

A CRITICAL STUDY OF INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN BY MANJU KAPUR'S "HOME"

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ABSTRACT

Home is Manju Kapur's third novel. In this novel, she takes us for a stroll through three generations. Banwari Lal, a patriarch and strong believer of the joint family system, comes to post-partitioned India etches a sari business in Karol Bagh, Delhi. The novel throws light on three female characters-Sona, (daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal), Rupa, (Sona's sister) and Nisha (Sona's little girl) - who claim their identity in the society in their own ways and fight for what they feel and believe is right. The novel successfully portrays the real picture of women in a male-centric society. The struggle of the protagonists between tradition and modernity and their need for an identity in the society forms the theme of the novel.

KEYWORDS: *Patriarch, Family, Women, Identity, Struggle*

INTRODUCTION

The story starts with two sisters being depicted differently showcasing the two extremes of their lives. One is attractive and the other one is less attractive. The beautiful and attractive elder Sona is married to Yashpal, the elder son of Banwari Lal and the less attractive younger one Rupa is married to Prem Nath, a Government officer who is portrayed as someone of less esteem. Rupa stays with her spouse and father-in-law whereas the less fortunate Sona stays in a joint family where she is often taunted by her mother-in-law for being childless after two years of marriage. Rupa and her husband are depicted childless still the end of the story. Sona discharges her duties of a responsible daughter-in-law of the family with utmost love and dedication, bearing the brunt of her mother-in-law's occasional mention of her inability to conceive.

Sona then goes through an emotional turmoil after her brother-in-law, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. Their marriage is welcomed by all the family in light of the fact that it is arranged by the parents. Sona had issues of insecurity and experienced partiality as her marriage with Yashpal was a love marriage or rather a marriage which Yashpal and Sona decided and didn't have very involvement their parents. Yashpal first met Sona with her mother who came from Meerut to match a blouse in their saree shop in preparation to attend an uncle's wedding. Having fallen in love with Sona, the very next morning Yashpal hands over Sona's address on his father's hand and says he should go and talk to the family without delay about the wedding failing which threatening to lead a life of celibacy by the bank of the Ganges. After consultation with a holy man, Banwari Lal agrees to the wedding. Sona's family was not as well off like the Banwari Lal's

and had very little to offer as dowry except their daughter's heart of gold. Sushila, on the other hand, brings a huge dowry with her including a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. This made Sona experience inferiority complex and added to her insecurities.

Sushila, who gives birth to a boy within one year of the marriage adds further mental trauma to Sona and she is subjected to taunts from her mother-in-law. It is around this time that the death of Sunitha came as a rude shock to the family. Sona felt bad for her sobbing mother-in-law and went to console her. She retaliated saying Sona only knew to enjoy life, make Yashpal dance to her tunes and nothing about motherhood. These words disturbed her mentally and she turned to her lucky stars and gods thinking that these events happening in her life are a result of her past karma. She begins to please the Gods by fasting and prayer, but ended up in vain.

Sunitha is married to Murli, a man of dubious credentials and ways. Like all daughters, Sunitha was given in marriage at marriageable age. Murli seems to be a person beyond the status of Banwari Lal in ideologies and as well as in wealth. Just like any other parents', Banwari Lal also wanted to get his daughter married to someone above their status to ensure the safety of their daughter dreams. Also Sunitha seems to have some liking for Murli and so they got married. It seems that Sunita likes the boy that's why she is married to him. But luck favored otherwise in Sunitha's life resulting in her death in a kitchen "accident" leaving behind a son, Vicky Banwari Lal, feels guilty about what happened to Sunita and hence considered the upbringing of Vicky, his responsibility. But his sons and their growing families have their own reasons to limit space for Vicky and Vicky was thrust upon Sona owing to her state in the family. A depressed Sona is even found to be complaining about how her life has turned miserable after these events to Rupa.

Later on, Sona delivers a beautiful baby girl, Nisha whose birth was considered auspicious and considered her a sign of Goddess Lakshmi who brought good luck and prosperity to the family. She then delivered a baby boy, Raju who brought great joy to the family and relief to Sona's mother-in-law who even declared that she would now have a peaceful death as both her sons were blessed with male progeny as a result of which they can hold their head high in the society.

