

Social Stereotypes in Manju Kapur's *Home*

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ABSTRACT

The authors' aim to write this paper is to identify and analyze various social constraints and taboos presented by Manju Kapur in her novel Home. Kapur here presents the intricate structure of the joint family system in Indian society where people consciously or unconsciously follow some age old social customs which ultimately is integrated as the part of their personality, thought pattern, and behaviour. On the other hand, Kapur also presents the protagonist who becomes the victim of this stereotype and turns out to be the mouthpiece of the author. Home presents the picture of females not only being victimized in a male-dominated society but is emerged as a pillar of strength and revolution to combat the age-old tradition that comes on her way.

Keywords:

Introduction:

Manju Kapur through her works establishes herself in a wide domain of the literary field. Her works including *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody*, and *Brothers* reflect the predicament of human personality and temperament. She shows deep insight in creating plot, characters, milieu, and themes under the realm of societal structure. Her works are fabricated with the treads of customs, traditions, and rituals followed by Indian society at every juncture. But each coin has two sides as Kapur's works reflect the darker side of the social norms and customs. It is believed that Indian society is known for its rich heritage in the form of various cultures, traditions and rituals meant for the people to create unity and happiness. But the people from ages have been molding or misusing the same for their own benefit. People sometimes are also seen to follow them blindly and unable to understand the logic behind it as a result of which it creates the stereotype and people become the victim of the same.

Victimization of Female under the Veil of Family Legacy:

Manju Kapur's *Home* is also based on the patriarchal environment and almost every one of the family follows the rules in the name of the legacy set by the supreme authority of the family- Lala Banwari Lal. Kapur brilliantly expresses how these social norms become part of human nature and how the characters like Nisha, Sunita even Sona, and Rupa become the sufferers. The novel revolves around the life of Banwari Lal's family who runs a shop in Karol Bagh, a famous market in Delhi. He has three children out of which the daughter Sunita is married to the shopkeeper in Bareilly and two sons Yashpal and Pyare Lal live with him following the norms of joint family structure which sets the patriarchal culture among the family members. Each page of the novel adds a significant thread to the orthodox and conventional set up followed in the name of culture and tradition.

Motherhood as an Ultimate Goal:

The novel begins by depicting the condition of Sona and Rupa. Both of them are childless but there is a vast difference between the perceptions towards their fate. Sona takes her infertility as a curse and follows strict rituals to please God so that she can be blessed with the gift called motherhood. She does fasting and donating to express her devotion towards the God which itself puts irony on the so-called rituals and customs which merely become the means of bribing God for fulfilling one's own desire.

Every Tuesday she fasted. Previously she would eat fruit and drink milk once during this day, now she converted to a nirjal fast. No water from sun up to sun down. She slept on the floor, abstained from sex, woke early in the morning bathed before sunrise. In the last evening, she went to the local temple, buying fruits on the way to distribute to as many Brahmins as she could. [1] (Home page14)

Kapur brilliantly portrays the character of Rupa who is also childless but is emerged as an entrepreneur who is supported by her family in her pickle business. She also performs a key role in raising and imbibing values in Nisha, unlike Sona who fails to provide motherly love to Vicky. Rupa's act of supporting her family by earning money and raising the daughter of her sister reflect the concept of motherhood. The implied message is motherhood is not merely restricted to giving birth but is a feeling which Rupa Showers on Nisha

despite being infertile. Whereas, Sona's mind is bounded with an age-old concept that motherly love should be given to the biological children that is why she cannot love Vicky as her own son.

Sona's infertility also becomes the sole reason for her spoiled relationship with her mother –in- law as she thinks that Sona deliberately denies the motherhood which depicts that as per the social norms, parenthood must be the next step of the married couple, and its believed that motherhood makes a woman complete.

...enjoying, enjoying, muttered the mother darkly, imagining the use of birth control. [2] (Home page 11)

Here, the mother- in- law instead of supporting her in the difficult phase blames her for not producing the heir of the family.

Dr. Ajay Kumar Sharma States that;

It is a typical Indian belief that conjugal copulation must yield the harvest of pregnancy; otherwise, the blot of infertility becomes the doomed destiny of a bride. [3]

Dowry, Domestic Violence & Orthodox Culture:

Kapur also depicts the issue of domestic violence and dowry by presenting the character of Sunita whose wedding was fixed with the *blessing of Babaji* and the family thought it was the best match but things turned upside down when Sunita's husband emerges as a drunkard and greedy for the dowry and one day Sunita dies in a kitchen accident leaving her son Vicky behind. The character of Sunita is an epitome of a suppressed woman who accepts the trauma as her destiny and cannot raise her voice against the ill-treatment.

She too believes in the myth of bad karma and decides to compensate the sins of her past lives by enduring her present miseries. [4]

Moreover, the author also mocks at the mass that follows the so-called religious Gurus blindly and considers their words and decisions as a supreme one. Even the marriage of Yashpal and Sona also takes place with the consent of Babaji. Kapur also narrates the incident when Sona and Yashpal visit a spiritual place called Chitai to seek the blessings of miraculous Devi so that they can be blessed with a child.

