



Women Struggle for Identity in Manju Kapur's "Home"

S.Anitha

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Madurai Gandhi N.M.R. Subbaraman College for Women,
Anuppanadi, Madurai*

anithadhanapandi@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the theme of women's struggle for identity in Manju Kapur's novel *Home*. Kapur's narrative explores the intricacies of traditional Indian family structures and the challenges women face in asserting their individuality. By analyzing the characters, their circumstances, and the cultural and societal norms depicted in the novel, the study illuminates the conflict between tradition and modernity. The paper employs a feminist lens to highlight the suppression and resilience of women in patriarchal settings. Additionally, it delves into the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of women's identity formation in a conservative society.

Manju Kapur's *Home* is a compelling exploration of familial ties, gender roles, and the pervasive patriarchy that defines the lives of women in traditional Indian households. Set against the backdrop of a conservative family in Delhi, the novel captures the journey of Nisha, the protagonist, as she navigates societal expectations and personal aspirations. Through Nisha's story, Kapur highlights the struggles faced by women in their quest for autonomy and identity. This paper focuses on the various dimensions of these struggles, emphasizing how cultural norms, familial obligations, and internal conflicts shape women's lives.

In *Home*, Kapur portrays the Banwari Lal family as a microcosm of traditional Indian society, where men dominate decision-making and women's roles are confined to domestic spaces. Women are expected to adhere to rigid societal norms, sacrificing their individuality for the family's collective honor. This dynamic is evident in the lives of key female characters, including Nisha, Sona, and Rupa.

Nisha's character encapsulates the essence of a woman's struggle for identity. Born into a family that prioritizes male heirs, Nisha is subjected to gender discrimination from an early age. Her childhood trauma of sexual abuse by a cousin further accentuates her vulnerability and highlights the silence surrounding

such issues in patriarchal settings. Despite these challenges, Nisha's determination to carve out her own identity sets her apart.

Nisha's pursuit of education becomes a pivotal aspect of her journey. Unlike her mother, Sona, who epitomizes the ideal housewife, Nisha aspires for independence. However, her family's insistence on prioritizing marriage over her career forces her to confront the limitations imposed on her.

Sona and Rupa, sisters with differing fates, exemplify the diverse experiences of women within the same societal framework. Sona, as the elder daughter-in-law of the Banwari Lal family, conforms to traditional expectations, focusing on her duties as a wife and mother. Her life revolves around ensuring the family's cohesion, even at the cost of her personal desires.

In contrast, Rupa, who marries into a less rigid family, enjoys relatively more freedom. Her decision to remain childless is a bold assertion of agency, challenging societal norms. The juxtaposition of Sona and Rupa's lives underscores the varying degrees of autonomy women can achieve within patriarchal systems.'

The novel delves deeply into the cultural expectations placed upon women, particularly regarding marriage and motherhood. For Nisha, the pressure to marry becomes a

recurring source of conflict. Her initial rejection by prospective grooms due to a skin condition exemplifies the superficial criteria often used to evaluate women's worth.

Marriage, as depicted in *Home*, is not merely a union of individuals but a social contract that reinforces patriarchal values. Nisha's eventual marriage to a widower, Arvind, represents a compromise rather than a triumph of her aspirations. This compromise reflects the societal conditioning that compels women to subordinate their desires to familial expectations.

One of the most significant aspects of Nisha's journey is her foray into entrepreneurship. After facing rejection and isolation, Nisha channels her energy into establishing a successful business. Her boutique becomes a symbol of empowerment, offering her a sense of purpose and financial independence. This development marks a critical turning point in Nisha's struggle for identity, demonstrating how economic autonomy can serve as a tool for self-realization.

However, even as Nisha achieves professional success, societal expectations continue to weigh heavily on her. Her family's reluctance to acknowledge her accomplishments highlights the deeply entrenched bias against women who step outside traditional roles.

Home intricately weaves the themes of tradition and modernity, showcasing the tensions that arise as individuals

and families grapple with changing societal norms. Nisha's journey reflects this intersection, as she navigates the dual pressures of upholding family honor and pursuing her dreams. Kapur's portrayal of Nisha's struggles underscores the challenges faced by women striving to balance these competing demands.

From a feminist standpoint, *Home* critiques the patriarchal structures that confine women to predetermined roles. Kapur's nuanced depiction of female characters reveals the diverse ways in which women resist and adapt to these constraints. While Nisha's story highlights active resistance, characters like Sona and Rupa represent more subtle forms of defiance and accommodation.

The novel also emphasizes the importance of solidarity among women. Nisha's bond with her aunt, Rupa, serves as a source of strength, illustrating how supportive relationships can help women navigate their struggles.

Manju Kapur's *Home* offers a poignant exploration of women's struggle for identity within the confines of a patriarchal society. Through the experiences of Nisha and other female characters, the novel sheds light on the myriad challenges women face in asserting their individuality. While Kapur's narrative acknowledges the resilience and agency of women, it also underscores the pervasive influence of cultural and societal norms.

Nisha's journey, marked by moments of triumph and compromise, encapsulates the complexity of identity formation in a traditional setting. Ultimately, *Home* serves as both a critique of patriarchal values and a celebration of women's strength and perseverance.

References

1. Kapur, Manju. *Home*. Random House India, 2006.
2. Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nation and Its Women." *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 116-134.
3. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 2011.
4. Agarwal, Bina. "Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household." *Feminist Economics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1997, pp. 1-51.
5. Nair, Anita. "Women and Identity in Indian Literature." *Indian Literature Today*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2012, pp. 34-47.
6. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.