that she can leave the world in peace. As both of her sons now have their sons and they can be proud in the society. Due to this gender differentiation, the family never let **Nish** go outside and play with her brothers.

**Nisha, the main protagonist** and the daughter of Yashpal and Sona, emerges as a self-dependent

woman in the novel. She refuses to settle with the patriarchal and male dominated family structure and tries to make her own individual identity. She spends a cramped childhood She is provided with nice dresses but she is not allowed to play or go out. Her mother Sona is content with the materialistic life and neglects to acknowledge even the simplest wish of Nisha.

Manju Kapur has portrayed the bewildered days of Nisha in a heart rending manner as Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in the early stage of her life. After this disastrous incident, Nisha starts screaming at the night time and also starts refusing to have her food regularly. As it is a large family, the women in the family are always tiring to take care of them and they do not have time to observe Nisha's state. Nisha struggles physically and mentally after this incident. Rupa believes there is something at their home which is frightening and disturbing the innocent mind of Nisha. She is sent to her aunt's house. Her aunt **Rupa**, and her uncle takes full care of her.

In a traditional family like Banwari Lal's family, education to girls is considered secondary. But Nisha's education begins properly at her aunt's house. Her aunt and uncle try to talk on the issue of Vicky with Nisha's father but no one in the family is ready to believe such tales about Vicky, whom they consider like their own child. Her uncle, **Prem Nath** helps Nisha in her studies and spends much time in telling her stories and lessons. When she joins the college, Nisha's episode of love life begins after she meets Suresh. But the family disagree her wish to marry Suresh as he belongs to a different entity. Though she loves him deeply, she could not marry him because of her patriarchal family. All her aspirations, decision and her choice depends on men in her family. This incident frustrates her deeply and she does not have any interest in her life. Mean while she suffers with skin disease.

During Nisha's education, her brothers get married. Now it is Nisha's turn. During Ajay's marriage, Sona wants Nisha to look gorgeous so that any boy or his family may choose her. When Nisha returns home after living for a long time, Sona discovers with horror that at the age of sixteen, Nisha does not know how to cook and she was worried that she takes half an hour to peel ten potatoes. Her mother knows that she is manglik and it is not as easy to find a manglik boy for her. Nisha is told to indulge in fasting for her future husband by her mother. Nisha is of recent thinking and does not believe in traditional beliefs. She is not ready to spend her whole day without food and water. The traditional mother wants her daughter to be like her.

Nisha has to adjust the idea of another man in his place of Suresh. Now starts Nisha's journey towards liberation. She wants to do something valuable. She complains, "Why should I sit at home every day waiting for proposals?" she further wants to do fashion designing course. 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.

Manju Kapur seeks liberty for the Indian woman but within the Indian socio-cultural values. She always bears the process of oppression and gender differentiation within the institution of the family and the male dominant Indian society. Nisha is a victim of gender discrimination when she feels that she can't work outside like her brother. Sona's inner quest for independent existence and self-identity is clearly revealed. She counts herself equal as her brothers. She denies the patriarchal system. At her request, her father allows her to join a play way school, next to her home. Instead of going to shop and attending the customers it is the better option for her. But soon Nisha feds up with children at the school and quits the job. Another example of woman submission has been presented by Manju Kapur through Nisha's struggle to adopt the profession of her own choice. The author 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. Society deprives her of this right just because of her being a woman.

The novel touches the realities of life in which owing to the modernization the 'old fashioned' shop of Banwari Lal is replaced by modern showroom and the 'home' is fragmented into flats but not the traditional mind of the people.

The novels deal with Nisha's challenges in cultural personality and her fight against patriarchal society. Nisha does not dance to the tunes of conventions and wishes to live a carefree life. With the help of her father, she starts her own business, a boutique, named 'Nisha's Creations'. First time in her life she feels proud as "Her father was trusting her as he would have trusted a son". She takes money from her father to start the business but she vows to return every single penny to her father. She hires a tailor on monthly pay and collects material for suits from her father's shop. Her friends and customers like her suits and dresses. She gets heavy orders and becomes a successful and known 'businesswoman' of the Karol Bagh market. She is now economically emancipated. She has thrown the social codes to the wind and wants to display her talent and is ready to take up any challenge.

Nisha proves to be a responsible working businesswoman. Her boutique starts shining in the

Karol Bagh very soon. She is very conscious regarding her workers, the raw-material for dresses and in fixing genuine prices. Within a year, she returns half the money loan to her father. She keeps an eye on the workers. She is very much attentive about her status as a reputed business woman. She bears no disregard in her work. Meanwhile Nisha's marriage is fixed with Arvind. Nisha is closed inside her home after her marriage. Her sister-in-law, Pooja, takes over her business. In the institution of marriage Nisha's husband never shares anything, personal or professional, with her. He does not recognize her desires and aspirations. Therefore marriage the promised end in a traditional society becomes an corral that restricts a women's movement. Within a month of her marriage, she conceives. During her pregnancy, she seeks to go to the shop. Her husband and mother-in-law do not welcome her idea of going out during these days.

Nisha delivers twins-one girl and one boy and becomes a complete woman according to the frame of society. Home shows the destructive limitations of Indian family values and the protagonist struggle for survival.

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