

Lanka's Migrant Housemaid, London, Cornell University Press.

- Halder, Baby. (2006), *A Life Less Ordinary*, (original in Bengali) translated by Urvashi Butalia, New Delhi, Penguin Books India Private Limited.
- Hansen, Karen Tranberg. (1989), *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia 1900-1945*, Ithaca, NY/London, Cornell University Press.
- Horn, Pamela. (1975), *The Rise and Fall of the Domestic Servant*, New York, St. Martin's Press.
- Maza, Sara. (1983), *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth Century France: The Uses of Loyalty*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
- Mc Bride, Theresa M. (1976), *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920*, London, Croom Helm.
- Onslenen, Charles van. (1982), 'The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service in the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914' in van Onselen (ed.), *Studies in the Social and Economic History of Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, London, Longman.
- Ray, Raka. (2000), 'Masculinity, Femininity, and Servitude: Domestic Workers in Calcutta in the Late Twentieth Century' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 26, 3.
- Rollins, Judith. (1985), *Between women, Domestic and their employers*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
- Tilly, Louise and Joan Scott. (1987), *Women, Work and Family in nineteenth century Europe*, New York/London, Routledge.
- White, Eleanor Preston. (1978), 'Families without Marriage: A Zulu Case Study' in Eleanor P. White and J. Argyle (eds), *Social System and Tradition in South Africa: Essays in honour of Eileen Krige*, Cape Town, Oxford University Press.



Manju Kapur's *Home*: Nisha's Voice Among The Voiceless

- Shruti Sangam & Sunita Tiwari

Abstract: "I raise up my voice- not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard." (Malala Yousafzai). Manju Kapur is a writer raising her voice in her works through the characters. Her novels deal with women who raise voice in their life for recognition of their self. 'Home' is a place where a girl in her childhood days gets attached to the roots that is the traditional values of her family which, after her marriage she carries with herself to her new home. Throughout her life she maintains a long silence to domestic violence and traditional values that is passed from one generation to another. But, today, she has opened her eyes wide enough to see the world through her own perspectives and raises her voice in the world to protest against the male dominant society. She is a symbol of roots which is nourished with traditional values to become a sacrificial daughter, a wife and a mother. She knows her prerogatives in life and is aware of the balance she has to maintain in life. In this paper, an effort is made to present the image of a 'new woman' who fights for her identity and emancipation from her roots, not at the cost of her family. Nisha, Manju Kapur's protagonist in *Home* is a bold character that passes through a number of ebbs and flows since her childhood days. Crumbled with the burden of traditional values in the later part of the novel, she raises her voice against the traditional values, and her family, not only for higher education but also to establish her own identity by opening a boutique with the name of 'Nisha Creations.'

Keywords: feminism, identity, roots, traditions, home.

"Home is where we have to gather grace." (Enterprise)

This is a perfect saying by Nissim Ezekiel in his famous poem *Enterprise* in which he elucidates that one can feel tranquillity at one's own house and nowhere else. And this statement is truly applicable for Nisha Kapur's bold and assertive protagonist of *Home* who from her very childhood was prone to a number of struggles and conflicts both internal and external but ultimately she is satisfied with herself and her own decision to stay with her family. It is so because she has been revolting against all the old traditions and practices that were practiced in her home since the survival of her grandfather Banwari Lal. As the title 'Home' indicates the novel centres around the concerns of womankind more than those of males, and some of the dominant concerns of womankind as discussed in it are dowry and marriage depending on it, barrenness and education and financial independence. According to the pioneer feminist Simone de Beauvoir, the two prerequisites for women's freedom are 'economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society' (god) while dowry and barrenness are ostensibly visible in the Banwari Lals,

economic independence for women born of educational training and liberation of women from social taboos and woefully lacking in it.

