Home beautifully weaves ‘conflicting loyalties, intrigues, triumphs’ as well as the ‘small rebellious and intense power struggles’ which constitute the universal human experience. (4)

Like her previous novels Home too deals with strong female protagonists and “reveals though the life in a joint family, the petty power struggle and the fickleness of human relationship.” (5)

In the fitness of the things it can be quoted that very genuine problem of one female being reflected by another one is the outcome of the novel and the novelist gives the message to the society that the females are not always at the fault as they are treated and rejected. When Manju Kapur makes a little fish speak, it speaks like a whale. When she discusses a point, she lectures like a stern teacher and stares her readers in the face. She herself is a feminist and likewise does not comply what Tennyson claims in his poem, Ulysses:

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 command, women to obey,

All else confusion.

Likewise she seems to be supporting the idea of what Shakespeare propagates in Act-III, Scene-III of Othello through Emilia:

’Tis not a year or two shows us a man:

They are all but stomachs; we all but food:

They eat us hungrily, and when they are full

They belch us.
Kiran Nagarkar’s revelation about her is also noteworthy when she says:

Manju Kapur is one of the most perceptive chroniclers of that microcosm of the nation state: the joint family. The narrative voice is deceptively soft, for Kapur lays it all bare-conflicting loyalties, intrigues, triumphs and tragedies.’ (6)

Nilanjana Roy in Outlook also describes her in the same vein:

Few writers have explored the complex terrain of the Indian family with as much insight and affection as Manju Kapur. She describes the small rebellions and intense power struggles with a knowledge of the human heart that is at once compelling and terrifying. (7)

Manju Kapur’s novels reveal the life of women, their struggle for basic rights and their quest for identity and survival. Consequently they undergo a transformation in their personality with the passage of time and with education they become aware of their self-reliance which is proved in concern with new woman. They cherish considerable freedom of expression and thoughts. In each and every field they shoulder with men and work. But it is also no denying the fact that the patriarchal dominance, familial restrictions and expected check at their every step fall in their way. Though to certain extent they emerge into new woman, the gender pre-conceived notions are always before them. Allen and Barbara in their essay, “Why Men Don’t Listen & Women Can’t Read Maps” say: “All things are not equal, men and women are different. Not better or worse – different” (8)

Manju Kapur’s women represent typical Indian women suffering from economic and socio-cultural disadvantages in the male governed society which is patronized by patriarchy. The women are silent and remain only as rubber dolls for others to move as their will. They are deprived of their basic rights, their aspirations to their individuality and self-reliance. In India, besides several restraints of gender, tradition and orthodoxy of
religion, Indian women today are victims of crimes like physical and mental torture, sexual harassment, rape and dowry killing etc. 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 (9)

Kanwar Singh in Contemporary Indian English Poetry also observes the same thing when he says:

Though it is true the modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her. The new woman dares to pronounce her volitions and convictions. (10)

Coming to *Home*, basically it has three female characters who seem to claim their voice in their own ways manifesting their feminine instincts. However, for this they remain restricted at one time or other owing to the typical system of patriarchy. For the time being they feel like cherishing the so called freedom of expression and sense of living the life in its real sense but ultimately they remain helpless before the family law and order. Talking about Sona, she doesn’t have a “say” in the family. She is childless and alone. She is not just a daughter-in-law who is said to be like a showpiece in the drawing room but like a soul to the family who gives life to it. Later on as the novel progresses she gives birth to a daughter followed by a son. It’s only then that the power equation changes for her in the family. She has a realization that she is no less important to the family.

Other character to be thrown light upon is Rupa. She is without child and has a lesser amount of money. She believes that economic independence and creativity of one’s own can fill the gap of any lack in life. Probably it’s her influence that shapes the protagonist Nisha into
being a woman she turns out to be. The third and the most important character is the protagonist Nisha who is the modern girl, girl of next generation with an idealism of living the life on her own condition. She exhausts her upbringing where she becomes a sufferer of incestuous violence but later she achieves quite a bit in her life. She studies English Literature in a university, falls in love with a low-caste boy, compellingly stands up to her traditionalist family and struggles to come out of the traditionalist family and confirmed canon of patriarchal society.

Kapur determines through various instances that she is the girl caught up in the flux of institution, conversion, modernity, convention, and trend. Kapur is fierce sufficient to project not only her voice but also keen to implement them in action. The theme of the novel in a way recommends that women’s wishes are a subject to male authority. She endeavours to bring in the distinction of her notes with her family and also with the social order she was a part of. Nisha doesn’t conform to the conservative notions towards love affair and marriage. She is not even scared of her orthodox family. She tries to convince her lover:

Oh Suresh, if we could marry, these demons will vanish. You told me so many times you loved me, lifetimes together, remember? . . . Don’t be afraid of my family - once my exams are over, we will talk to them, fight against them, and run away if necessary. (11)

