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Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed illustration of a writing desk. A large white quill pen is the central focus, resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is tied with a red ribbon and has a red wax seal. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm glow. In the foreground, there is a glass inkwell with a quill inside, and a red wax seal with a wooden handle. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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Prof. K.N. Shelke

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Prof. K.N. Shelke

Flat No. 01,
Nirman Sagar Coop. Housing Society,
Thana Naka, Panvel, Navi Mumbai. (MS), India. 410206. knshelke@yahoo.in

Cell: +91-7588058508

Problem of Identity Crisis Reflected in Manju Kapur's 'Home'**Prof. Manjiree A.Vaidya***Head, Dept. of English, Amity University Mumbai, (M.S.) India***Abstract**

Identity plays vital role in human life. Every human gets his identity from birth and it goes on changing according to different roles in his personal and social life. The factors like upbringing, childhood, individual nature, the roles assigned and accepted in personal and social life, the achievements and failures, self image and support from others constitute an identity of an individual. If any of these factors is imbalanced, it results into identity crisis. In modern world human being suffers more from internal problems like alienation, fragmentation, rootlessness, futility of life, distortion of self image etc. than external problems. This leads to perpetual quest for identity.

Manju Kapur, through her novel 'Home' tries to emphasise the fact that woman has the same mental and moral power like man, yet she is not considered as his equal. Actually in this male dominated society, she is compelled to perform traditional roles such as wife, mother, sister and home maker. She is expected to serve, sacrifice, submit and tolerate peacefully, in spite of injustice done to her in her family. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. Under such conditions, she is bound to look for her own recognition as member of society and tries to establish herself through various keys.

In this novel many women characters like Sunita, Sona, Rupa, Sushila and Puja strive for their identity in different situations, including Nisha, the protagonist who rebels against the old family system to assert herself roles which she is not supposed to play, even never crossing the boundaries of morality and family values.

Key Words: Identity Crisis, Manju Kapur, 'Home'

When one thinks about identity of a woman, the quest begins from the question whether woman is really treated like a human being. Mostly the identity crisis begins from her birth. She is constantly put under restrictions and expected to meekly perform the roles assigned to her by the patriarchal norms of society. So from her birth to death she is constantly under scanner of the watchful society. Many reasons such as gender bias, marriage, expectations from society, suppression of her feelings, thoughts, desires and challenge to her self-esteem etc. are

responsible for the identity crisis of a woman. She tries to adjust with her traditional role and requirements of present age. It is like playing a role of tapestry artist every moment of her life. Even being economically self-sufficient, she cannot live life on her own terms because patriarchal influence is deeply imbibed in her mind. She lives in duality as she is neither completely submissive nor completely free from social manipulation.

'Home' is third novel of Manju Kapur written in 2006 which depicts the cry of

identity crisis of women in a complex, convoluted joint family. Manju Kapur, through this novel, tries to emphasise the fact that woman has the same mental and moral power like man, yet she is not considered as his equal. Actually in this male dominated society, she is compelled to perform traditional roles such as wife, mother, sister and home maker. She is expected to serve, sacrifice, submit and tolerate peacefully, in spite of injustice done to her in her family. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. Under such conditions, she is bound to look for her own recognition as member of society and tries to establish herself through various keys.

Anupama Chowdhury says, "Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress".¹

The title of the novel 'Home' implies a place which is most safe, comfortable and where every person wants to be in with its values and traditions.

The novel begins with the story of two sisters, Sona and Rupa. Sona is fair and attractive while Rupa is ordinary-looking. The fairer Sona is married to the Banwarilal family while Rupa is married to a junior government officer.

In the first few pages, the story traces the lives of these two sisters and finally shifts its focus entirely on the goings-on in the Banwarilal family. In the Banwarilal family, family values and prosperity in business are always matters of priority.

