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Portrayal of Women Characters in Manju Kapur's '*Home*'

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Indian writing in English, including literature in translation, reflects the imprints of transformation with the time. English is introduced in India, by the British rulers, to bridge the communication gap and promote the European Literature and Science. The Indians later adopted the language and its style to convey their emotions, culture and social issues through their writings. Especially the women novelists have taken up themes which are prominently based on the woman, who is suffering in the traditional environment of male oriented society. They are dealing with multiple issues, concerning self and society, and highlighting how the Indian woman has been denied access to education, equal rights, right to work and freedom to choose for a long passage of time. This paper aims to bring out the changing images of an Indian woman in reference to the traditional and modern values. It is an effort to focus on this viewpoint with the help of an analysis of Manju Kapur's '*Home*'. The novel shows how the Indian woman of the modern age, in an effort of shaping her life in her own ways, is torn between tradition and modernity. Tradition implies an established method or practice; belief or custom, passed on to us by our ancestors.

Much of what we do today has its roots in the past, while modernity is known to be a practice of modifying tradition according to the necessities of modern era.

In this novel the traditionally glorified woman is replaced with the genuine modern one, who is trying to throw off the burden, she has been carrying for ages. The image of woman is changing with the passage of time. The protagonists, portrayed by the novelists, are away from the traditional portrayals of the self-sacrificing, enduring, meek and quiet woman. They are the modern portrayals of self-assured, assertive, educated, protesting and ambitious ones; making society aware of their needs and proving their identities. These protagonists, struggle to find solace, assimilating the two worlds i.e., traditional and modern.

Home is a family saga which presents many women in a joint family. Nisha is the protagonist. It can be described as Nisha's journey from childhood to mother hood. Sona and Rupa are other important characters of the novel.

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Nisha is a daughter of Sona and Yashpal. The novel describes her development. Through her character Manju Kapur tries to represent an age old view that for a girl her beauty is her destiny. Nisha is a very charming girl. She belongs to the Lala Banwari Lal's reputed family. During their childhood days, all sibling used to play with one another.

Vicky likes Nisha so he always plays with her. Due to lack of attention from Sona's side, Vicky gives full attention to Nisha, her cousin. Vicky's conduct towards Nisha is cruel and dirty. One day on the terrace when Nisha wants him to play chess with her, Vicky touches her soft thighs. As he enjoys its softness, he touches her private parts. But she does not divulge this secret to anyone. As Vicky tells her after his heinous conduct: which can be understood through the following lines "*We are not going to tell anybody about this,' he whispered, holding her. 'This is our secret. See, you have done susu. (57) ...'It's our secret. If you tell anyone, they will beat you and me.' He gripped her arm. 'No one must ever know. No one. You understand. (Home, 58)*

Nisha's psyche is brutally hurting after this terrifying incident. The thoughts of this incident hover around her mind like a dark cloud. Kapur writes, "In the days that followed, Nisha grew silent. For the first time she felt divided from the family she

had so unthinkingly be part of." (Home, 59) Nisha grows silent and gives up food. She begins to scream at night. Nobody tries to find out the reality. She looks pale and sick every time. Sona discusses this problem with her sister Rupa. Rupa takes Nisha at her home. She finds herself in completely new surroundings from the one she has been living. As they are child less, they shower their full love on Nisha. Nisha completes her schooling at Rupa's home. Manju Kapur writes: *The pattern of Nisha's next ten years was now set. She spent all week with her aunt and uncle. A rickshaw picked her up, took her to school, dropped her back. When she spent weekends with her parents, her father made sure that Vicky was never close to her. (Home, 74)*

Now at her Home, Nisha enters DBC as a BA student with confidence. It is during her journey to the campus that Nisha really feels grown up. Kapur writes, "*She returned to college feeling adventurous, daring, and modern. For the first time she had interacted socially with an unrelated male.*" (Home, 144) She goes to college BA University's special bus for its students. During her journey, one day she meets Suresh. They fall in love. They start meeting on daily basis. They are bunking their college classes to spend time with each other. On one day, a letter from college authority arrives. Nisha is found short of attendance and her term will not be granted for examination but her parents