She doesn’t want to be part and parcel of this kind of institution of marriage where it is simply imposed upon the girl and not desired by her. Nisha claims to marry her love at any cost but finally settles with a boy of her parent’s choice. Whatever she seems to be in the beginning seems to be deceptive in the end. Later in the novel, she establishes her own boutique ‘Nisha’s Creations’ and seeks her trade and industry sovereignty. Here lies the irony of Kapur’s female characters. One the one hand they manifest remarkable vigour and idealism of casting an impact on the world, on the other they lack the stamina to lead their idealism to the
climax. In the beginning Nisha tends to become different from traditional women but only when one is all set to believe her determination and power to change the society, her righteousness disappears. In veracity she lacks bravery and settles down paying whatever prices demanded. She finds herself nothing but ordinary Indian woman seeking ordinary social tenets and emotions. Kapur further says:

My intention in telling this particular story – the way in which I told it – was to highlight the power struggles that go on in families – the areas of control and ways in which spaces are constantly negotiated. I also wanted to explore variations that exist within the same family, which meant I had to have a pretty large cast of characters. (12)

The novelist raises innumerable issues that are deep-rooted within the family-revolt against the age old tradition, the search for identity and the place of women in Indian society. Ours is a culture that venerates sons and dreads the birth of a daughter. In our society women have been assigned fixed roles to play in their lives. The novel reveals a universal truth that joint families can both obliterate and preserve our maturity and individuality. Kapur has very well discovered the long subjugated voices of women imprisoned inside the four walls of domestic objections.

In short, this doesn’t connote she should have either divorced her husband or abandoned her child. She is shown contended in being a traditional female. What readers wait for such a woman is not submissiveness but a kind of opposition to bring in a change in the situation and not succumb to it. It only pleads that she should listen to her own inner voice to find her identity in this swiftly shifting world. She must create, out of her own needs and abilities, a new life plan, fitting in the feeling of affection for her offspring and dwelling that have distinct feminism in the past with the work towards a better intention that delineates the expectations. The novel presents Manju Kapur’s
understanding of human characters and her maturity as a novelist. Her *Home* reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress.

In this chapter the protagonist Nisha’s quest for identity and survival is quite discernible. Nisha refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and male governed society and tries to establish her own individual identity. Since the establishment of the society, woman is stamped as the weaker sex, denied full justice, social security, economic liberation, and political awareness. Simone De Beauvoir’s comment upon this situation is quite discernible:

The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other. (13)

The novel encapsulates the idea of women’s liberation and the protagonist’s emerging as a new woman. Earlier in various socio-cultural situations, women were discriminated more on the basis of sex. In this regard Manju Kapur 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. (14)

It would not be wrong to say that this has been in practice with women as their duties owe to domesticity under the pressure of patriarchal notions (system) and controls, but in *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedman questions why a woman is in a patriarchal system and is confined to merely domesticity and childcare. She observes:

For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment– the autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization--is as important as the sexual need . . . (15)
In this regard *Home* is a portrayal of Nisha, the protagonist, as a new woman, a more assertive, self-assured; and confident one. On equal footing with man, she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner. As a young college girl, she applies her power to work as a businesswoman. Her quest for identity, as Sehgal, in the review of *Home*, comments, is a, “whole new look at women- not as the property of father, husband or son . . .” (16) and she is really the representative of new women in the millennium.

The novel deals with a brisk and strangely captivating account of three generations i.e. the first generation of Lala Banwari Lal, the second of his two sons, and the third of his grandchildren’s. Lala Banwari Lal, the patriarch, runs a sari business in Karol Bagh, Delhi, where he settled after the partition of India.

Lala Banwari Lal has two sons, Yashpal and Pyare Lal, and a daughter Sunita. She is already married and has a son Vicky. Yashpal marries Sona. The younger son Pyare Lal is married to Sushila. Sona has a sister Rupa, wife of an educated but poorly paid government servant, Premnath. Both are hard workers, good at heart and live with their in-laws in the same area.

After the accidental death of Sunita her only son Vicky is brought to Delhi from Bareilly. As Sona does not conceive for a long time, her mother-in-law assigns her the responsibility of Vicky. Meanwhile Sushila gives birth to a boy who is named Ajay. Owing to her not conceiving Sona feels miserable in her life. She observes fast for a long time for the birth of a child but it helps her in no way. So Yashpal plans to visit a shrine at Chetai near Almora. It is believed that the Goddess of this mountain is very powerful. Rupa and Premnath also accompany them. Two months later Sona comes to know that she has conceived. Soon she gives birth to a girl, ‘Nisha’. Nisha’s birth after a harrowing experience of Yashpal and Sona after ten years of marriage was a miracle. Though Sushila expresses
her apparent joy that her son would have a sister, Rupa assessed the birth of a baby girl as a potential threat to her sister. When the baby’s horoscope was cast, she was found to be a mangli according to the configuration of the planets at her birth. It was believed that such girls will be difficult to marry off unless a boy with similar unfortunate stars is found. It was also believed that life would be unhappy for her being a mangli. Yashpal showed no faith in such beliefs and his father took great protective interest in the baby girl. Sona kept all these beliefs a secret hoping that the child wouldn’t be blamed for bringing ill-luck in the family.