Lala Banwari Lal who owns a cloth shop in Karol Bagh is a Punjabi refugee from

Pakistan. His cloth shop in Lahore was destroyed by the communal forces. He, with his son, Yashpal, a daughter, Sunita and pregnant wife came to Karol Bagh where he now lives with two sons Yashpal and PyareLal. Yashpal, the elder son, falls in love with Sona who is a girl from economically ordinary family. The boy's mother wails and calls the girl a witch, since in traditional business families marriages are arranged with great care where "The bride had to bring a dowry, come from the same background and understand the value of togetherness." (Home 4)

Although Lala Banwari Lal does not feel the girl suitable for his business family, he gives permission for the marriage, as Yashpal is hell bent to marry the girl otherwise he would leave the shop and spend the rest of his life celibate, by the banks of Ganges. Lala Banwari Lal does not want to break his joint family into fragments.

Soon after Yashpal's marriage his mother gets bitter to see the change in her son's behaviour and his inclination to his wife. The mother-in-law does not accept Sona and secretly hates her. The hatred increases when PyareLal gets married to Sushila, a girl decided by the elders and her father gives enough dowry in the marriage. Sona's identity crisis began with her marriage, but it further grows, when even after two years of marriage she does not conceive.

The problem of childlessness is considered as a curse for every female in Indian society and mostly woman is considered to be responsible for it. It is vividly narrated in the novel. Sona's modesty and fair skin are considered of no use if she fails to give

birth to a son who can forward the family line. Sona tolerates the taunts of her mother-in-law, but she is very gloomy and jealous when PyareLal's wife, Sushila delivers a male child. In her anxiety, she prays her favourite image of God, the little Krishna to bless her with a child:

Please, I am growing old, bless us with a child, girl or boy, I do not care, but I cannot bear the emptiness in my heart. (Home 20)

Her sister, Rupa gets married to Premnath who is a government employee in the Defence Ministry. Both, Rupa and Premnath are hard workers, good at heart and live with Premnath's father in the same area.

Soon a blunder comes in the family, when Banwari Lal's daughter, Sunita dies due to torturers by her husband, Murali for dowry and her ten-year-old son, Vicky, is brought to Sona to take care as her own son. Despite her unwillingness, she is made a mother of a borrowed child. In joint families, the personal choices and desires are not considered. "I want my own child", are the unheard wishes that nobody pays attention to.

Eventually, Sona gives birth to a daughter, Nisha after ten bitter years of barrenness. But she becomes the most blessed, when she becomes the mother of a son, Raju who can carry on the family name. Poor Sona feels secure only after delivering a male child. Meanwhile, Sushila gives birth to her second son Vijay. So Vicky, Ajay, Vijay, Raju and Nisha are the representatives of the third generation of the family.

The sister Rupa however stays childless, but in many ways remains much happier.

She is self dependent, as she begins a small scale business of pickle making.

From her childhood, Nisha faces subordinate treatment in the family being a daughter.

The following extract from the text bears testimony to this discrimination, observed by most of the middle class families in India:

'Nisha set up a wail. 'I want to go too.'

'You can't', said her mother shortly.

'Why? Why can't I?'

'It is better for girls to remain inside.'

'Why?'

'You will get black and dirty.'

'So what? Raju is black. Blacker than Vicky.' (Home p.52)

It is interesting to note the answer made by the mother:

'Raju is the colour of Krishna'.

'But' the girl retorts, 'He is not. Krishna is blue,' (Home 52)

She insists on her mother to allow her to go out and play cricket. She says:

'I also want to be the colour of Krishna. I am going to play cricket in the sun'.