Love Marriage Vs Arranged Marriage:

The author also presents the concept of love marriage and the perception of the society towards the love marriage. Yashpal falls in love with Sona at the first sight but when he approaches his parents they deny the marriage thinking that love marriage would be the hurdle in the way of the financial security and harmony of the family. At the same time, they consider the benefits of arranged marriage such as dowry, family prestige, and understanding of the values together. Kapur also points out the discrimination of Indian families towards the female child. As mentioned earlier, Banwari Lal is very careful while selecting a daughter-in-law for the family but he merely ignores his daughter's marriage. That's why when he comes to know that Murli runs a small retail shop and does not demand much dowry, he gets her daughter married without even a second thought. Murli does not have a mother or a sister at his home which is considered as a plus point for this match which indicates the typical temperament of mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law towards the woman. Later on, the concept of gender description is mentioned again as the birth of Nisha after ten years of marriage doesn't make Sona happy but her joy reaches the seventh sky when she gives birth to Raju.

Female Objectification:

Kapur also narrates the concept of marriage and the beautification of female in the marriage market in the beginning as Sona along with her mother visits Banwari Lal's Shop when she comes to Delhi to attend the marriage as her mother thinks that it is very important for a girl to look presentable while she reaches the age of marriage. Later, so much money is spent on Nisha's Jewellery and attire during her brothers' wedding so that the prospective groom's family can be attracted. Kapur also narrates the so-called impact of stars on the people in India as Nisha is born as a mangli as per the horoscope and it was predicted the girl may create a bad omen. Due to this reason, Sona is concerned about her marriage. Another social dichotomy is seen when Sona does not allow Nisha to play outside as she worries that her skin would be black but when she argues that Raju is also black she replies that for males black skin is a symbol of Lord Krishna.

Indian society believes skin colour determines a person's worth. In our culture, all virtues are associated with "fair" while anything dark has negative connotations. [5]

But it differs between male and female as the religious connotations say that Lord Krishna had black skin.

Another social stigma seen in the novel when Nisha enters a young age, she is compelled by her mother to do domestic work and cooking which is considered as a top priority of the groom's family while they search for the bride and people are always suspicious about educated daughter-in-law. Sona also compels Nisha to do fasting during Karva Chauth considering that fasting is a devotion of a woman towards God and Nisha would be blessed with a good life partner.

When Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky, she faces acute depression as a result of which her parents send her to Rupa's house. During that time, the family is suspicious towards Vicky but no action is taken thinking as it would spoil the prestige of the family in society. Moreover, we can see that no attention is given to Nisha's education and college selection. Like his parents Nisha also becomes the victim of societal norms when she falls in love with Suresh, as her own family creates hurdle in their relationship and become the means of their separation as; Suresh is from the lower caste. The irony is, her own father Yashpal who once upon a time fought with his family to marry Sona cannot understand his daughter's true love and considers love marriage as evil.

Nisha, dear daughter, leave all thoughts of this dirty low caste man, what can he give you command to what we can arrange for you? Marriage into a family that will enable you and your children to live comfortably for the rest of your life. [6](Home Page 199)

Female and Entrepreneurship:

Nisha goes through the phase of physical as well as mental trauma when Suresh leaves her but gains the confidence to resume her life and expresses her desire to support her family in their family business, but her family does not allow her thinking that as per the social norms only males can look after the family business and for female jobs like teaching is more suitable. She works as a teacher for some time but due to the instinct to be an entrepreneur leaves her job and borrows money from her father to start her own boutique named Nisha's Creation and thereby is emerged as an entrepreneur. She is more skillful and dedicated in her business than her brother and Yashpal is also aware of the fact as within a short period of time she returns the money which she borrowed from him to establish her own business. But again as per the social stereotype a daughter cannot take over the family business and marriage is an ultimate destiny of a woman's identity he keeps mum. Nisha is at the peak of her career when her parents find a mangli widower named Arvind. As per the agreement, she continues her business even after her marriage but her typical mother-in-law thinks that a female can't be an entrepreneur and a female's life aims to do household work and to produce the heir of the family. Ultimately she gives birth to twins and thereby gives up against the social norm which indicates that a woman's identity is incomplete without being a mother.

Conclusion:

Kapur through her novel *Home* represents different customs, traditions, and rituals such as the concept of arranged marriage, motherhood, fasting, hierarchal decisions in the family as a part of family legacy, and almost all the characters are seen following the same consciously or unconsciously since it has become the inherited part of their personality. But it is observed that at one point of time, it also creates social evils like dowry, domestic violence, gender discrimination, prejudice against the love marriage as a result of which characters like Nisha, Sona, Rupa, and Sunita become the victims. Here the sufferers can be divided into two categories one who tolerates everything silently as for them it is a part of the custom. Sona and Sunita fall into the first category whereas Nisha and Rupa try to find logic and justification behind everything and give a strong fight to establish their self despite facing the social stereotypes.

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