At the naming ceremony on the fortieth day of the birth, the priest chose a long name ‘Anandalakshmi’ to confuse the evil eyes and to ward off ill omens. But the child was known by her short name ‘Nisha’. The grandfather offered a grand celebration, inviting all relatives, so that Yashpal wouldn’t feel that the household spent more money on Pyare Lal’s children. The fictionist focuses on a typical balancing act of a patriarch in a joint family. The gifts that the baby received especially in gold, added to her future dowry.

The basic sense of security and trust should be built up in the child during the early period. Nisha grew up as a secure and confident child seeking out new experiences and new contacts. Her sense of trust was very strong in the traditional joint-family being surrounded by elders and relatives who showered love and care. But in her case, the trust was betrayed when Vicky exploited her sexually. But the bitter trauma was hidden by her mother to protect the good name of the family, by sending the girl to be groomed by her sister. Nisha grew up happily in the new environment. In her case aversion to a girl child was not shown unlike in traditional households where often hostility is shown to a girl child making them feel secondary to other male siblings. (17)
Sona conceived again the following year and was blessed with a baby boy. Now she could assert herself in the family as mothering a male issue to continue the lineage was as respectable as anything:

The mother of a son, she could join Shushila as a woman who had done her duty to the family, in the way the family understood it . . . at last the name of his father and grandfather will continue. (18)

With the baby boy, Nisha is sidelined. Sona gives birth to a son Raju. Meanwhile Sushila gives birth to her second son Vijay. So including Vicky, Ajay, Vijay, Raju and Nisha are the representatives of the third generation.

In her childhood Nisha falls a prey to the carnal desires of Vicky. When Vicky grows to be seventeen, he begins to be more close to Nisha. He paid unusual attention to her, at times touching and stroking her. He plays snake and ladder games with her on the roof. When they are alone, he tells her repeatedly that no one loves him in order to feel more closed to her. Nisha tries to console him putting her arms around his neck "You have me, Vicky, you have me." (19) But quite shrewdly he keeps mumbling,

Don’t talk to me of my own blood. In this world you can trust nobody. . . . One day I will run away from their house and shop. I will show them. (20)

Quite ironically he proves his words. He starts taking her advantage. It becomes a habit for him while on the roof top to exploit her sexually placing his hands into her panties, upsetting the girl. But he warns her not to reveal it to any one otherwise she would be beaten herself. She tries to resist his advances, but her helplessness leads to his finding bliss in masturbating. The little girl undergoing such trauma stops eating properly as her mouth becomes dry. She begins to have nightmares and
remains sleepless for several days thinking of the dirty thing she had done:

Her hand had touched the filthy black thing. She tried to block it from her mind, but it proliferated, grew large and terrifying. (21)

It affects her psychologically and mentally, though as a child, she doesn’t eat and sleep well. Nobody is able to understand the reason behind her mental disturbance. But Sona being worried about her daughter’s continuing distress elicits the truth out of her. When Rupa suggests that she and her husband will look after Nisha, Sona readily agrees. It is a matter of fulfillment for Rupa and Prem Nath in their childlessness. 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 the Ramayana and even try to admit her in better school. This reminds one of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, where he points out that ‘Children are no more innocent and they possess the instinct of elders’. Nisha grows up happily at her uncle’s home. Both Rupa and Prem Nath make sure she feels at home. Since Prem Nath takes personal care of her studies, she excels there.

After the death of Banwari Lal, Yashpal, the elder son in the family, shoulders the responsibilities. Sona insists that she should return home to her parents from time to time to be groomed in the tradition of the Banwari Lal household. Rupa had lavished all her love on the girl for eleven years, being too protective of her. Consequently Nisha comes back to her home to accompany her grandmother. But when she returns, to her utter amazement she finds her mother to be a bit conservative and traditional as her mother expected that at sixteen her daughter should acquire cooking and housekeeping skills. Nisha is worried as to how she would ever get training to become a housewife in the future. She is horrified to learn that her mother’s idea of a daughter that she has to help her mother while everybody else eats. But she is quick to retort saying
that she needs to study for the time being. Sona wouldn’t accept Rupa’s idea of education that it should help a girl to look for jobs and all. She is convinced that:

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. (22)

Nisha merely tolerates her mother, being with her all the time in the kitchen, and laughing behind her for her orthodox ways. She tries to cut ginger as fine as she could to satisfy her mother. But her heart is elsewhere affirming more and more her decision to be herself despite all odds.

Once Nisha is told to fast for her future husband, her modernity comes into view. When she protests, her mother shows her fury upon her. Even at that tender age of ten Nisha begins to assert her identity as a person, arguing with her mother and resisting superstitious practices:

How are you going to get married, madam, if you do not make sacrifices?

