



BODHI

International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science

An online, Peer reviewed, Refereed and Quarterly Journal

Vol : 2

No : 1

October 2017

ISSN : 2456-5571



**CENTRE FOR RESOURCE, RESEARCH &
PUBLICATION SERVICES (CRRPS)**

www.crrps.in | www.bodhijournals.com

UNIQUENESS OF TRADITIONAL FAMILY IN MANJU KAPUR'S *HOME*

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Family is derived from Latin word 'familiar' which means an exclusive group of people who share a close relationship, traditionally composed of a mated couple and their dependent children or procreation in co-residence. Family is the key to socialization which ensures healthy structure of society. It is an exclusive group of people bound by similar affinity, economy, culture, tradition, honour, and friendship that impacts Nation and promotes Humanism. The families that break tradition within a few particular societies are those that are uprooted and grafted into new societies. In science, Genealogy is a field which aims at tracing family lineage through history. The term 'family' denotes groups of objects closely and exclusively related and thus the concept of family is metaphorical which differs.

Marriage is about a life of togetherness connecting two individuals of the opposite gender. There are happy marriages, bitter marriages, contented marriages, contented couples, estranged ones, mismatches, and so on. The general hallmarks of marriage are compatibility, sharing, caring, mutual commitment, integrity and love. Simon Beauvoir in her article, "Introduction: Woman as Other," asserts: "The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness – there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness – but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition as routine" (Beauvoir 502).

The choice of marriage mainly depends on the horoscope compatibility. Instead of the personal wishes and opinions of the young girls and boys, it is their horoscopes that are analyzed to unimaginable heights. The mismatch between the said astrological charts is blown out of proportion and the alliance is drawn to a naught. This is to show that astrological predictions can

make or break a matrimonial alliance in a conservative Indian set-up. Unless a seasoned astrologer gives a green signal and everything augurs well about the proposed alliance, an Indian wedding cannot take place. Manju Kapur goes back to her premise of three generations residing in one house, the women existing within the joint family set-up. Home is about the home of Lala Banwari Lal, a patriarch who firmly believes in existing in a joint family. He is the head of the family and runs a sari shop in Karol Bagh. Yashpal and Pyarelal are his sons, and he has a daughter Sunita, who is married. Anupama Chowdhury in an article entitled, "Manju Kapur's Home: A Feminist Reading" remarks, "Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress" (Chowdhury 33).

Home focuses on three female characters- Sona, (daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal), Rupa, (Sona's sister) and Nisha (Sona's daughter) who assert their identity in their own ways. The story begins with two sisters: one is good looking and the other merely plain. The beautiful elder Sona is married to the elder son of Banwari Lal while the younger one, Rupa is attached to a junior Government officer of not as much of value. At the initial stage the narrative revolves around the life of Sona and Rupa before it centres on the whole family. Each sister thinks that the other is luckier and each one has more problems than the other. Rupa lives with her husband and her father-in-law in the family whereas Sona's is a joint family.

The only stress of Rupa's life is a depraved tenant who lives upstairs in their house. He refuses to pay his rent on time. They have already spent a lot of money on the case to expel him. Rupa and her husband, Prem

Nath remain childless couple throughout the story. But she is lucky enough because she is not subjected to bear the taunts of in-laws for having no child. Like Sona, after passing two years, Sona is still not pregnant. Her mother-in-law comments her occasionally, "What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you". (H 18) Sona performs every duty as a daughter-in-law as she is skilled at an early age to love, serving and abide by her in-laws. In the meantime, Yashpal's younger brother, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. Their marriage is welcomed by all the family because it is arranged by the parents. Sushila brings a massive dowry such as a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. Sona realizes what she has not realized in three years of her marriage. She feels herself inferior to Sushila, as Sona's parents did not give her dowry at the time of her marriage. Avtar Brah in the book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* has mentioned:

On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experiences of pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentment, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture. (Brah 192) The newly married couple starts living upstairs where Sona wishes to shift. But the system of joint family remains same. All take their meal together only. The family believes, "Separate kitchens led to a sense of mine and yours, dissatisfaction, emotional division, and an eventual parting of the ways". (H 12) Sona struggles to have children in order to establish her place in the family and rejects the responsibility for Vicky, the orphaned son of the daughter of the family. Sona finally gives birth to a baby girl. Everybody is happy because "It is good to have a girl in the house". (H 35) Girl is considered as Lakshmi for the traditional family. "And now the womb has opened," continued Rupa, 'a baby brother will come soon.'" (H 36) The boy child is seen as

'Kul-Ka-Deepak'. Sona's delivery of her next progeny, a son is enjoyed and welcomed more than the first. Sona's mother-in-law declared, "Now I can die in peace". (H 41) As both of her sons now have their sons and they can hold their head high in the society. Due to this gender differentiation, the family never let Nisha to go outside and play with her brothers. The family of Banwari Lal is traditional and patriarchal. They believe that men work out of the house, and women within. His two sons follow the ways of their father without any question.