'Krishna is a god. You, you will look like the sweeper woman who comes to the house, you want to look like a Kali bhainsi?'" (Home 52)

When Vicky turns fifteen, he tries to seduce Nisha yet a child of five. It is a psychological and physical trauma which she faces in the most formative and budding years of her life. Consequently, she cannot eat and sleep well and she

begins to have nightmares. Nobody could understand the reason behind her mental derangement and she is sent to Rupa's home for a change. Rupa and her husband understand that Vicky is responsible for Nisha's miserable condition; they could do nothing but sympathize. They try to tell her stories from Ramayana and even try to admit her in better school. She spends her weekdays with them and weekends with her parents. "When she spent weekends with her parents, her father made sure that Vicky was never close to her." (Home p. 75)

This unfortunate episode shows that quite often small girl children are seduced and victimised by the close relatives who have frequent chances and are not suspected by the guardians. Secondly, the novelist tends to explicate that male Chauvinism is inherent in boys from their adolescent age which can be exemplified by Vicky, who does not spare even the daughter of Sona who, although unwillingly, took care of him like her own son.

Nisha lives with her aunt Rupa who is also much conscious of her freedom and identity. She runs a small business of supplying pickles and sweet chutneys to local restaurants and shops. Instead of crying for her barrenness, Rupa focuses her attention on business. Nisha slowly settles down in Rupa's home. For the next ten years, Rupa and her husband focus all their attention on careful upbringing of Nisha, including her school and studies.

Vicky, who is weak in studies, somehow passes his tenth class. Yashpal suggests that now he should be sent to his father at Bareilly, as he is the only son of his father his right place is in his parental house. But Vicky flatly refuses this proposal and

threatens to kill himself. Finally, he is allowed to join the shop and a small room is built for him on the barsati. His father finds a girl for him to marry and Vicky gets married to Asha who is from a small village with poor family background, slowly understands the marginal status of her husband in the house. She understands that if she has to create her place and identity in the house, she should establish her usefulness in the house.

She cooed over Raju, she pressed her grandmother-in-law's feet, she ran with grandfather-in-law's tea when he came home, she practically lived with Sona next to the stove. She had no airs, no graces, she was humble, obedient and helpful. (Home 103)

Soon she gives birth to a son. But nobody gives much importance to it. The naming ceremony is very simple and she gets only a silk sari. She feels sad that this subordinate treatment is given to Vicky only because he is daughter's son and in the conventional Indian family the blood lines from the daughter's side are not given a chance to articulate about their rights. Asha frequently tries to make Vicky aware about his right in that house. Asha's life in Bareilly was uncomfortable, marginal and poor and now from morning to night she is in the kitchen, chopping, cleaning, cooking meals and making drinks and snacks. In search of her identity she finally realises that living separately from that family will be insane decision, as they have meagre income to survive independently.

After death of Lala Banwari Lal, Nisha comes back home. In spite careful upbringing and preparations of study by Rupa and Premnath, Nisha ignores her study completely once she comes back

home. Her mother, who is not much careful about education, insists that she should be careful about her household duties. Her mother, like every Indian Mother, carefully tries to imbibe the qualities fit for ideal wife, mother and daughter-in-law in her. She comments:

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 127)

She wants that “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.129) She knows that a girl’s real education is in the kitchen. Just as it is believed that if a woman has to win her husband and his family, she should rein in the kitchen with her skill in cooking and managing all household responsibilities. She should not complain in any state. Moreover, a girl has to be happy in every situation. Sona states clearly, “What is there in happiness? A girl has to be happy everywhere” (H 135).

But, Nisha rebels against the notions of her mother who considers her daughter a mere helper in the kitchen rather than an independent person to carry out her own whims and favours. In the words of Shilpi Rishi Shrivastava:

Lala Banwari Lal dies and Yashpal takes back Nisha to please his mother. Now there is less interest in school and Sona expects her in the Kitchen all time. Nisha is horrified to discover that “her mother’s idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time anybody ate.” Sona who is always concerned with making her daughter homely and good wife says,

“That Masi of yours has ruined your head. What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful to her entire life.”²

Soon Ajay and Vijay are married in a quick succession. As Nisha is mangli, she is destined to match her horoscope with a similar manglik boy; she is compelled to wait unless a manglik boy could be found. Ultimately, Rupa insists that Nisha should continue her college education.