In school nobody does it.

They are not manglis.

... So?

So? What do you mean, so? What kind of wife are you going to make if you can’t bear to fast one day a year for your husband?

I don’t want to marry. (23)

Since the girl resists imposition of fasting, Sona thinks of consulting some priest to find a way out by marrying her off to some tree, plant or sun to absorb the evil of the planets. On one occasion when she is at home with
her mother, she is made to rise early before dawn. Later she is coaxed to eat breakfast at four in the morning and is told she wouldn’t eat until sun sets. She is taken along with the other fasting women to Hanuman temple. In the evening, her mother, along with Sushila and Asha, performs puja recounting the story “The Karva Chauth Katha”. The story recounts how a fourteen-year-old girl, who couldn’t resist hunger while fasting, ate before sun down as her brothers lit a torch from a tree-top. Instantly her husband died in the village. Eventually she did pooja and fasting for one whole year and brought her husband back to life. The story proved how a girl’s self-disciplining following the elder’s teachings, rewarded her with happiness. Hearing the story, Nisha protests that the brothers in the story were responsible for death as they cheated their sister. Such a questioning attitude on her part, laughing at illogical social practices, makes her affirm her identity and independence. When her mother scolds Nisha saying that the fault is of the girl, who didn’t obey the elders, being independent in her decision to eat, bringing about the tragedy, Nisha was in no mood to listen to her mother’s cooked up story. Indian traditional society being male oriented, the girl child understands cultural sexism by late childhood when she starts forming her gender identity. Sona was upset with her sister Rupa for not transforming her daughter into a traditional woman. Traditionally an adolescent girl is trained to be a submissive and virtuous woman, who is skilled in domestic affairs. It is the mother’s duty to train her daughter up to be absolute docile daughter-in-law, even going to the extent of sacrificing her own will. Such an attitude towards a girl child hampers her growth as an individual. She expressed her annoyance at her sister Rupa for having made her daughter absolutely useless after eleven years of guardianship. Her hurting remarks meant that she had made the supreme sacrifice of sending away her own blood for eleven years, and the woman returned a sub-standard female.
Such a perception spoiled all the plan of education for Nisha, who began to feel more and more out of place at her home and dreamt of living with her aunt. Though they repeatedly told her she was needed in her home, she felt out of place. She longed for her uncle and aunt, and began to question the idea of home in the joint-family system. Home is where one receives true affection as Robert Frost puts in the poem *The Death of the Hired Man*, ‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there. They have to take you in.’ Nisha was fed up with her mother taunting all the time in different ways.

Soon Ajay’s marriage takes place and then Vijay’s. Nisha’s mother makes wedding plans for her as she is already seventeen. This comes as a shock when Rupa tells Prem Nath about it. He feels with heavy heart that she would give up her studies but realizes that they can do nothing in her case as they had merely borrowed her and looked after for eleven years. He laments that she never belonged to her. But Rupa wouldn’t budge and retorts:

*A sister’s child is not a borrowed thing. . . . For your own sister’s children you are ready to give your life, your money, everything* (24)

Such an argument between the couple reveals the intricacies of relationship in a joint-family under scanner. There is a gradual decline in the relationships between the inmates in the Banwari Lal household. As Nisha is mangli, she is destined to match her horoscope with a similar mangli, she should wait unless a mangli could be found. Ultimately Nisha is at the centre of interest with an issue of her college education. After a dialogue with Sona, Rupa, an emerging new woman interposes:

*If anything happens in the girl’s later life, she is not completely dependent.* (25)

She continues in a careful emotional manner:
It would be shame not to educate her further. Let her do English Honours, not too much work, reading story books. (26)

Sona is convinced that there is no discrimination made as male and female in the context of education. Finally her parents relent to Nisha’s further education. She will be doing her English Honours at the Durga Bali College. It is the ideal college for parents who want a paper qualification for their mediocre daughters waiting to be married off. Marriage for Nisha is a problem as she is a mangli:

A mangli, destined to marry unfortunately, destined for misery, unless a similar manglik could be found, with a similar fate and horoscope. (27)

Nisha joins Durga Bai College. In the college, she has Pratibha as her best friend who is an ambitious girl and joins NCC program hoping that this would lead to a Government job in police. As a new woman Pratibha also wants to create her own identity and an independent existence in the economic field. Like Nisha, she deserves to be mentioned as active, confident and thorough.

On the way to college, Nisha meets Suresh, a student of Khalsa College of Engineering. After their few meetings, Pratibha makes Nisha aware asking the details about Suresh i.e. his name, caste, family background etc. and says, “If you are going to be a modern girl you have to be thorough” (28) Nisha just pretends and says, “You think girl and boy can’t be friends.” (29) Being modern in her view she does not discriminate biologically. To be friends, they are equal beings.

