



Manju Kapur's 'Home': An Exploration of India's Joint Family Dynamics

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Abstract: *Manju Kapur's Home is a story of every home in India. In this novel, she covers the story of daily lives of almost four generations in detail. She presents everything- hopes and aspirations, failures and frustrations, conflict between two generations. Critics, readers and reviewers have shown a great appreciation of her representation of human relationships. In the age, when each writer seems to be preoccupied with modernity, The novel may be labelled as old fashioned, but Kapur's unique sense of presentation makes it more concerned to contemporary times. The fact is that importance and essence of human relationships and home cannot be denied at any age. A family living under one roof faces so many problems, but the members do not forget the basics of home. They share conflicts and confrontations with delight and overcome all those problems easily. The present paper describes how Manju Kapur's Home explains the lessons of sacrifice and compromise within the family for the sake of peace and harmony in the home. Kapur's Home serves as a reflective commentary on the challenges faced by modern Indian families, inviting readers to consider the implications of tradition on personal identity and autonomy.*

Key Words: *Manju Kapur, Home, Joint Family System, Indian literature.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Manju Kapur strives to show how the patriarchal principles which govern a joint, business class family have many dark shades of politics, manipulations, jealousy, suppression of individuality for the larger interests of the family underneath its brighter surface. Money, energy and interest all flow in one direction since it is a strongly centralized system. These principles govern the lives of the inmates. Women's chief preoccupation is to execute all household tasks and to assist men in the supreme function of procreation.

2. DISCUSSION:

Manju Kapur discusses the issues of sexual abuse through the character of Vicky. Sexual exploitation of a child or a young woman is more often or not, the deed of someone close to family that is an insider, a relative or a friend with whom the victim previously shares a comfortable relationship. The child freely interacts with that person, completely ignorant of his wicked intention. A child's understanding of the world is limited and so Nisha in *Home* fails to comprehend the exploitation she undergoes. The laws of contemporary society, instead of sympathizing with the victim instil in her the feelings of shame and insult and treat her as a culprit. The consequences of physical abuse include signs of abnormal behaviour in the victim, like extreme quietness isolation, screaming, inability to eat, drink or sleep properly, deep sense of insecurity, as happens in the case of Nisha. Overpowered with the feelings of insecurity and aloofness, she fails to narrate the incident to nobody in the house, not even to her mother. Manju Kapur has described the tumultuous growing up years of Nisha in a heart rendering manner as Nisha is abused by her cousin, Vicky and though the family elders have a suspicion of Vicky's incestuous behaviour, they do nothing in this regard. Nisha is too young to know what is happening to her. Kapur traces the course of these only too familiar childhood sexual explorations between close members of a joint family with a delicacy that is compelling. It does not ruin Nisha's life. She survives. Kapur seems to suggest that this is all that really matters.

Through this incident of sexual abuse of a child; Manju Kapur poignantly portrays the complexities inherent in a joint family system. Nisha's behaviour stands as a proof of the extent to which she was affected by the sexual abuse: *"In the days that followed, Nisha grew silent; for the first time she felt divided from the family she had so unthinkingly*



been part of ... she tried to block it from her mind, but it proliferated, grew large and terrifying ".(Kapur 59) Home, the place of relaxation and comfort, turns out the most insecure place for her and she begins to have nightmares. Sunita Sinha observes "*Kapur handles the theme in a matter-of-fact manner and draws our attention to the fact that the scary incident is considered unthinkable to be discussed and brought to the open. These are our social realities, even if we normally keep them under the wrap and the family tries to suppress and gathers around the girl to comfort her.*"(Sinha 170)

The nightmarish episode of Vicky's sexual abuse of Nisha leads to a turning point in her life. The psychologically and mentally affected Nisha is taken into the complete care and attention of Rupa and her husband Prem Nath. As a contrast to the traditional approach of Banwari Lal family towards girl education, Rupa and Prem Nath encourage Nisha to excel in her studies. Nisha is highly influenced by the thoughts of Rupa and starts deviating from the paradigm. Rupa says, "*There is always time to learn cooking, but only one time to study.*"(Home 125) Nisha's stay with Rupa modifies her mind according to the ways of her uncle and aunt. She gets highly influenced by Rupa, who runs a pickle business and wants to lead a life like her. Sona fails to accept the change in her daughter and tries to reorient her towards the traditional pattern of their family. "*We are traditional people. Tradition is strong with us. So is duty.*"(Kapur 123).