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produce fake medical certificate for Nisha to convince school authority to grant her term for examination. Her father rejects Suresh as her future son-in-law and says: *Nisha, dear daughter, leave all thoughts of this dirty low caste man, what can he give you compared 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. We have rejected many proposals in our search for you, the least of them better than this nobody of a man.* (Home, 199)

Many restrictions are put on her by her family members because they don't want blot on their family's name so they are doing all this. Kapur writes: *All day she remained in the house, a prisoner of her deed, a prisoner of their words. She was distrusted too much to be allowed to put a foot outside. A padlock was put on the phone, only incoming calls could be received without the key.* (Home, 200)

After three years of her departure with Suresh, she will have to think and adjust about another man than Suresh. Soon Nisha begins to notice that her skin has started irritating and she begins scrubbing it. She suffers from the problem of skin eczema. As a result of it, she is not able to pass her time. She thinks that she will be mad sitting inside the house, as loneliness hurts her. Her mother Sona develops a headache as she is attending regularly with Nisha at the cure centre for her daughter.

Nisha thinks that it is due to emotional causes. Aamer Hussein rightly remarks: *"Kapur's ability to chart sexual abuse and disease in the same detached style in which she narrates daily adventures is remarkable. Nisha's childhood experiences with a cousin mark her for life, as the skin condition that nearly ruins her chances of marriage is probably a psychosomatic response."* (The Independent - Article)

After recovering, Nisha wants to do business in her own way. Her mother is not happy with the new development in her life. But she has already decided that she will not listen to her mother. She defies her mother and also family. Nisha wants to follow a path which is never followed by any women of Banwari Lal family. She thinks positively about her life as she is going to get economic freedom. Her new shop is named as 'Nisha's Creation'. Nisha hires a tailor named Mohseen Khan. She begins by making salwar suits. Rupa masi helps her on important issues. She gets settled in the market by taking care of each and every aspect of her business very minutely. Nisha is earning very well and she pays her debt within a year to her father. She handles all the difficulties of her business tactfully. Here we see Nisha emerging as a successful business woman. Shivani Vashisht states very aptly: "The novel resonates with the theme of economic

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independence of women who act against the tradition joint family value system. Generally families adhering to the conventional values objected to women folk stepping out of the houses and confined them inside. Nisha keen to uplift herself and to establish her identity and individuality gets educated to establish her own business."

Yshapal, Nisha's father recognizes her daughter's business skills. He knows that she is more brilliant, intelligent and independent than Raju. But still, he feels that her daughter's real happiness lies at her future in-laws' home. So, he starts the search for her husband. They want a mangli husband for her as she is a mangli by horoscope. But Nisha puts forward a condition that she will be allowed to do her business after marriage. But her mother says that they are looking for a daughter-in-law, wife and mother. They will not want a businesswoman like her. Thus, Nisha is ready to marry but on her own terms, she is not preparing to marry anybody at the cost of her business career. After a long wait, a marriage proposal arrives for her from the boy's side., He is a widower in his early thirties. His name is Arvind. He is a mangli also. But Nisha doesn't want to get married. She has lost interest in life. At the end, she agrees to marry him as per her parents' choice. She is worried about her freedom only. She thinks her freedom should not be touched. She

discusses with him her business on their first meeting. She makes it clear that she will work even after getting married. Nisha is a new woman who wants her freedom at any cost. Nisha finds herself trapped after her marriage with Arvind. She is notable to look after her business properly. For Nisha marriage is an escape route from problems. But things do not go on smoothly with her in Arvind's home. She is asked to look after her old mother-in-law. They are also expecting from Nisha a baby as soon as possible. She thought she would be free after her marriage with him. Arvind and her mother-in-law never think about her business. She even has to take her mother-in-law's permission to go to her home in Karol Bagh. After some time, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to twin babies. All she says that she wants to work during her pregnancy but no one allows her to work. She cries a lot but she is told that it is not good for babies. So it is decided that first she looks after her babies and then after few years she will look after her business.