Her life becomes one of emotional trauma after falling in love with Suresh. It is love at first sight for Suresh who pursues her, though from a poorer caste family. Lovelorn, she begins to play truant, neglecting her studies. She becomes such a bold girl to wander here and there, roam in the University lawns, and sip coffee in coffee houses with Suresh. It
becomes her routine. He proposes to marry her though he also did badly in his engineering studies. Their going together to cinema and having affairs led to bring the matter to their parents. Meanwhile, Nisha begins to skip classes and proved to perform badly in college. She finds college life adventurous making her modern and daring in her decisions. It is for the first time that she begins to interact with a boy. Fresh ideas creep into her mind in her craze to be fashionable. At his suggestion, she gets her hair cut like that of Suraiya, a famous film star of the day, to the utter surprise of her family. The fictionist describes vividly her change of attitude:

To encourage her rebellion she thought of the girls in her class, girls with swishing, open hair, wavy, curly, blow-dried, or hanging straight, framing faces with fringes, flicks, or stray tendrils. She thought of her own, in the thick, rubber-banded plait, never falling free, ugly and unimaginative. (30)

This is another way of Nisha defining her independence, reacting to her rigorous upbringing at home. She wants to negate everything her mother stood for. Her mother questioned her:

Who gave you permission to cut your hair, suddenly you have become so independent, you decide things on your own. (31)

But she is equally attentive at her studies. When exams approach, she worries: “I can’t meet you. I have to study, I have to get second division at least.” (32)

Suresh helps her with St. Stephens Tutorials which results in securing first division. It surprises all. The courtship continues into its second winter. Nisha now certain of her ability to do well begins to bunk even more classes. By the end of second year, in her quest to establish her own and separate identity, she becomes more adventurous in her clothing, alternating her salwar kamees with jeans and T-shirts. In her
appearance and temperament, she becomes a forwarded girl. Her affair with Suresh begins to comment upon. By now she is in third year. She asks Suresh: “When is your family going to approach mine with proposal?” (33)

Once, Suresh cleverly took Nisha to a room in the back lane of a gully. He cajoles her to be intimate with him. But she resists though he begins-

to caress her all over, and her mind divided, one part on college and parents, one part following his hypnotic touch (34).

When he reaches down her kurta, she pushes him away and preserves her chastity showing maturity. She says: “It is just as well there is something left for when we are married.” (35) But when he bemoans and expresses his passionate love for her, she also reciprocates her emotional tie with him. The sequence is one of total passionate love for each other, unlike the bitter experience of sexual exploration in the hands of Vicky as a young child. She is so involved in her love for Suresh, her studies begin to be on the wane so much that she is not allowed to appear for the examinations due to lack of sufficient attendance.

Towards the end of third year, her parents receive a letter about her being short of attendance in college from the authorities. Her affair with Suresh also comes into light. And as such Nisha takes the opportunity to query about love marriages to her aunt Rupa, who shows aversion to it as it meant too many adjustments. But Nisha’s passion for Suresh reaches a peak when she wants her parents to arrange their marriage. The family wouldn’t agree as he comes from a lower caste. She argues with her parents who married the same way. Her father becomes defensive stating that their love marriage was blessed by their parents. The angry parents immediately stop her college-going to compensate the damage and to maintain the family honour. They are adamant in their argument and plead:
Nisha, dear daughter, leave all thoughts of this dirty low-caste man, what can he give you compared to what we can arrange for you? Marriage into a family that will enable you and your children to live comfortably for the rest of your life. (36)

Their entire attempt at persuasion is ineffective as Nisha loves the boy deeply. In her asserting her identity, nothing can stop her from her pursuit of happiness with Suresh. Her family goes to the extent of intimidating the boy and offering bribe to renounce her. The novelist makes comparison of the relationship Nisha had with the two males in her life.

Thinking of Vicky she thought of Suresh; thinking of Suresh drove her back to Vicky. If, with Suresh’s arms around her, she could reveal what had happened all those years ago, she would be absolved. No matter what her cousin had done to her, he, Suresh, had touched her in love, theirs was love, nothing else. (37)

Her thoughts make her frustrated as she tries to keep her mind on love and purity in her effort to establish her identity in relationship. There is great honesty in her determination to grow in love. She did not sacrifice her virginity to any one and is ready to face any consequence to assert herself as an individual. Nisha begins to think of herself a broken hearted woman, never agreeing to any marriage proposals. She wants to meet Suresh only once. But her brother Raju calls him a crude fucker. In his opinion, Nisha is not trustworthy. So, she rebels: “Who you are to decide whether I am trustworthy.” (38) This rebellious comment reflects her modernity. She wants to live on equal footing with men, creating her own identity. She refuses to admit any discrimination between men and women. Her rebellious nature arises from time to time. When Suresh, on the other hand, tries to convey her family that his intentions are pure and he wants only 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 sobbing with indignant emotion,

Who cares about castes these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market. Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for? (39)