'Home' symbolises security, safety, and a sense of belongingness and above all it depicts the identity of one's own self. It is a place where an individual feels free and safe to perform all activities but at the same time one is curbed under great norms and traditions which one is bound to follow. This restrictions and practice of traditional beliefs is mostly applicable for the girls or woman residing in that family. For a girl a home is a place where she spends her whole period of childhood with the name and identity given by her father and the other half she is bound to spend in her husband's home with new rules and regulations and she has to make efforts in order to make one adjust to that new environment. After her marriage her identity again changes and she adopts the identity and name given by her husband. But during this period of shifting from one home to another, she is unable to search for her own identity which is lost on the way when she moves from one house to another. And this very search for one's own identity serves to be the basic theme in the fiction 'Home' where Nisha the female protagonist fights for her identity, raises her voice against the traditions that are made to be followed by all the women. She is compelled by the society to swing herself in the cradle between tradition and modernity to stand for her individuality. This fiction of Manju Kapur is a revolt against the age – old traditions, the quest for one's identity, family relationships, and problems of marriage. Kapur's fiction is not like the other fictions where the female protagonists after struggling end her life. In all her fiction we find that the female protagonists, in all her novels, after struggling a lot for one's identity bring a solution to their problems. Her protagonists are all highly educated middle class women who crave for the survival in the society by establishing ones identity. She does not want to depend on any of the male members whether it be her father, husband, brother or her own child. She wants her own identity that besides being just a daughter, wife or a mother she inherits the title of being an 'individual' which means that she too has the right to express herself and make space for her own that she too can be recognised within her own society.

The eminent novel 'Home' by Manju Kapur is a story about the three generations of women belonging to the family of Lala Banwari Lal who is the patriarchal head of the family. He has three children two sons and a daughter namely- Yashpal and Pyarelal and Sunita a silent- bearer. The first generation of women of Banwari Lal's family that is the wife of Banwari Lal was also a silent bearer of all the sufferings and inner turmoil throughout her life. She is a reflection of the immaculate women of traditional era like Savitri, Gandhari and Sita who considers her husband to be an incarnation of God and their sayings cannot be denied for this may be counted as a bad omen. She symbolises to be a pativrata woman like Sita, and Gandhari blindly following the traditions and old beliefs

that are valued since ages. Manju Kapur has portrayed her in the fiction as:

All her years of silent suffering after fleeing Lahore, the years of sacrifice for her children, were now to be rewarded by the obvious preference for a wife. (*Home*; p. 10)

Home depicts the three generation of the family. The orthodox, traditional way of the joint family is depicted through the females of these generations. The narrow outlook by objecting to the marriage of one's choice, not having a child etc. These are considered as blotch on the family. Sona, wife of Yashpal, is tortured mentally for this. On the other side the tortures inflicted on the daughter Sunita, are also dealt by the writer. Sona has to agree to take care of the ill brought up son Vicky, who is also the cause of harassment of Nisha. The writer has presented the psychological block of the mindset of women. Barrenness has been looked on as a curse in society. Manju Kapur has presented the two sides of the same coin in her fiction. In other words she compares and contrasts the two sisters Sona and Rupa of the same family, 'One self-obsessed, complaining and dissatisfied, the other a well of sweet water from which everyone drank.' (*Home*: p. 69) Both of them are childless, but on one hand where Sona prays and practices fast with the hope of becoming pregnant one day or the other, Rupa involves herself in a business of making pickles with the help of her husband and father-in-law. She does not waste her time in these sorts of traditional practices but finds a way to establish her own identity and supports her family financially. She too feels the urge for a child but in order to deviate her mind she sets her own business to keep herself occupied as well as gain liberation. After ten years of continuous struggle and sacrifice Sona, then a woman of thirty gave birth to a beautiful baby girl whom she named as Nisha and later she was once again blessed with a second child, a son Raju. Thus, Banwari Lal's family entered into the next generation which principally symbolized the advent of modern contemplations, accomplishments and actions on the part of the female protagonist, Nisha.

