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Redefining Family Ties: Nisha's Path to Freedom and Self-Worth as a 'New Woman' in *Home*

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Abstract

Modern woman is a woman, who has individuality, claims her rights, and gets herself educated against all odds of societal norms. During the process of attaining her rights, the society tries to portray her as a rebel against familial and social values. There are a number of Indian novelists who deal with the woman's problems and Manju Kapur is one amongst them. She believes in presenting life as it is, not as it should be. This paper explores the female characters of Manju Kapur's novel *Home* (2006). These female characters occupy pivotal position in the novel. She presented the live characters from day-to-day life whose evolution is transformed from tradition to modernity. In *Home*, the idea of "New Woman" surfaces as a critique and opposition to conventional gender roles and expectations within Indian society. The phrase 'New Woman' in literature is credited to Sarah Grand, a British feminist author, who brought it to prominence in 1894 in an essay called "The New Aspect of the Women Question." The expression swiftly became linked to the evolving roles and ambitions of women during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The 'New Woman' symbolizes a challenge to conventional gender roles, promoting women's autonomy, education, and involvement in public life. The "New Woman" in Kapur's story represents the changing identity of women who seek independence, individuality and autonomy within a patriarchal structure. It is through Nisha, the protagonist of the novel, Manju Kapur weaves the concept of New Woman by narrating her journey from an insecure girl child to self-dependent young woman.

Keywords: Modern women, identity, patriarchy, marriage

Introduction

Manju Kapur is regarded not only as a novelist but also a modern woman. She tries to explore the inner strength of woman through self-identity and liberation against the social barriers. Through the female characters she sorts out the problems of women's identity. Kapur presents her female protagonists as mostly educated, aspiring individuals, caged in a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking to which their family and society become intolerant. In an interview, Kapur explains how a woman has to adjust herself to maintain balance between the family relations. She has to maintain the holistic approach to everybody in order to keep herself or her family free from the daily unnecessary quarrel. The novelist attempts to represent the transformation that takes place in a woman's life and how the image changes with growing time, especially the portrayal of protagonist in the novel evolve to a significant extent, as the traditional concept of the woman's character for being enduring, self-sacrificing, calm, to an ambitious woman, educated and assertive in their modernized way of behavior. Manju Kapur has used her books to speak out against the patriarchal system that suppresses women's identities by giving them a subordinate place in home and as well as in society. In Manju Kapur's third book, *Home*, the lead character, Nisha, comes up via many phases of conventional constraints and then become a "New Woman." It is a never-ending conflict between a strong modern daughter and a strict traditional mother. Throughout the narrative, it is shown how the traditional apperception is upended and damaged to the point where Nisha, the new woman, takes her place. It primarily tells the tale of Nisha, who falls prey to her mother's conservatism and narrow-mindedness. Manju Kapur portrays the struggles of the main character, Nisha, who tries to make her mark despite living in a restrictive environment of traditional values. Nisha the novel's protagonist has been subjected to discrimination by her own family. Her mother Sona shows her favouritism towards Raju, her son.

In the novel one may find that Sona, the protagonist's mother went through the path of suppression. Sona's mother-in-law once treated her with contempt and the same way Sona in the role of mother shows discrimination between her daughter and her son. For instance: When the boys went out to play, Nisha sets up a wail to accompany her, Sona admonishes her that girls shall remain indoors, since they might get black and dirty. But Nisha argues with her mother as follows:

Nisha: "So what? Raju is Black."

Sona: "Raju is the colour of Krishna."

Nisha: "I also want to be the colour of Krishna. I am going to play cricket in the sun."

Kapur projects Nisha as a new woman, who values self-expression and individuality. She is more likely to express her opinions, desires, and emotions openly.

Sona: "Krishna is God. You will look like the sweeper woman who comes to the house. You want to look like a kali bhainsi?" (51)

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Additionally, Nisha has been sexually abused by her cousin Vicky. Because of her sexual abuse, the house is amiss, dangerous, and portrays a bogus feeling of security. She is sent to her aunt's house since she is unable to sleep at home. She has not visited her family again for eleven years. She considers her former home obscene, demanding, and lack of privacy and personal freedom, having been raised by her aunt in an environment of extraordinary care and enlightenment. When explaining how a girl kid is sexually assaulted in her own home, the author highlights power relations. Nisha, the main character of *Home*, gradually transforms into a "new woman" against the backdrop of strong tradition, constitutes the exciting story of the novel. The new woman Nisha asserts her sexual agency, making choices about her body on her desires rather than societal pressures.

