

**THE PORTRAYAL OF THE 'NEW WOMAN' IN  
MANJU KAPUR'S *HOME***

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**Abstract**

Indian English Literature is significant in the contributions made by its women writers. Manju Kapur is among them who attempt to represent the conditions of the Indian women as these women come across various experiments and tribulations due to the conflicting pressure of tradition and modernity. She presents the painful perception of the urban middle class women who in search of their own identity. They changes from a noiseless victim to an absolute insurgent moving against the age old traditions, ethics and restrictions of the male dominated society. This kind of self-assertion is reflected in Manju Kapur's *Home*. The novel is set in a business locale, present the central protagonist Nisha as women who valiantly faces and resist against the limits of being 'a woman' and ultimately accomplish her devoted quest towards being herself. Manju Kapur affirms the capability of the new erudite Indian women to determine their priorities for self-discovery in rising as a 'new woman'.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, oppression, new woman, self-identity, traditional societal pattern.

Time has changed and the status of women in society too, this is also replicate by the contribution of women in literature. Twenty first century women write down to contribute in enduring debates like never before. They have evolved from the past and are speculating the future. They write not only to discover the world and show concerns to recognize themselves. On one hand, they deal with the issue of sexuality, relationship, love, personal experience and on the other hand they talk about politics, inequality and financial certainty. Often literature is represented by male point of view as the world is dominated by men. However, female writers have sustained to contribute in Literature. Men have used language as a tool to employ their supremacy over women. The purpose of feminist literature is to establish the voice women in this male dominated society. Feminist Literature may be a fiction or nonfiction but it gives emphasis to on equal social, economic, political and societal rights of women. It often identifies the inequality in the role of men and women particularly in Indian society.

The term “Indo-Anglian” originally refers to the genuine creative writing in English by the Indians whose mother tongue is other than the worldwide language, English. In a chronological aspect, Indian English Literature has undergone numerous stages like Indo-Anglian, Indo-English, Indian Writing in English and recently Indian English Literature. At the present it is believed as a part of Common Wealth Literature in English.

Novel is a commonly established genre in Indian English Literature. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Anitha Desai are a few who made incredible contributions to it. One more development in the region of Indian English fiction is the significant contribution of women writers. Numerous Indian women novelists effectively endeavour to portray the situation of the Indian women who encounter various trials and tribulations because of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. Similarly to many other women writers like Anitha Nair, Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharathi Mukherjee, Manju Kapur and Shobha De expertly capture the Indian culture. Through their works, they exhibit a grown-up understanding of the female psyche. These woman writers revolt against the established traditions of the patriarchal society. They disclose the genuine experience of women. They present the anguished consciousness of the urban middle class woman who in-search of her own identity changes from a silent sufferer to a complete rebel moving against the age old traditions, ethics and restrictions of the male dominated society. Also, the work of Anita Desai reflects the emerging women’s quests for identity, ambitions and suffering. Her work challenges the basic doctrine of customs and convention of her time.

The upheaval contrived by woman may take the extreme forms of sexual indifference or extra-marital relations through which she tries to affirm her identity in search of her ‘self’. This sort of self-assertion becomes the central theme of Manju Kapur’s novel *Home* (1998). The present paper attempts a study on the emergence of the new woman passing through the tribulation of self-assertion and attaining the liberty to lead a life of her own choice. Manju Kapur’s *Home* deals with the mental conflict of such liberated woman protagonist who is trapped between a personal self and a societal self.

The period of twentieth century began to witness the rise of the new woman as an impact of modern feminism. The New woman liberates herself from the conventional limitations, changes the notions of marriage system and sexuality. The New woman move away from the age old practices, traditions and are new in their approach. The novel *Home* of Manju Kapur fabricates new woman, Nisha, who fearlessly countenance the ruthless realities of her life.

Manju Kapur is one of the Indian outstanding writers who speak for the middle-class women. She has published five novels *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), *Custody* (2011) and *Brothers*. She had been accredited by The Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for her debut novel that is *Difficult Daughters*. She chooses the characteristics and vision of female life in the patriarchy society.

Manju Kapur’s third novel *Home* captivating the accounts of three generations of Banwari Lal’s family. In an interview Manju Kapur accounts that: “Literature by women, about families, always has these larger considerations, with years of studying texts, it becomes almost second nature to look beneath the surface at social and economic forces, gender relationships and how they are played out in an arena that, in my writing happens to be the home. But then, all sort of things happening outside do affect what is happening inside the home.”

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The novel is all about the family members of Lala Banwari Lal. He is the head of the family and runs a sari shop in Karol Bagh supported by his two sons, Yashpal and Pyarelal. As the story unfolds, Nisha the daughter of Yashpal come out as a self-dependent woman in the novel. Banwari Lal's family is embedded in conventional and patriarchal customs. They exercise the prototype of men working outside of the house and women inside. However the new woman Nisha declines to settle through the male dominated family organization and tries to construct her individual identity. She escorts a disgusting youth where she is never allowed to go outside and play with her brothers.