At the end she feels her husband Arvind has betrayed her as he forgets his promise to let her work even after her marriage. She feels very sad at the end. But Kapur ends the novel thus: "*Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her pallu and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives,*

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husband, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine." (Home, 336)

Sona and Rupa: Manju Kapur begins her novel Home by introducing Sona and Rupa in the following manner: Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta, sisters both, were childless. One was rich, the other poor, one the eldest daughter-in-law of a cloth-shop owner, the other the wife of an educated, badly paid government servant. (Home, 1)

Sona and Rupa are sisters. Sona marries Yashpal and Rupa marries Prem Nath. Rupa is not wealthy and still they have lots of expenses. Both are craving for a child. So Rupa says to Sona We are cursed, Did, what to do? It is our fate. Perhaps it is just as well we don't have children, that man will trouble us life after life. (Home, 1)

Sona and Rupa have to face many difficulties in their personal lives because of their specific social backgrounds. Rupa has difficulties that are easily narrated. Sona's problems are of joint family's common problem. Sona's marriage is an arranged one. The eldest son of the Banwari Lal family, Yashpal falls in love with her. As Sona's parents are not wealthy, there occurs much discussion. Sona all the time thinks about him and he also does the same. Yashpal gives his father's address and asks him to talk about their marriage otherwise he will leave shop and will spend his whole life on the banks of Ganga. But the Banwari

Lal family is a traditional one and they do not accept such marriage. But at the end of all of this, they get married and now live their life happily. Rupa is shown as a wise woman who accepts bitter realities of life and changes herself accordingly. Manju Kapur writes: *Without children, Rupa had the time to start a little pickle business. Her husband encouraged her, her father-in-law helped her paste on the labels with a trembling hand, her brother-in-law helped her with his contact among the shopkeepers of Karol Bagh. As long as her products were good, orders were plentiful. Rupa worked hard at her recipes, experimenting with new ones and expanding her repertoire. (Home, 16)*

Though Rupa is unable to be a mother, she is welcomed by her family. When Sona is not able to conceive a child, she is advised by her husband to adopt Vicky. But she doesn't want to do so. She tells her husband that it is a rebellious step. She doesn't speak anything but she wants her own child only. But Rupa consoles her and tells her to look at her husband's generosity. He wants her to be happy at any cost. Sona suffers harassment from her mother-in-law. She wants to fly out of the cage but she can't. When Nisha is sexually assaulted by Vicky, she doesn't talk about that to anybody not even to her mother, Sona. She is not able to understand Nisha's changed behaviour overnight. She worries a lot for her daughter. She tells Rupa about Nisha's strange behaviour and asks her to

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take Nisha to her home. Sona and Rupa never clash with each other but they understand each other very well. They share their sufferings and moments of happiness. Rupa takes Nisha to her home and completes her schooling there.

Through the novel Manju Kapur reveals the process of the development of the Indian girl child. She places a lot of emphasis on the cultural conditioning of the girl child in the Indian set up. It also explores the way in which Indian girls are moulded to suit the needs and imperatives of a patriarchal society; Most of her novels deal with feminist issues. These novels begin with the problems affecting the marital life of an urban educated woman. The novels of Manju Kapur trace the painful voyage of the heroines from childhood into adulthood in the form of a bildungsroman. She uses myth, religious dogma and tradition to curb a woman's freedom and stifle her natural impulses to live and grow like men. Also, education and career are intentionally delimited to deprive them of freedom from dependency.

Culture is a crucial factor in the shaping of the lives of women in Manju Kapur's novels Home reveals the difficulties faced by women in achieving self-reliance. Thus, Kapur attempts to deal with the difficulties in the lives of Indian women by exploring major issues and roles of women in her novels. Hence, it is concluded that the novel

of Manju Kapur describes the lives of educated middle-class urban women in India. She fully explores the pivotal issues related to women like - education, marriage, motherhood, identity crisis, economic freedom, self-reliance and ultimately women's independence. This journey from birth to a free woman through education and successful career is not an easy-going process, at least in India. In such journeys Manju Kapur's protagonists defy traditional values both at home and outside the home. As a result, all of them unfortunately end up with a deep sense of isolation and none of them is able to live the dream life of peace and prosperity. In brief, Manju Kapur's examines the difficulties of women through her women characters in the novel.

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