Later on, Nisha desires for higher studies, so family lets her to join her in Durga Bai College to pursue English Honors. Soon she falls in love with Suresh, a lower caste boy studying in Khaba College of Engineering. They become friendly within two or three meetings. They both wander here and there. Soon Nisha's family gets to know about Nisha's love affair. They decide to discontinue her studies. Nisha swirls into depression. She feels her own house as a prison. Nisha's mother cries and bursts as "this girl will be our death. My child, born after ten years, torture me like this. Thank God your grandfather is not live. What face will I show upstairs;" (*Home*, 198) Nisha remains silent every time. She doesn't share her sorrow with anybody except aunt Rupa. With the help of her aunt, Nisha wants to meet her beloved Suresh, who denies to marry her. She gets very depressed because she doesn't know the threats made by her family. After some days, because of depression Nisha gets skin disease, family uses every available medicine either it is allopathy or homeopathy, but of no use. Nisha wants to complete her studies, so she discussed with her father Pyare Lal, who agrees to write the final exam only if Raju accompanies to the exam center. At last, she completes her education. Nisha prioritizes education and career development, often pursuing higher education and

professional opportunities that were traditionally reserved for men.

Nisha's battles for her fundamental rights and her desire to learn have largely made her conscious of her independence, which has turns out to be a major issue for new woman. As Simone de Beauvoir states "One is not born, but becomes woman." Thus, Nisha is conditioned to pay attention to and comply with the rules established by the family's older people.

On successful completion of education, Nisha's parents think that it is very bad for Nisha to remain in the home all the time, so to feel better, they allow Nisha to work in a school to teach. Soon Nisha fed up of the teaching job and plans to start a business. Nisha consults her father. She demands a year from her father to prove her ability. She pleads her father "give me a chance to show you what I can do." (*Home*, 286) Yashpal at the time of dinner says to Nisha 'Beti' he started "business is not an easy thing." (*Home*, 291) But Nisha with her zeal, started her own business by name "Nisha's Creation" She took twenty-five thousand from her father. She promised him to pay every rupee within time. She learnt the graphs of the market carefully. She managed the market with her full insight. Nisha succeeded in her business; she understood the different shades of complications in the business. Sona and Pooja, Raju's wife also helps to Nisha in business life. Nisha valued her credentials well. She paid half of the twenty-five thousand which she had taken to start the business within year. Now, she is on her own feet: "she had paid half the twenty-five thousand loan. With your blessings, papaji, you will get the other half by next year, she laughed, almost recapturing the liveliness that had been here in college" (*Home*, 295) The purpose behind the Nisha's Creations is not merely to pass time, but it indicates her desire to be financially independent. Nisha, the new woman embraces her rights and seeks to empower herself and others. She often advocates for gender equality.

Nisha faces discrimination with her horoscope too. Sona and Pyare Lal who always conscious about Nisha's marriage, finds a manglik boy for her. Soon the boy and his mother came to see Nisha and approves her as a bride. Though the boy Arvind is a widower agrees to Nisha's condition "I cannot give it up" She confides this was the only thing she could visualize in any marriage that she had to come to the basement every day." (*Home*, 303) Arvind accepts that Nisha need not to stop her business and he will hire a room near Karol Bagh. So, she will not feel any problem to continue her business. Arvind lives in Daryaganj and have a business there. Arvind and Nisha registered the marriage in the court.

Nisha enters into in-laws' house. She performs her duties well and manages her business also. Soon she becomes pregnant. Her mother-in-law suggests her to stay in home and look after the household which are affairs of the girls. Nisha has a husband who is mom's pet. Later Nisha gave birth to twins, one girl, one boy. Nisha arranges naming ceremony for her kids, she becomes a complete woman according to the frame of society. She states at the end of the story "all mine, she thought, all mine." (*Home*, 336). She seeks a balance between her professional ambitions and personal life, often negotiating her roles as a worker, partner, and possibly a parent.

As a wife, mother of twins, and daughter-in-law, Nisha lives a happy and fulfilled life, embodying her own universe and

identity. Through her struggles, the main character of "*Home*" shows that she is an educated individual rather than a woman who aspires to establish her own identity in spite of rejection and heartache.

Nisha's journey reflects the struggles of many women in contemporary India as they seek to balance personal desires with familial obligations. She is educated, ambitious and desires independence, which contrasts with the traditional expectations of marriage and motherhood that her family holds for her.

In the series, Kapur presents Nisha as a confident, independent woman who respects Indian tradition and believes that "home is where one gathers grace" (Nisim Ezekiel: *Enterprise*). In Manju Kapur's novel *Home*, the concept of the 'new woman' is embodied through the character of Nisha. Nisha represents a shift in traditional gender roles and expectations in Indian society. She struggles with her identity, goals, and the limitations placed on her by her family and society throughout the entire novel. As the narrative unfolds, Nisha's character explores themes of self-discovery, empowerment, and the challenges faced by women who dare to break away from societal norms. Her experience highlights the evolving role of women in Indian society and the complexities of navigating personal freedom within a patriarchal framework.

Overall, Nisha's character serves as a representation of the 'new woman', one who is aware of her rights, seeks to assert her individuality, and confronts the cultural and familial pressures that define her existence.

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