Thus, Nisha joins DurgaBai College. After some days, Nisha meets Suresh, a student of Khalsa College of Engineering. After their few meetings, they fall in love with each other. Nisha becomes a bold girl. She bunks her lectures and roams with Suresh on the University lawns, sipping coffee in coffee houses.

As Suresh suggests, she cuts her hair like Suriya, a famous film star of the days. When exams are around corner, she worries; Suresh helps her with St. Stephens Tutorials which results in securing first division. It surprises all. The courtship continues into its second winter. Nisha becomes more careless about her classes. By the end of second year, in her quest to establish her own and separate identity, she makes over completely by alternating her salwar kamees with jeans and T-shirts. In the third year of her college, she asks Suresh about their marriage.

Towards the end of third year, her parents receive a letter from the college authorities about her absence in college. Her parents come to know about her affair with Suresh. She has to face many troubles. She wants to meet Suresh only once. But she is not allowed.

Suresh tries to convey her family that his intentions are pure and he only wants Nisha. No dowry, no fancy wedding, he doesn't even care if she is a mangli. On account of this, she is moved by his nobility. She says her mother:

“Who cares about castes these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market”, she sobbed with indignant emotion.

“Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?” (Home p.200)

Nisha's mother gets so furious that she slaps her and imprisons her in her own house. It is no better than a house arrest.

Later Nisha's family hold meetings with Suresh. They oppose him because of his poverty and low caste. Under the pressure of Nisha's family, he declines to marry. He says:

I will do whatever is best for everyone. I can have nothing to do with Nisha against her family's wishes, no matter what my personal inclinations may be. (Home 205)

It is suggested in the novel that Suresh and his father have been secretly paid a handsome amount by Nisha's family.

In due course, Nisha secures third division in third year examination and Suresh episode is terminated from her life permanently. Her family begins the preparation of her marriage with girl viewing process. She does not want to spend her time idly at home. She expresses her wish to do some professional course like Fashion Designing.

The parental pressure to desist Nisha from marrying a poor boy reflects that how the emotions and feelings of marriage are dishonoured. This negligence of parents to

the whims and fancies of females further accelerates the identity problem among them.

All of a sudden, Nisha starts suffering from the skin eczema. Her trouble increases when Raju, her younger brother also gets married to Pooja who is from rich family and who is not beautiful. Pooja is reluctant to adjust with the family, its conventions and values. She is well aware of her rich family background and behaves in the house according to her whims. Even her own mother can not oppose Pooja, because of strong support of Raju to Pooja. Nisha is jealous of Pooja as she becomes the centre of attention of the family and Nisha becomes pariah in her own home. Whenever Pooja and Raju go out, Sona insists that they should take Nisha with them and Pooja does not like Nisha's company. Nisha gets very upset in such situations. Later after her marriage with Arvind, when she wanders with her husband, she understands the feelings of Pooja and confesses that she could not understand Pooja's feelings at that time.

In the mean while, Pooja conceives and eventually gives birth to a daughter. Pooja does not allow Nisha to touch her daughter because of Nisha's skin eczema. When she complains to her mother, her mother takes Pooja's side which makes her disappointed and disowned to the family. She tells Rupa, “You see Masi,there is no place for me in this house.” (Home p.281) She is so dejected that later she tells her father, “I want to leave this house. There is nothing for me here.” (Home 282) She wants to go to an ashram and devote herself to homeless widows. At least there she can live with dignity and respect.

Nisha, sitting at home, feels very forlorn. She rebels for work and against the patriarchal values of family. She requests her father to allow her to join their family business just like her brothers. She requests her father Yashpal:

“If only you could take with you, Papaji”, She pleaded in a rush, “I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do” (Home 268).

But her father refuses, as working by the women in the family is against the principles of family values according to which for a woman to aspire life beyond the limits of the home is deviant. In this context Malti Mathur asserts, “Any woman who wished to give up these curity and safety of the confines of the home for an uncertain, unsafe identity outside, are looked upon as no less than a Jazebel”.³

However, he wants to help her out by different way.