In the third part of this fiction one analyzes the struggle and toils made by Nisha for her survival in her own 'Home'. The struggle that she undergoes is both internally and externally along with her desire to establish her own identity. Nisha's fight for her own survival takes place into three phases- her childhood period where she gets physically abused by her cousin Vicky, her second phase when she falls in love with Suresh but she didn't lose hope. In fact, she recognised her ability and established a boutique giving herself another identity of being an 'individual' besides playing the other roles. And her third part lays stress when she turns into a complete woman by marrying Arvind, a widower and giving birth to twin children a boy and a girl. At a very young age Nisha was mentally and physically harassed by her own cousin Vicky, which cast a very bad effect on her mind psychologically. She as a child was compelled to bear the violence of physical assault by her cousin. Since she was too small she could not

revolt against him because she felt that if she reveals the dark side of her brother no one will trust her. '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.' (H, 58) Due to this torment she became ill and was compelled to be sending to her aunt Rupa's house so that she can get well soon. Gradually, the ill thoughts fail to come to her mind and both Rupa and Premnath discovers to their knowledge that it must be due to sexual assault by Vicky that has caused such a menace to her beloved niece, Nisha. Due to their proper guidance and care she secured good marks in all her examinations. But, due to the sudden death of her grandpa, head of the family, Banwari Lal she was called back to her own home to stay with her grandmother and make her happy. After Nisha's entry in the house Sona her mother came to know that she has not been taught any traditional values which every single girl should be acquainted with since her very childhood. At every stage Sona criticized her sister for not educating her daughter about how to become a good wife and mother in her future:

The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative karma to be a beacon in her married home. (Home: p. 128)

When she asked Nisha to keep the fast of karva chauth:

What kind of wife are you going to make if you can't bear to fast one day a year for your husband? (Home: p.92) She replied, 'I don't want to marry?' (Home: p.94)

As the time advanced Nisha began to learn little household things but slowly and slowly she became weak in her studies because according to Sona in the words of Manju Kapur :

This is the life of a woman: to look after her home, her husband, her children, and give them food she has cooked with her own hands.(Home: p.126)

Even Tennyson quotes:

Men for the field, women for the hearth,
Men with the sword, for the needle she,
Men with the head, women with the heart,
Men to commend, women to obey,
All else confusion.

According to Sona her sister Rupa has made her daughter Nisha a sub-standard female. Sona wants her daughter to become a follower of Savitri a symbol of sacrifice and service to her family. She believes that 'her real education in the kitchen.' (134) But still after securing an average percentage in her school exams she was given the permission to take admission in the Durga Bai College for taking up English honours on special request of her aunt Rupa till some good proposal for marriage come to her:

'If anything happens in the girl's later life. She is not completely dependent.' (Home: p.139) 'Let her do English honours, not too much work, reading story books.' (Home: p.140)

Sona, herself being an uneducated woman does not want her daughter Nisha to be highly educated. She believes that a girl should receive education in terms of handling the kitchen household which is a lifetime certificate essential for every woman rather than receiving college education. This is so because of her old traditional concept that woman has to depend entirely on her husband for her entire life after her marriage because he is the only master of her life. She makes her daughter understand that a man's duty is to earn and a woman's duty is to give her life and service too her family. She thus, decorates her daughter for every marriage so beautifully with the hope that she will get married soon because of her beauty. But destiny has stored something else for Nisha. On her way to the college she meets Suresh, a young, handsome boy pursuing his engineering from the neighbouring college. Her regular meeting with the boy casted a very good impression on Nisha and her friend Pratibha, another character in the fiction who wants to establish her own identity and expect the same from Nisha: 'If you are going to be a modern girl you have to be through.' (145) Suresh was a source through whom Nisha came to know about herself quiet deeply and stepped into the world of modernity firstly by cutting her long hair and making attempts to look like Suriya the famous film star and secondly she brought change in the type of dress she wore that is she started wearing jeans and tops. But this step towards modernity not only brought change in her attires but also developed in her a sense of modernity. She started revolting against the traditional values and beliefs and also rejected them. She also rebelled against her family in order to marry Suresh. She started telling lies and bunked classes to spend more time with him. 'If you could, you'd look like Suriya, I'm telling you.' (147) The rapid change in her daughter's appearance made Sona very furious but later on she calmed down with the satisfaction that such sort of her daughter's beauty can bring good marriage proposals for her in the future. When the exams hovered on the head of Nisha she denied meeting Suresh anymore till her exams was over but with the help of Suresh she secured a first division. Suresh has even taken Nisha to a friend's house so that he can mate with her but she refused him saying, 'We should wait till we are married.' (189) This reflects Nisha's traditional attitude that though she has changed her dressing sense and her outlook but still she maintains her dignity and chastity.