The head of the house, Banwari Lal, is ready to do anything for the honour of the family and to maintain its unity. He believes, "United we stand, divided energy, time and money are squandered" (H 7). At first his principles are challenged by his elder son, Yashpal, who falls in love with a customer and then marries her. The opposition of the love marriage is the awfully characteristic of traditionalism. In addition to this, Sona's childlessness and later Nisha's empowerment is also considered as shameful act. They believe that a girl is supposed to find satisfaction in the performance of her duties in the varied role of mother, daughter, sister, and daughter-in-law. The home is 'Karma- Bhoomi' and for a woman to aspire life beyond the limits of the home is unnatural. Malti Mathur in an article "Crossing the Threshold: Women in Shashi Deahpande's *Small Remedies* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*." asserts, "Any woman who wished to give up the security and safety of the confines of the home for an uncertain, unsafe identity outside, are looked upon as no less than a Jazebel". (Mathur 85)

Nisha, the main character and the daughter of Yashpal and Sona, emerges as a self-dependent woman in the novel. She declines to reconcile with the patriarchal and male subjugated family structure and tries to make her own individual identity. She spends a congested childhood where she is not allowed to play or go out by her own choice. She is provided with nice dresses and everything else yet, "unfortunately her outfits did not match her inclinations,' I want to play in the park,' she whined periodically". (H 53)

Manju Kapur has portrayed the confused growing up years of Nisha in a heart rending manner as Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky in the early stage of her life. It affects the child psychologically and mentally. She thinks silently that, "she had done something dirty" (H 59). Rupa believes that there is something at their home which is frightening and disturbing the innocent mind of Nisha. Rupa is sent to her aunt's house. Her aunt Rupa, and her husband, take full care of Nisha. In the traditional family of Banwari Lal's, girl's education is considered secondary. But Nisha's education begins properly at her aunt's house. Her uncle, Prem Nath helps her in her studies and spends much time in telling her stories and lessons. A change appears in Nisha's performance after she leaves her own home. Her uncle and aunt try to talk on the issue of Vicky with Nisha's father. But no one in the family is ready to believe in such tales about Vicky, whom they consider like their own adolescent.

During Nisha's education, her brother has got married. Now it is Nisha's turn. Her mother knows that she is manglik and it is not as easy to find a manglik boy for her. Nisha is told to keep fasts for her future husband by her mother. Nisha is of modern thinking and does not believe in traditional beliefs. She is not ready at all to spend her whole day without food and water like her mother.

Nisha is also forced again to keep 'Kava Chauth' fast for the long life of her husband because their family believes in superstitions. Nisha has been influenced by her Maasi's updated thinking of life. The lady believes in practical ways of life and thinks of her sister, "There was an age for everything, and when the child should be thinking of studies, she was forcing her to think of husbands". (H 95) Nisha's stay with them has conditioned her mind according to the ways of her uncle and aunt. Rupa has a business of pickles; Nisha sees her mentor in her aunt and wants to lead a life like her. Sona does not understand her daughter Nisha very much similar to Kasturi in *Difficult Daughters*, where Kasturi, the mother of the protagonist Virmati, stands opposed to her daughter's happiness and wishes. Both Kasturi and

Sona are the forces of patriarchy within their homes; the opposition does not come so openly from the male members as it does from their own mothers. They are unable to understand their daughter's feelings and rather expect them to follow the traditional role of women in a family. Sona says, "This girl will be our death. My child, born after ten years, tortures me like this. Thanks God your grandfather is not alive. What face will I show upstairs?" (H 198)

The traditional mother wants her daughter to be like her. For her doing kitchen work is more important than studies. The main concern of Sona is Nisha's marriage. Throughout Ajay's marriage, Sona wants Nisha to be good-looking so that any boy or his family may wish her. While Nisha proceeds to her home after living for a long time with her aunt, Sona discovers with horror that at the age of sixteen, Nisha does not know how to cook. "What can Rupa have been thinking of? I assumed she was teaching you everything she knew," Sona grumbled. You take half an hour to peel ten potatoes. How will you manage in your future home?" (H 125)

Nisha all the time disputes in return, "Masi says there is always time to learn cooking, but only one time to study" (H125). Nisha always tries to defend herself and her aunt. This clash between Nisha and Sona is a clash between tradition and modernity. The mother wants her daughter to be rooted in the tradition that would make her life significant. "Roop, I would never had imagined you, of all people, filling the girl's head with rubbish. 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. Next you will be saying she should hire a servant" (H 126).

Social structure conditions one's thinking. A person becomes that, under which circumstances he or she lives. We see that two real sisters- Sona and Rupa, born in the same house, are totally different in their thinking after their marriage. It is result of the atmosphere of their new family's one considers a working woman as emancipated individual, while for the other it is shame. One protests, "Times are different now" while the other defends by saying that "We are traditional people.

Tradition is strong with us. So is duty". (H 123) During first year of her college, Nisha comes across a boy, Suresh, at the bus stop. She falls in love with Suresh but in her mind she always reminds herself of the patriarch set up of her home and yet "As they rode towards metamorphosis in Kamala Nagar, she felt she was entering a phase from which there was no turning back" (H 149). Kapur brings out some disturbing home truths in this novel which still exist in our society and is a very part of social organization. An in-depth analysis of this novel reveals the sensibilities of the author reflected in myriad ways through the characters and their responses and reactions.

Manju Kapur's novels focus on the urban Indian middle class family, the life of women and their struggles, a gynocentric approach. The novels portray difficult daughters, significance of marriage in society, theme of female bonding. It emphasises desire for motherhood in the women characters, openness in discussion of sexuality and it also gives much importance to education. Manju Kapur discusses many of socio-political issues and chooses the urban Indian middle class as the sociological base for her works. She feels that she is

most familiar with this class and comfortable writing about it. It is difficult to define a class but it can be identified by its specific features. The Indian middle class corresponds to the majority of the population. They have been identified with the joint family structure although this notion has also undergone change. The family lives together and personal space is limited.

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