Seeing her loneliness, he finds out a teaching job in a play way school. Nisha enjoys her job as a teacher, yet she is not completely satisfied. Then she decides to start the business of selling bridal salwar suits. She asks just one year to prove her ability.

Although her mother disapproves this idea, her father supports Nisha. He gives her place and twenty five thousand rupees on a condition to return the money to begin her business. Nisha arranges tailor masterji Mohseen Khan and discusses important issues with Rupa Masi and asks her suggestions as Rupa has prolonged business experience. Her father suggests to call her establishment as ‘Nisha’s

Creations’. Thus, Nisha becomes an entrepreneur.

She pays her attention at the quality of dress and establishes her brand name successfully. Within a year, she repays half the twenty-five thousand loan. Nisha, now, finds her true identity in the world of business which she skilfully tackles. Her success tempts Pooja to help her. Even her mother offers her help. Yet Nisha is confident enough not to rely on them, in fact she does not like them to interfere.

For instance, when her mother scolds her tailor masterji, Mr Khan for taking nap, he gets angry and does not come for work. Nisha says:

Mummy, what have you done?” wailed Nisha, “Even if he (M. Khan) 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?”(Home 294)

When Nisha enjoys the fruits of her hard work and success, again her life takes a turn in the form of a marriage proposal by a widower who is also a mangli in his early thirties and who loses his first wife in an accident. Destiny is so strange, as Nisha who was once compared to beauty of Suriya, now has to compromise to marry with a widower only because she is a mangli and suffering from a skin disease. For Nisha, now, the excitement of marriage is over. She is ready to marry anyone, chosen by her parents, without even seeing him. So when Arvind expresses his desire to meet Nisha, she says:

“Why does he want to see me?”, persisted Nisha, “I don’t want to see

him. You have chosen it is enough”
(Home 298).

Nisha has a bad fight with her mother and she wants to get rid of them all. She spends the day with her tailors, discussing about her designs and realises that only her business gives her peace of mind which she needs. So she determines that even if she gets married, she will come and look after her business every day. She wants to voice her feelings about the affinity about her business to her prospective husband.

She says to her mother, “If I am going to marry him I should be able to say what I like” (Home p.300).

Marriage, in the Indian context usually diminishes women into submissive dumb dolls. Nisha does not want to be such dumb doll. She discards the idea of spending her entire life inside the four walls. A meeting is arranged between Nisha and Arvind in Nisha’s home. She puts her condition before him that she wants to run her business even after the marriage as she could get self identity and her own status in the society because of it. Arvind agrees to her condition. In fact, he even shows his readiness to search a place for her business close to their home. Eventually, they get married in simple way and Nisha, thus, gets a home of her own.

Nisha marries with new dreams and desires from life, but within few days she figures out that Arvind is not very supportive to her. As Clara Nubile has pointed out in *Danger of Gender*: “Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of, ‘being a woman-wife-mother’.”⁴

Her mother-in-law is an attention seeker who tries to tell Nisha over and over again about her responsibilities as a married

woman. The following excerpt in the text signifies how Nisha is entrapped in the never-ending dependability of her mother-in-law in futile issues:

In the next few days Nisha figured out what comprising half the female population in the house entailed. Her mother-in-law claimed her attention morning, noon and night, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in drawing rooms, theirs and others, as visitor and visatee. She received and gave attention, care, concern and food, with little time left over for anything else.(Home 323)

Whenever she steps out to go to her shop, Arvind suggests her to take permission of his mother. This irritates Nisha. She insists that if Arvind takes permission from his mother, Nisha will not feel guilty. Arvind tells his mother who does not respond very enthusiastically. She understands that her dream of bright future is breaking into fragments. Gradually, in her absence Pooja takes Nish’s business into her hold. Once again her fate works against her dream of independent woman, when within a month of their marriage, she conceives. Her going out is restricted by her mother-in-law under the name of care which suffocates her. Her condition is just as kamala Das describes in her poem 'Of Calcutta'.

