

Binaural Issues: A Study of Manju Kapur's Home

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Abstract

It is a universal truth that a woman's world is completely different from man's world. These differences are wonderful and complementary but in course of civilization, these differences have taken a new taken a new shape. Some set of cultural expectations in terms of code of conduct and their status in the society, were imposed on each sex. More than half of the population of the world is of woman but she is not treated at par with man despite innumerable evolution and revolutions. She has the same mental and moral ability yet is not recognized as his equal. In such circumstances, the question of searching her identity is justified. In patriarchal society, she is mother, daughter, wife, sister and home maker. She is always expected to sacrifice, severe, submit and bear all ill treatment against her silently. Her individuality has no recognition in this patriarchal environment. This paper is basically focused on Manju Kapur's novel *Home* which depicts a female's journey from her childhood to motherhood. Kapur narrates important issues of gender, class and family. This paper is an attempt to show various feminist issues like female education, gender discrimination and financial independence, quest for identity, freedom and woman empowerment in contemporary Indian joint families. Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* gives the idea of woman as other, in which she talks about female gender and writes: One is not born woman rather becomes a woman.¹

Key Words: Protagonist, Predicament, Patriarchal, Horoscope, Mangali, Childbearing.

It is known fact that a set of cultural role is more forcefully imposed upon the weaker specimen of the society for maintaining harmony and development of the society. In process of civilization women were always found to be the victim of dominant patriarchal culture. Studying Manju Kapur's *Home*, it comes to know that how a woman passes through different stages in her complete life span in order to play many roles smoothly, she loses her identity and find herself sacrificing her own wishes for the sake of her family. With her six novels, Manju Kapur established herself as a well known literary figure in the vast realm of literary world. Her five novels: *Difficult Daughter*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody* and The latest one *Brother: A Novel*, are wonderful in portraying different facets of human predicament with

keen observation. She shows her deep interest in presenting the life of common people in daily chaos. There is a unique touch of universalization in all her works. Her choice of character, milieu, plot and setting-everything is quite impressive to create a familiar atmosphere of exchange with the people belonging to everybody life.

Her distinctive sense of feminism is also exhibited in an outstanding manner. She presents her characters in the context of inner conflict, which has been recognized as the core issue of her works. In her novels Home Kapur highlights the factors which restraints the freedom of the female to live, grow and realize her identity, the way men do. She once again goes back to her theme of three generations residing in one house, as in her first novel *Difficult Daughters*.

Home is about the home of Lala Banwari Lal, a patriarch, who firmly believes in living together as a joint family. He is the head of the family who runs a saree shop in Karol Bagh, Delhi: As Anupama Chaudhary writes:

Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and pressure our maturity, individuality and mental progress.²

The novel is about three female characters- Sona (Daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal), Rupa (Sona's Sisters) and Nisha (Sona's daughter)- who assert their identity in their own ways. In an interview, Kapur stated:

Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that I am exploring the space that women occupy in domestic relationship. It is a world I know and understand... There are many manifestations of the Indian woman's role; she is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law. In fact there are many aspects of woman's life that I will need to write about.³

Sona, on one hand got married in the family of rich cloth shop owner, while on the other, Rupa is the wife of an educated but lowly paid government employee. Each sister thinks that the other is luckier and each one has more difficulties than the other. Sona in spite of so many prayers and rituals remains childless for the first ten years of her marriage and faced so much humiliation by relatives and family members. Though her sister Rupa remains childless throughout the novel, she is lucky enough in this case as she is not subjected to bear the humiliations and taunts of her in-law for having no child. Sona always compares her condition with Rupa's childlessness and laments:

She (Rupa) was not subjected to sneers and taunts; she was not the only barren woman amongst myriad sister-in-law whose wombs were bursting with perpetual pride.⁴

In Indian male dominated society wifehood and motherhood have always been accepted as central role for women. Women's prime function, as defined by our society is to serve as the vessel that will bring forth the next generation and its result; she faces two types of oppression; First, by the imposition of motherhood, as a reputed symbol of her status and second, by the responsibility of continuing the family human race. Her mother-in-law passes unfavorable comments:

What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you.⁵

The comments of her mother make her depressing and inferior but she has to bear that entire humiliated attitude because she is still childless. Her motherhood and womanhood, is continuously questioned. The woman can accept everything but taunt on her barrenness is unbearable. Finally, after a relentless psychological pressure for ten long years, Sona blessed with a baby girl but her responsibilities towards the family are not yet over because, in Indian culture idolize son and dreads the birth of a daughter.

...and now the womb has opened, continued Rupa, 'a baby brother will come soon.'⁶

Manju Kapur's approach towards women's liberation and patriarchal notions are deeply rooted in the Indian woman's situations with their socio-cultural and economic spaces and patterns of the country. Her novels' protagonists are always caught in continuous disjunction between the personal desires and institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. They opposed the male domination and patriarchal mechanisms of surveillance and control over female's body. Kapur culminates the factors which restraint the freedom of the female to grow, live and realize her identity, the way men do. The process in which religion, myths and traditions are embezzled to shape women into an acceptance of their secondary position, cause them to live circumscribed life. Her protagonist combat and overcome the ideological suppression and reshape the existing value systems and ideals to re-create themselves in a meaningful way.