The terrifying experience of sexual exploitation of Nisha leads to a turning point in her life. The mentally and emotionally affected Nisha is sent to her aunt Rupa's house. Moreover there she takes pleasure of the absolute concern and attention of Rupa and her husband Prem Nath. Both of them encourage Nisha to excel in her studies, as a contrast to the established approach towards girl's education. Nisha is extremely influenced by the thoughts of Rupa and starts to move away from the age old concept of patriarchy. In this regard Manju Kapur states, "There is always time to learn cooking, but only one time to study." (*Home* 125)

Nisha reside with Rupa who transforms her mind. She extremely inclined towards Rupa, who runs a pickle business and wants to lead a liberated life like her. Sona does not accept the transformation in her daughter and tries to move her in the direction of the conventional pattern of their family. Here Manju Kapur states that, "We are traditional people. Tradition is strong with us. So is duty." (*Home* 123).

Throughout the novel *Home*, Manju Kapur tries to reveal various distressing truths of home that still exist in our society. Nisha feels disturb when her three years long love affair with Suresh gets destructed. The end of the affair leads an end of her love and hopes. Then Nisha decided to starts her expedition towards self dependence and she desires to do incredible things in her life. She desires to study fashion designing and to be economically independent. It is her first endeavour on the way to empowerment that is apparently opposed by her conventionally entrenched mother.

In her intellect she contradicts the patriarchal system and considers herself equivalent as her brothers. For a short period of time she joins a play way school near her home instead of going to her father's shop. Discouraged with the type of job she quits it. Through this Manju Kapur bring to light the struggle faced by a woman to adopt the profession of her own choices. She reveals that it is not trouble-free for a woman to decide the job of her own choice. In order to accomplish her task, she requires struggling hard and come over the restrictions and commandment made by the society.

Manju Kapur presents the changes in the ethical fundamentals of the Banwari Lal's family pertaining to the realities of life. Nisha denies following the conventions and wishes to breathe an untroubled life. She starts her own business with the help of her father, a boutique, named 'Nisha's Creations.' This increases her confidence for now, in the words of Manju Kapur, "Her father trusted her as he would have trusted a son." (*Home* 291). Nisha borrows money from her father and makes all arrangements for her business. Nisha's customers be fond of her suits and dresses thus paves path for profound orders and she becomes a booming and recognized 'business woman'. In her field, she proves to be a liable effective business woman. In a short period of time she returns money of loan to her father. She never accepts any carelessness

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in her work. As Manju Kapur says that, “My reputation will be spoilt. Do you know how competitive the market is?”(*Home* 294).

As soon as Nisha successfully built her identity through her private enterprise, her family wants her to be settled and get married. They supervise to arrange a marriage for Nisha with Arvind, a widower. When Nisha is entered in the institution of marriage, her destiny begins to alter. She is entrapped within the four walls of the house looking after the needs of her husband and in-laws. Her vision of liberation shatters when she came to know about her pregnancy within a month of her marriage. Subsequently after her marriage Nisha feels like a speedy bird caged in conventional, patriarchal and societal customs. He unable to understand her desires and wishes.

During her pregnancy period, her family members, even her modern aunt Rupa do not welcome her thought of going away to take care of her business. Rupa consoles her, as Manju Kapur States that, “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.”(*Home* 334) as per the conventional patriarchal attitude, a marriage is complete only if it is pursued by motherhood. Nisha gives birth to twins a girl and a boy uplifting herself as an absolute blessed woman from the side of the conventional society. Nisha give up her own business to Pooja, her sister-in-law because she is totally occupied with the responsibility of her family,

Manju Kapur very beautifully elucidates the predicament of modern woman who tries to stable her profession and married life in the patriarchal society. The protagonist, Nisha tries to affirm her individualism by attaining financial independence. Through this she tries to emphasize the value of equality of power. Her views on marriage stress on the incapability of men in accepting the psyche of women and their poignant requirements. According to Cora Kaplan, “The psychic fragmentation expressed, through female characters in women’s writings is seen as the most important sign of their sexual subordination more interesting and ultimately more meaningful than their social oppression.”(152)

Manju Kapur throughout her novel *Home* demonstrate a woman’s inherent longing for love, dependence, wisdom of belonging and the corporeal and poignant gratification. The novel provides deep study of the modern Indian society in which woman is tattered amid her independence and her responsibility. Similarly, Nisha also achieve something to a definite perimeter in attaining self-identity but little bit fails to reach the height of self actualization. Manju Kapur through her protagonist Nisha establishes the capability of the new erudite Indian woman to establish her precedence for self innovation. Therefore, Nisha stand out as woman of powerful determination to a extent violating the restraints of male subjugated society in expedition of her self-identity.

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