Nisha refuses to follow the age-old traditional marriage. She does not want anymore to be an artefact to be sold in the market. Nisha’s quest for identity and freedom as a human being significantly expresses Manju Kapur’s feminist approach. Nisha’s desire for establishing self-identity is-

A value charged, almost a charismatic term with its secured achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation. (40)

Nisha’s views irritate her mother and she gives her a slap. She is even kept a prisoner in her own family. When she implores to her uncle Premnath, he consoles: “Suresh’s family should have met your family.” (41) This is but his traditional approach, whereupon Nisha answers: “Uncle, this is the modern age” (42) Later they hold meetings with Suresh. But those prove to be fatal for Nisha. She realizes:

Raju was right; Suresh was a Chutia, a total fucker, if he loved her, he had no right to decide her future on his own. (43)

Significantly enough, Manju Kapur, here, has pointed out the traditional male governed approach. Though Suresh loves Nisha, he wants to decide her future on his own. During this time, Nisha attempts third year exams and secures third division.

Meanwhile Suresh vanishes from her life and there is nothing she can do. She just leaves her fate in the hands of her parents becoming a bird in a cage and to adjust with the idea of another man in place of Suresh. Here starts a discussion on her marriage issue all around. She
feels torturous about viewing process. In her attempts to survive, she wants to do something meaningful. She dares to complain: “I don’t want to be seen by all these people, why can’t I do some course?” (44) She declares,

I want to study fashion designing. Lots of girls do it, why can’t I? Why should I sit at home everyday waiting for proposals? (45)

Being an English graduate, she doesn’t want to stay at home. Instead she thinks about career oriented courses.

By this time, Nisha is suffering from eczema. To pass time is another problem for her. Meantime Raju marries with Pooja, who neither tries to adjust with her mother-in-law Sona nor with Nisha. Loneliness compels Nisha to feel that she would go mad sitting inside the house. Like her brothers, she wants to work in shop. She requests her father Yashpal to take her with him pleading 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. (46)

This reveals her inner quest for independent existence. It also seeks equality of sex i.e. Nisha and her brothers belong to different genders. She denies the patriarchal system in a very cool, calm and composed manner, with a sane and serene approach.

As Nisha belongs to trader’s family, Yashpal allows her to join a play way school, instead going to shop and attend the customers.

After seven months of marriage, Pooja conceives and delivers a baby girl. As there is growing power struggle between Pooja and Nisha, Pooja does not allow her to touch her baby due to dark brown patches of eczema on her skin. In the meantime she gets an idea to start business of salwar-suits. With this innovative idea, she demands a year from her father to
prove her ability. She pleads: “Give me a chance to show you what I can do” (47)

Here, as a new woman she appears to be self-assured and confident. She darts to pronounce her volition and conviction. Yashpal manages to arrange a place for work and twenty-five thousand rupees to start her business on condition of return. He trusts her without making difference between his son and daughter. Both are treated equally. This lays an emphasis on equality portrayal of Nisha. Nisha arranges a tailor named Mohseen Khan and assigns important issues with Rupa Masi. Her father suggests ‘Nisha’s Creation’ as the name of the shop. As a responsible working businesswoman, she pays her attention at the quality of dress, which paves a path for the latter advancement of settlement in the readymade cloth market. Within a year, she repays half of the twenty-five thousand rupee-loan. Pooja also offers her help.

Being a business woman, Nisha tackles every problem on her own. For instance,

‘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?’ (48)

This proves Nisha to be dashing and daring in decision making and self-assured. Though, she takes help of Pooja, she doesn’t allow her to interfere in any decision.

Meanwhile on her birthday, the family priest predicts that she will make good marriage soon. At last, Nisha is shown a picture of a widower in his early thirties, the similar mangli named Arvind, who wants to meet her. She persists,
Why does he want to see me? I don’t want to see him. You have chosen it is enough (49)

One thing is certain: she does not matter whom she marries. She is going to come in her ‘Creation’ every single day. She has something in her mind to say to the groom. She says to her mother, “If I am going to marry him I should be able to say what I like.” (50)

This shows that she no more wants to be a mere sexual object. She reveals her freedom in the meeting with Arvind.

I work, she offered

I know, (Arvind)

I would like to continue.

How long have you been doing this business?

Two years,

‘Two years’, more pauses, more thought, ‘You must have worked very hard’.

‘Yes’, she said, ‘It is called Nisha’s Creations’. ‘Lots of women are doing ready made. I see small boutiques operating from houses all over Daryaganj’. ‘I cannot give it up’, she confided. (51)

Nisha does not want to trap her entire life into home. So she abides condition to her groom that she should have freedom to run her business even after their marriage. As a businesswoman, Nisha works spontaneously for first two years. It brings to her sense to achievement in life helping her to create her own identity, her own voice, and her own place in the society and in home.