The story then turns to the second generation, where Nisha, the protagonist and daughter of Sona appears as a self-reliant woman in the novel. She rejects to harmonize with male-domination of her family, and tries to establish her identity as an individual. She spends a horrible childhood where she is sexually exploited by her cousin. She is not allowed to do anything of her choice. She is sent to her aunt's house for sparing her from her cousin. Few years later, she is considered a marriageable age girl. In Indian culture, marriage is the solitary aim of a girl's life. When a girl child is born, her horoscope is observed with an intention of her marriage probability details. When Sona gave birth to Nisha, her horoscope is analyzed and it is noticed:

The configuration of the planets at her birth made her a mangli. That was not good news; manglis were horribly difficult to marry off.⁷

And top of all the incidents, on the fortieth day of her birth itself; family gets ready to buy things which are supposed to give as dowry in her marriage.

Sets of silver glasses, cups, spoons and rattles... Gold chains that hung around her neck and reached her knees. With this gold Nisha's dowry was begun.⁸

The pre set notion that a girl is born just to marry, can never be better articulated than this as Nisha is not allowed to play outside the home, like her brothers. The reason, her mother gives undeniably pins down the purpose of a girl's existence.

How can you be if you get dirty and black playing in the sun?... who will want to marry you?⁹

It is the myth that a girl's life becomes complete only after her marriage; which is transmitted by one generation to other. It shows that the existing status of women is still secondary in Indian society. As the family believes in superstition as Nisha is forced to keep Karwa-chauth fast for the long life of her would be husband; whereas Nisha is a girl of modern views and does not believe in traditional rituals as she does not get ready to spend her whole day without water and food. For her mother, Nisha's training as a good household girl is more important than her education. She wants to train her daughter in traditional manner. She told her sister Rupa:

We are old fashioned people. Tradition is strong with us, so is duty.¹⁰

Sona seems dissatisfied with Nisha's religious knowledge of different rituals and fasting associated with womanhood. She is also disappointed with Nisha as she does not know proper cooking which is also expected from each and every Indian girl. Sona wants to train Nisha in all domestic and social responsibilities demanded from a female after her marriage. When Nisha gets back home after living for a long time with her aunt, Sona comes to know surprisingly that at the age of sixteen, her daughter Nisha does not know any household work properly:

'What can Rupa have been thinking of? I assumed she was teaching you everything she knew' Sona grumbled. You take half an hour to peel ten potatoes. How will you manage in your future home?¹¹

She also tells her the stories of Karwa-chauth, Savitri Katha etc. as she was much aware about the role of a woman in her family.

Sona was making up for negligent upbringing. Nisha needed to be grounding in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative Karma to be a beacon in her married home.¹²

Nisha's mother wants her to be like her as she does her kitchen work and consider domestic chores more important than education. Sona wants Nisha to look beautiful and charming so that any boy or his family may choose her for marriage. Unable to understand her daughter, Sona seems much similar to Kasturi in Kapur's previous novel *Difficult Daughters*; where Kasturi stands against her daughter Virmati's happiness and freedom. Both the characters; Sona and Kasturi are unable to give emotional support to their daughters. They rather expect their daughters to follow the traditional role of a female in Indian society.

This girl will be our death. My child, born after ten years, tortures me like this. Thank God your grandfather is not alive. What face will I show upstairs.¹³

Kapur attempts to find freedom for the Indian women but within the Indian socio-cultural values. She shows female oppression and gender discrimination within the institution of the family and Indian patriarchal society. Nisha is also a victim of patriarchal domination and gender discrimination; when she is not allowed to work outside like her brother. She requests her father:

'If only you could take me with you, Papaji'. She continues, 'I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do.'¹⁴

This shows her inner quest for self identity and an independent existence. Though she counts herself equal as her brothers and denies the patriarchal system but always seems to get fail to establish her individual identity. Another example of women submission has been depicted by Manju Kapur through Nisha's struggle to choose the career at her own choice. It is not easy for a woman to adopt the profession of her own and if she does so, she has to struggle a lot in that process. Society deprives her of the rights just because of her being woman.

Nisha, protagonist of the novel *Home* defies the conventional social structure and defines womanhood entirely in different terms that suit her aspirations. She does not dance to the tunes of conventions and desires to live an independent life. In an article, Malti Agarwal writes:

Manju Kapur's depiction of her heroine, her travelling the labyrinth of rule 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.¹⁵

The novel *Home* throws more light on the character of Nisha from her childhood to motherhood. Like her mother Sona, Nisha's journey was also easy and smooth. Her education, her sexual exploitation in her own house, her skin disease, her career and her marriage with Arvind- all these events show her helplessness and miserable condition in patriarchal society. The novel ends with a question- Is Nisha now satisfied and happy with her life? Readers are left to conclude the story at own as Nisha is not a fictional character only. She is a type who is visible in each and every Indian family.

Kapur's novels enable us to understand feminist struggle against biases. She shows those issues of feminism where female are being trapped within the matrix of religion and tradition. Her works manifest women's struggle for emancipation from political economic and social bondages. Kapur tried to evolve a different image of a new woman grounded in reality which is helpful to give new direction to women empowerment.

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