Finally, a day came when she has to reveal the truth to everyone about her affair with Suresh. She proposed her parents for their marriage but they were not interested. And ultimately the chapter of Suresh has to be closed. She replied her mother boldly when she was denied to marry Suresh, 'What you really want is to sell me in the market. Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?' (199) She undergoes mental trauma, which is reflected in the form of eczema. After such a big fight she has to pass through another exam the most painful of all and that was the

skin problem which caused her tremendous throbbing. Treatment after treatments took place but her itching increased day by day. In the meantime a good proposal of marriage came for her younger brother Raju from a rich family and relative of Ajay's wife Rekha. And at length Raju got married to Puja an educated girl belonging to a rich family. Even proposals of marriage came for Nisha too but due to her past records people did not want to accept her. Being frustrated of all this she asked her mother to allow her to do some course so that she can learn something and engage herself in the activities: 'At least till then let me do a course. Later we can see,' she pleaded. (227) She further rebels against the orthodox idea of her mother by saying; 'I want to study fashion designing. Lots of girls do it, why can't I? Why should I sit at home every day waiting for proposals?' (226) Even her brother Raju criticizes her on the idea of her working but who later on after his own marriage to Puja asks her to handle the boutique of Nisha Creations which was initially laid down by Nisha herself: 'You're in-laws will not like the idea of your working,' said Raju. 'I certainly won't let my wife work that is going to look after the house?' Nisha's father was very fond of her daughter and could not let her daughter sink in such a manner. Thus, he allowed her daughter to teach and handle small kids of a play school near by her house. But, Nisha failed to enjoy her responsibility for a long time. Thereafter, one day she requests her father to allow her to run her own boutique where she could make dresses of her own choice and sell them like his family members did. 'Give me a chance to show you what I can do.' (p.286) Her father denied her proposal but then she said, 'I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do.' (267) She denied saying, 'I do not want to be a teacher.' (269)

This revolt by Nisha reflects the concept of new woman who desires to become independent and wants to make her own identity. She wanted to escape from the chains of traditions and old beliefs. She was quite depressed by the skin problem as it destroyed her beauty which made her feel proud. But now she tends to lose her beauty and so she decides to give herself a place that can give her more value and she can create a good image in the eyes of her family and society. As she started with her boutique she became engrossed with her works. At times when she used to leave the responsibility of her boutique under the guidance of her mother, she found that everything went wrong and then she used to settle all things very creatively and intelligently,

Mummy, what have you done?' wailed Nisha. 'Even if he sleeps he never cuts less than five suits a day. I promised Gyan's twenty by day after, if he doesn't come, my reputation will be spoilt. Do you know how competitive the market is?' (p. 293)

This implies that she was very much dedicated and responsible towards her work. She had a high ambition to prosper and become a successful

business woman. She never wanted to be 'caged like a bird' in her own home. She was quite devoted towards her duty and well mannered in managing her workers. She doesn't shun away from hard work and is aware that to succeed one has to put in hundred percent commitments. Gradually Nisha became engrossed in her work and in a few months she prospered to a great level. Till then a marriage proposal also came for her from a widow whose wife died in an accident and he was living with his mother in a small house. Nisha still felt that she shall never leave her business because it reflects her identity which has given her the reason to survive in this world and live happily in her family. Her world of business meant everything to her and when she met Arvind her future husband she requested him to allow her to continue her business:

'I work,' she offered.