“Here, in my husband's home,
I am a trained circus dog
Jumping my routine hoops each
day," (Cp; Vol. 1; p.59)

She rebels against this condition and longs to join her business again. Her parents avoid taking risk of her health, as it is an issue of a child of her family. Even her Rupamasi consoles her that she can join her business at any point once again after

the safe birth of the child. The conversation between Nisha and Rupa reveals Nisha's distress:

'Nishu, it is a question of attitude. Are you determined to be unhappy? Should anything happen, you will be the first to cry. What is making suits compared to a baby? Suits will always be there, you think market is running away?'

'Pooja is running away my business.'

'You are the clever one, you can always start again. There is a time and place for everything. Now is the time for you to have children and enjoy them. If your mind is always somewhere else, you will be irritable. If you do too many things, you will be exhausted and create tension.' (Home 326)

As time progresses, Nisha is unable to go to her shop and handle her business. Even if she wishes hard, her mother-in-law and husband do not support her dream. She gets frustrated and hopeless when her business leaves her hands. Her parents and Raju suggest that in this situation, Nisha should hand over her business completely to Pooja. Rupa comes with proposal to Nisha. She says:

You know, beti; you can always restart a business. You have shown a flair for it. But this time with your baby, this will not come again" (Home 334).

After much consultation and deliberation, finally she hands over her business to Pooja on condition that Pooja should not ruin Nisha's reputation by using her name:

She stipulated that Pooja could not use the name Nisha's Creations. That

goodwill, that reputation was not transferable. One day she would resurrect it, one day it would be there, waiting for her. (Home334)

Ten months after her marriage, she gives birth to twins- one girl and one boy. Everybody in her home is overjoyed. Now in the midst of her family in her own home, she forgets about her dream to create her self-identity as a businesswoman even after marriage and while playing the roles of daughter-in-law, wife; and mother, is very content and blissful.

Malti Agarwal in "Manju Kapur's Home: A Chronicle of Urban Middle Class in India" observes:

"ManjuKapur's depiction of her heroine, her travelling the labyrinth of rules and regulations of traditional middle class milieu and stepping out to start earning for her existence are superb. A girl in Indian family is whining under the burden of patriarchy. She while living in her home feels herself homeless-shelter less. She strives to explore space for herself. She tries to be self-reliant in order to survive".⁵

Thus, Manju Kapur has created one more female protagonist, Nisha who represents Indian middle class which gives value to the family, traditions, and values. The female characters relentlessly struggle in search of their self-identity and yet give importance to family values.

Nilanjana Roy's comment indented on the jacket of the text is apt:

"Few writers have explored the complex terrain of the Indian family with as much insight and affection as

Manju Kapur. She describes the small rebellion and intense power struggles with a knowledge of the human heart that is at once compelling and terrifying.”

Anita Sethi in her review of *Home* writes,

“As tradition battles with transition, the older members of the Banwari Lal family struggle to adapt to the seismic changes rippling through the country, from Nisha restyling herself with a new haircut and clothes to buildings being bulldozed to make way for chandeliered shops”.⁶

To conclude, it is observed that Manju Kapur is a dynamic writer who represents postcolonial world of women who are

realistic rather than romantic. The women characters of her novel struggle for their identity. They tread uncommon paths to create their own status in family as well as society. They struggle for their survival in the patriarchal society. Although they are educated, they do not cross their limits forgetting the family and its values. They try to explore their status and rebel against the suppression of women in male dominant society that delimits identity of women in the four walls. Manju Kapur as a visionary writer creates a perfect mirror image of the present society which reflects the constant struggle of the modern woman about tradition and modernity. Her creative talent has placed her at a high place among the postcolonial Indian women writers.

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