But the times are changing and with the death of Banwari Lal, the shop and their shop began to witness modernization. Of these, fate dwells upon Nisha, the protagonist and Sona's beautiful daughter, who became the victim of the various events that was tormenting the family right from her childhood. Manju Kapur portrays Nisha as a self dependent woman who refuses to settle down with the male dominated ways and life style of the family. She strives to make a mark of her own in the society. The author succeeds in describing the congested and suffocated childhood of the girl in a heart wrenching manner. She was never allowed to play outside with her cousins or gouts on her own as it was against the traditions of the patriarchal society of which she was a part of. Adding to this, Nisha was sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in her childhood days. This event altered Nisha's state of mind greatly and she began to show signs of rejection. A worried Sona sends her daughter to stay with her aunt Rupa and Uncle Prem Nath who comes to know about the happenings and confront the Banwari Lal's about Vicky's behavior but it fell in deaf ears as they were not ready to believe such stories about their own boy. Owing to such response, Rupa and Prem Nath begin to take interest in Nisha's future and are keen on educating her.

Nisha experiences a whole new atmosphere at her aunt's place. Her new found freedom of thought and expressions made her dream bigger and beyond the horizons. She was greatly influenced by her Maasi's (aunty) novel way of thinking and practical approach towards life. Prem Nath also encourages her by spending time wither reading stories and

teaching valuable lessons. Nisha's education was given first priority over other issues such as her Manglik status, marriage issues etc. whereas it is vice-versa at the Banwari Lal's. Nisha's education was given a step-motherly treatment when compared to the special prayers and fasts that were conducted to please the Gods and help her get a perfect match for marriage. Nisha envisioned her mentor in her aunt, an entrepreneur with a pickle business and wanted to be like her when she became an adult.

These modern thoughts of Nisha did not go well with her mother Sona, who often had arguments with Nisha regarding petty issues such as her sluggish approach to peeling potatoes, cooking etc. She would even grumble about Rupa's influence in Nisha's life. But Nisha would always support her Maasi and would talk back to her mother about the exposure Rupa gave to her regarding her life.

As Nisha entered college, she fell in love with Suresh, who was not a suitable match considering her traditional ways of her family who took caste and community into consideration during the match making process. However, the affair had a bitter end after the family members coming to know about it and finally Nisha had to make peace with herself. With her hopes, dreams and love shattered, Nisha feels the urge to be empowered and discusses the idea of her starting a boutique of her own and earning. However, this does not go well with the family members, especially her mother Sona. As a victim of gender discrimination, she fights with her parents saying if her brothers can work, she can work too. Her father tries to console her and even tries to change her profession of interest. But Nisha wouldn't budge. She finally succeeds in setting up her own boutique 'Nisha's Creations' with financial support from her father who trusted her abilities. She vowed to her father that she would return every single penny that she had borrowed and took all necessary steps to attain success in her new business venture.

Through grit, hard work, dedication and determination, Nisha was able to shine and even return the loan amount to her father within a year of starting the business. Her meticulous, prompt and responsible services to her customers had helped her earn a good reputation and the title of 'Business woman of Karol Bagh'. The story continues with Nisha's marriage to Arwind and the sequence of events that occurs in her marriage life. She is forced to quit her thriving business and hand it over to her sister-in-law Pooja due to her pregnancy. Even her role model, Rupa advised her to accept the change and spend some time for her baby. Nisha delivers twin babies, a boy and a girl and completes her cycle and purpose of life as stereotyped by the society.

CONCLUSIONS

Manju Kapur describes the conflict between traditions and modernization rather boldly in Home. She depicts the transition from Banwari Lal's generation to Nisha's in a neat manner, throwing light on even minute details such as the change in the outlook of their home, shop etc. as the years pass by. The extent to which the family had its beliefs rooted in traditional ways can be understood by their reaction to several new thoughts and ideas that were introduced into the family like the love marriage between Yashpal and Sona, Sona being childless for a few years, Nisha's love affair with Suresh, her modern thoughts about life, her career decisions etc. All these issues did not go well with the family members initially. Only after several coaxing did they keep aside their pre-conceived notions pertaining to these matters and approve some of it.

The novel also highlights the fact that social structure and living conditions of a person influences their thinking and thought process. This can be easily visualized in the case of the sisters Sona and Rupa. Both of them are brought up in

the same house, but their views about life changes after marriage as the atmosphere to which they were exposed molded them into the person who they are in the present. A joint family with staunch traditional values influenced Sona to be a strict mother who was of the view that the life of a girl is confined within the walls of the kitchen and that being a responsible and doting wife, daughter-in-law and mother is the soul purpose of a woman's life. Rupa, on the other hand had liberal views due to her literate husband who believed in the power of education and empowerment of women.

Manju Kapur depicts Nisha in perfect light to that of a present day educated girl hailing from a family with traditional values struggling in the society and defying all odds to stand for herself and make a mark in the society. She was subjected to gender discrimination right from her birth to her choice of career. The author focuses on the changes that occur in the moral foundation of the Banwari Lal family as time passes. The novel pretty much talks about every little struggle that Indian women face and have faced in each part of their lives and how the society has conceived these struggles and its reaction to it.

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