'I know.'

'I would like to continue.'

The man shifted his weight about and looked at her. 'How long have you been doing this business?'

'Two years.'

'Two years.' More pause, more thought. 'You must have worked very hard.'

Again he reminded her of her father. 'Yes,' she said, it is called Nisha's Creations.'

'Lots of women are doing readymade. I see small boutiques operating from houses all over Daryaganj.'

'I cannot give it up,' she confided. (p.302)

This shows that Nisha was quite proud of herself for her besides being a good daughter she proved to be a good business woman. The boutique Nisha Creations was her identity which gave a new direction to her life and was the reason for her survival. Finally, she was married to Arvind the person with whom she has to spend her whole life whether she liked or not. The marriage was a simple one without any grand feast. After her marriage also she continued her work but when she got the news that she has conceived everyone was happy except her for now she has to give up her working and was asked to yield her business to Puja for better functioning. She cried heavenly for her working but for her own safety and her peaceful delivery of the twins every member of her family forbade her. Even her Rupa masi said, "You have your whole life ahead of you- what is there? It is out of love that she says all this, you are a lucky girl. Some families do not let their daughters-in-law stop working the entire pregnancy.' (p.325) 'You know beti, you can always start a business. You have shown a flair for it. But this time with your baby, this will not come again.' Rupa masi choked and further words failed her.(p.333) 'I told everybody I wanted to keep on working,' cried Nisha into the wilderness, and 'nobody is letting me.' Tears began to fall. They were bad for the baby. (p.325) She has to sacrifice her business of Nisha Creations that was her world and identity for the safety and security of her children a girl and a boy. And finally she was gifted with the twins which were her world after

her Nisha's Creations. Nisha is aware of the priorities in life. They keep on changing with the changing circumstances and she is ready to do so. Manju Kapur's female protagonist Nisha belonged to a middle class family where she was given the two types of education- one about the household that is the traditional values and the other modern values through she was able to prove herself modern by giving herself a new identity and name other than her father and husband's. As Clara Nubile in the *Danger of Gender* observes:

In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of patriarchal system. (Clara, 2003:271)

Manju Kapur has portrayed Nisha as a modern girl who struggles in her life to get higher education and establish her own identity by running a boutique of her own. She did not want to be slave at the hands of her parents or husband therefore she pleaded to allow her to continue her business even after her marriage and during her pregnancy. But when she was denied she did not turn violent against the elders but ultimately compromises with the situation without any further hindrance. Thus, we see here, that besides being bold, deliberate and modern in her attitude like the working women of the modern age she does not forget her traditional values like Draupadi, Gandhari but make sacrifices for her family. Thus, she plays a dual role by maintaining a balance between the traditional as well as modern values and fulfilling her desire of establishing her own identity. Today the woman is not hungry for her physical needs but she craves for an identity of her own. Besides being a daughter, wife and a mother she does not want to limit herself as a woman but wants to give an identity to herself. "Identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history of a culture." -Stuart Hall "Minimal Selves" This concept of searching for one's identity is a shifting one which reflects different meanings at different levels. It is like a fluid concept that acquires the very shape of the container in which it is kept. The characters are always in the process of searching their true identity and self, which is always related to many other characters. Quest for feminine identity is a post- colonial phenomenon which was adopted by the Indians from the West. This phenomenon was quite influenced by various changing forces of reality-freedom movement, progressive education, social reforms, increasing contacts with the west, urban growth, etc. The modern woman of today like Nisha, does not find any sense in such self- sacrifice and yearns for self- expression, individuality and self- identity. She becomes the voice of the woman in her family who is bold, and assertive to put forward her views and rebel against the old traditions followed by her mother and grandmother. She tries to free herself of the dependence syndrome as says Chaman Nahal-

I define Feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of