Kapur follows the members of traditional family into the uneasy world they come to inhabit. From the frantic sensory overload of modern urban India, she constructs a story as intricate, quiet and dazzling as the fabric produced by the family being the renowned the cloth merchants of Karol Bagh. *Home* is a captivating account of three generations. First, Lala Banwari Lal, the second of his two sons and one daughter and the third of his grandchildren. The novel rightly brings out some of the truths that are always hidden in middle class family. It explores the complex structure of Indian families and exposes many questions that are embedded within the family like quest for identity, problems of marriage, revolt against ancient traditions and how a woman struggles for her life in social sphere. *Home* is a multi-generation family saga, which deals with the search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. It projects deep understanding of human nature and author's maturity as a novelist. Her concept of happy home comprises of tradition-oriented females who are ready to sacrifice their individuality for the same of social fibre; that is family. According to Anupama Chowdhury: "*Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress*"(Chowdhury 33)

The family, in Indian society, is an institution by itself and a typical symbol of the collectivist culture of India right from the ancient times. The joint family system or an extended family has been an important feature of Indian culture, till a blend of urbanization and western influence, began to affect in home and hearth. This is especially true of urban areas, where nuclear families have become the order of the day. There is no denying the fact that socio-economic factors have played their role in the joint family system getting diluted. Indian culture is known for its age-old traditions and beliefs in joint family system. Since the time of birth, we see our grandparents, uncles and aunts staying together. However, increased independence and mobility have paved way for many joint families to collapse. The Indian joint family system has had the blow of modernization, urbanization and industrialization as well. Though some economic reasons have made it seemingly impossible to stay together under one roof but most of Indians still understand and value the importance of grandparents and extended families in our lives. *Business Standard* writes about Manju Kapur:

"*High quality fiction, Kapur understands the constancy of human beings and their relationships, our self-decisions, our manipulations of situating to suit our own viewpoints, the instinct of gossip mongering and groupism and how the joint family system provides the perfect setting for the playing out of all these qualities.*"(nilanjana-s-roy)

It may not, however, be presumed that joint family system originated in India. This institution is said to be the outcome of the settling down of the Aryans in different parts of the world. We have similar institutions practically all over the world. Even in ancient Roman society, the supreme authority rested in the eldest male member of the family who, in administering the family affairs, was entitled to take all steps. When the pastoral stage was over and the people began to live a settled life by tilling the soil, constructing the house and maintaining the patrimony, joint family system came into existence. Difficulties of communication and travel compelled all the members of the family to live together and carry on jointly the family occupation in agriculture or trade. Over and above these causes, the kinship idea and the religion highlighting ancestor worship further made joint family a complex organization catering to the spiritual and economic needs of the large family groups which composed the society. Generally, in pre-independent and even in the Post independent era, joint families in India had tranquil world where the head of the family adhered to the traditional values and believed that men work out of the home, women within, where women were supposed to follow the old ways unquestioningly. But gradually spread of education and the light of the new world made these women aware of their rights and they began to raise their voice against this undemocratic setup. The striking thing about *Home* is not only the representation of the family-structure and its fragmentation with the passage of time but also the flux and changes in characters of each generation. *Home* presents several interrelated themes. Kapur has skilfully demonstrated how even



cases of incest go unnoticed in a traditional joint family. *Home* belongs to what must now be counted as a subgenre of Indian writing in English: domestic fiction, stories of weddings and deaths, arranged marriages and love affairs, cooking and bickering in a joint or an extended family in south Asia or, with signal differences, among south Asian immigrants in the west. Story of *Home* is a simple story of a Karol Bagh sari seller, but gets a more universal color and makes an invitational family saga. Manju Kapur has tried to put a lot of issues in this novel which are commonly encountered in a joint family and are usually kept under the carpet to protect the family honour and name. With the advent of technology, the family in *Home* witnesses a series of new beginnings; to have newly viewed generation, education and above all to find peace.

In *Home* Kapur highlights the social dichotomy of love marriage versus arranged marriage. Love marriages are considered as a social sin and worthy of shame while arranged marriages are viewed with the eyes of respect and hope for dowry negotiations. In earlier times, it was necessary to arrange the marriages very carefully to ensure family harmony, good dowry, good family background and understanding of the value of togetherness. Love marriage of the elder son Yashpal comes up with lots of abused remarks and regarded as a sin. While the arranged marriage of the younger son is cheerfully welcomed and socially applauded as it enables to have dowry benefits. With much resemblance to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the attitude of the community when a girl attains her marriageable age has been discussed in detail in *Home*. "It was necessary for marriageable girls to blossom during Occasions (like marriages), it being likely that among the guests a boy or better still, his parents would cast a glance and hold it steadily upon her person that it was hoped subsequent enquiries would yield results." (Kapur 2).

3. CONCLUSION:

Through *Home*, Manju Kapur mirrors the emotional unrest which prevails in urban middle class families. *Home* deals with the search of home i.e. the search for a place of shelter and security. These types of novels are rarely written these days. In era of modern devices, the novel seems a unique in terms of portraying a tale of family in which grandfather, father and grandson -all live together and share aspirations, failures and frustrations- in the background of togetherness. The novel gives the taste of cultural flavour to its readers.

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