This success leads her to get married and fulfill her quest for home that may be parental or of one’s own, the key factor of the novel. The
importance of Nisha’s marriage lies in the fulfillment of the family of Arvind, who is marrying for the second time after an accidental death of his first wife. They get registered marriage and Nisha gets entrapped into the inescapable cage of ‘Home’. Clara Nubile has pointed out in the *Danger of Gender* (2003).

Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of, ‘being a woman-wife-mother.’ (52)

Nisha also gets entrapped into her own home and cares for mother-in-law. She thinks about her business letting in the hands of Pooja on condition not to use her name and spoil her fame:

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. (53)

Rupa talks about her caliber and confidence in restarting business at any time after she would be fruitful and have sons. She consoles:

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. (54)

Furthermore as Clara Nubile points out for an Indian woman, “Marriage must be followed by motherhood,” (55) after ten months of her marriage, Nisha delivers twins--one girl and one boy, filling her life with hope of posterity.

It is in her motherhood that her society and culture confines to her status as a renewer of the race and extends to her a respect and consideration which were not accorded to her as a mere wife. (56)

Now in the midst of her family in her own home, she, while playing the roles of daughter-in-law, wife and mother, is very happy and satisfied.
To sum up, it would be proper to say that Nisha as an individual creates separate room for herself in home and society. She, as an educated and spirited new woman, refuses to be treated as an object; instead she tries to establish her own identity. It is necessary to note that she belongs to middle class family in metropolis, is born and brought up in India, where social and cultural scenario is different than that of western countries. Her quest for self-identify, struggle for economic independent existence, and her equality with men depends upon Indian social ethos. In the context of ‘Emergence of New Woman in Novels of Manju Kapur’ Laxmi Sharma aptly says,

The emergence of new women in the realm of social, economic, cultural and racial aspects will also be probed. . . . The concept of new woman in Indian society varies from the one in the west . . . (57)

It seems that Manju Kapur wants to have complete liberation to new woman in socio-cultural India. As she herself studied in Halifax for a few years in the early 1970’s, she presents portrayal of new woman and honours Indian tradition very well. She maintains the character of Nisha, to create awareness of women’s liberation and equality along with men, not fully bloomed but at least up to mark.

Though Manju Kapur has sketched Nisha as an educated, confident, self-assured, bold and independent spirited new woman paying honour to Indian tradition, like Ezekiel, she believes ‘Home is where we have to gather grace.’ She herself is of the opinion in as far as Nisha is concerned that:

My endeavour has been to probe into the character of Nisha struggling with her search for identity through love and betrayal. A home is meant to be an environment offering security and happiness. Does the Banwari Lal household offer Nisha a proper place for her growth and development in her quest for identity as a
person? Family ties being very important in India, the concept of joint families or many members of a family living under the same roof came into practice largely due to economic considerations. In course of time it became a social norm by which several families shared the same household, kitchen, bathrooms and even professions. Such joint families set up businesses jointly and practiced the same trade for generations. A shared environment in a joint family gave a sense of security to the family members, providing emotional and financial support. Now-a-days due to rapid urbanization joint family system is slowly disappearing due to migration of people from rural areas to cities in search of employment and financial constraints, leading to division of joint and ancestral properties. (58)

Manju Kapur has dwelt on very serious contemporary issues afflicting a middle class joint-family in Home. Though the story is replete with incidents and situations in the lives of various characters who are confronted by tradition in the backdrop of contemporary trends, Nisha stands out as a woman of determination to break free from the shackles of male domination and patriarchy in asserting her female identity. Through the eye of an omniscient narrator, the fictionist probes into Nisha’s relationships with her family and friends. Kapur has been very successful in going into the intricacies of analysing psychological and emotional crisis Nisha undergoes at different stages of her life.

Manju Kapur, the author of Home has respectable credentials. Her first novel was published when she was 50. It was well-written and was awarded Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 1998. Home is her third novel and after an initial awkwardness in tone, it settles down to an engrossing, simple and quick reading.

Normally the home has long been considered the only area of activity for a woman. That is the place where she was supposed to find
satisfaction in the performance of her duties in the varied roles of mother, daughter, sister and daughter-in-law. The home is her karma bhoomi for a woman to aspire to a life beyond the limits, home is considered heresy of the works. Any woman, who wishes to give up the security and safety of the confines of the home for an uncertain, unsafe identity outside, is looked upon as no less than Jezebel. The home, the interior space, is real and a persona in itself since it imposes its own rhythm and flow on those who inhabit it. The threshold itself is perilous territory, fraught as it is with challenges, risk of dishonor and a life outside the pale of accepted norms of society. Far from being a neutral location, it is the point where the stereotypes of gender are re-cast into fresh moulds. The threshold circumscribes a woman’s physical and mental world, it marks out her boundaries, it is one of the many agents that work at erasing a women’s individuality, for within the threshold, the woman is known only as someone’s daughter, wife or mother. The Lakshmana rekha of Hindu mythology through which Lakshmana seeks to limit Sita’s movement in the outside world is both a physical and psychological boundary as it sets out the markers within which a woman may operate. The consequences of crossing the rekha, of transgression in a patriarchal world, is that Sita is abducted by the demon king Ravana and carried away to his island-kingdom. The rekha so etched out can be seen as a restraining concept that operated in all cultures and civilizations, not restricted to the Indian ethos alone. The rekha is the threshold. While men have long been free of the constraints of the ‘threshold’, women are still shackled to this notion and have frequently been forced to choose between a life within or an unconventional, controversial mode of existence without. It is ironic that men who have chosen to give up family and a secure lifestyle in pursuit of an idea or dream are not only accepted but also honored. Siddhartha and Mahavira did just this and are venerated today as the founders of Buddhism and Jainism respectively as is Goswami Tulsidass who wrote the immensely popular Hindi version of the Sanskrit epic, The Ramayana. But a woman who boldly chooses to step over the threshold is marked for
life and has to struggle to maintain her dignity and a measure of ‘respectability’. Even Meerabai, admired now for her devotion to the Lord Krishna, was reviled and subjected to mental and physical torment for her behavior judged as unbecoming of a respectable married woman – and a royal princess to boot!

All over the world, innumerable women followed in Nora’s footsteps when she firmly shut the door behind her, rejecting the security, drab monotony and humiliation of a domestic life and crossed over the threshold in pursuit of individual freedom, and identity of her own, happiness and self-fulfillment in Ibsen’s Doll’s House. Once over the threshold, the crosser over may go on to glory and triumphs even if it is at the cost of personal happiness as Savitribai does in Small Remedies or to a life of compromise and force acceptance of what such a life offers, as with Nisha in Manju Kapur’s Home.

Improbable that Manju Kapur’s ‘Home’ should be as stimulating as it is. This is the simplest of stories--the life of a joint family running a cloth business in Delhi’s busy Karol Bagh area--told in the simplest of ways. The style is conversational and there’s nothing too-out-of-the ordinary about the plot. Even when there is strong dramatic tension, it’s presented dispassionately besides this is a fast read. What raises Home far above its seemingly commonplace concerns is Kapur’s understanding of the inconstancy of human being and their relationship; of our self delusions, our manipulating of situations to suit our own viewpoints, the instinct for gossip-mongering and groupism, and how the joint family system provides the perfect setting for the playing out of all these qualities. But this book’s biggest strength is Kapur’s refusal to stand in a position of judgments on these universal human foibles.

Without fuss, without any preamble except for a short introductory paragraph about the working of the typical lower middle class family:
The marriages augmented, their habits conserved. From an early age children are taught to maintain the foundation on which these Homes rest . . . (59)

High quality fiction can give you insights into lives that are built on value systems completely different from your own. It can make you empathize (if only briefly) with the lives and their foundations; understand the long process, spread over many generations, that has made these people what they are. Home had that effect on me in places. At one point Nisha asks Rupa Masi:

‘Masi, what do you think of love marriages?’

The aunt stared at her. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Like that only.’

‘They are a very bad thing. Too much adjustment. Look at your mother she spent ten years in sacrifice before her situation improved.’

‘That was because she had no children.’

‘I also had no children, but I did not have suffered like your mother, bap re.’ Here Rupa shuddered. (60)

For that one moment, and in spite of everything it is believed and seen the lady’s point-founding a marriage on a single passion that might easily ebb with time can be an imprudent thing to do in a situation where the couple is married as much to the family as to each other.

Kapur brings out some truths in this novel, yet she does it from an exceptionally matured detached perspective suggesting that many of the things that go wrong stem naturally from the human condition rather than from the flaws in any one way of life. She makes her characters believable and sympathetic, and even when we shudder at the repressive
ancientness of their beliefs, we can recognize them as being not all that different in their essence from us. Nisha’s story—a failed affair, her struggle for emancipation—is interesting and well-observed enough in its own right, but it feels strange to be cut off from some of the earlier threads jarring.

Very human and hugely engaging, *Home* is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise, and secrecy, which lie at the heart of every family. Modern Indian fiction has given vent to Indian feminine sensibility; their increasing awareness, unyielding determination to combat men’s hypocrisy and search for self-fulfillment. It has obtained its sustenance from various socio-political events like Indian freedom movement, independence, right to vote, spread of education, employment opportunities and legal developments for the protection of women’s rights etc. Therefore, the depiction of the Indian women has undergone a metastasis. In this period Manju Kapur, unquestionably in her novels, has left an indelible imprint among the modern female writers in English, as she truthfully mirrors the socio-political scenario of the era. Bhagabat Nayak has befittingly written that Manju Kapur seems to give a tribute to country’s celebration of fifty years of independence in her novel as her protagonists. Main female characters of Manju Kapur’s novels are projected as a cult to impugn the set norms and taboos imposed on women in the male dominated Indian society. Manju Kapur has successfully presented by drawing a parallel between women’s struggle for self-liberation and the freedom movement prevalent during that time.
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