Chapter - IV

A Conventional Home versus a Woman’s Struggle for Liberation in *Home*
After two successful and popular fictions of Indian social background, the third one that is registered in Manju Kapur’s account is *Home*. *Home* is a novel that vividly depicts the Indian family life after the partition of India and Pakistan. Like her other novels, in *Home* too Manju Kapur’s major focus is on the Indian family life. The novelist appears a master in picturization of woman’s issues in typical Indian families. Family life and home is described fantastically in Kapur’s remained at the centre in her novels and the protagonists around whom the plots of all her novels revolve around are the women. In *Difficult Daughters* it is Virmati, in *A married woman* it is Astha, in *Home* it is Nisha, in *The Immigrant* it is Ishita who are discussed at length and through these characters the issues of Indian women are analyzed. Out of these portrayals we witness ‘new woman’ who is modern in her approach. N. S. Warake beautifully introduces *Home* and says:

Manju Kapur’s *Home* explores the complex terrain of the Indian family and reveals many issues that are deep-rooted within the family—the revolt against the age-old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage and lastly the women’s struggle for her survival. (268)

The opening chapter of the novels is titled as ‘Sisters’. In the opening chapter we come to Know about the two married sisters who are childless. The novel is a story of Banwari Lal family where in the family head Banwari Lal is a cloth merchant in Karol Baugh area, Delhi. We come to know that Banwari Lal had a largest cloth shop in Lahore before the partition. After the independence of India first he arrived in rehabilitation centre, Amritsar and from there he settled in Delhi. We are informed that Banwari Lal left Lahore in that critical condition of partition with his pregnant wife, with two young children after the initial struggle, he established himself again in Delhi as a cloth merchant.

Banwari Lal has two sons, Yashpal and Pyare Lal and a daughter named Sunita. Sunita is married to Murli, a small shop owner in Bareilly and has a son Vicky. Yashpal, the elder son of Lala Banwari Lal falls in love with Sona. Once at his shop Yashpal comes in contact with her and requests his father to visit her house with his marriage proposal. Yashpal marries his beloved Sona. Sona has a sister named Rupa who is not that much fair like her sister. Rupa’s parents search out a similar family like Sona’s for their younger daughter Rupa but their efforts go in vain. The
parents can’t find that much socially stable and rich family for Rupa. Finally she is married to Premnath, a low-paid government servant in defense ministry of India. Yashpal’s younger brother is married to Sushila. Both the brothers had left their study after school and joined the family business with their father. Through the first chapter itself we come across the typical Indian joint family Lala Banwari Lal appear as a stereotype family his to married sons along with two daughters in low.

Through the first chapter we come to know about the agony of childless married women. Sona and Rupa, both the sisters are childless. Both the sisters belong to different background. Sona is beautiful and her in-laws are rich with good social reputation where as Rupa is comparatively dull to Sona in complexion and hers low compared to Yashpal. Being childless after marriage is depicted as a curse for a woman. Sona is continuously tortured by her mother in low for some reason. Sona perfectly plays her role as a model daughter in low but absence of a child in her life is something which is natural and out of her control. In spite of serving her in low perfectly, she herself feels miserable for being childless and takes it as her bad Karmas of the past birth. Her finding the reason as bad Karma for being childless shows her conventionality and orthodox nature.

Meanwhile Pyare Lal’s wife Sushila does not fell any difficulty in conceiving a child. Sushila gives birth to a boy who happens to be the first heir of the Banwari Lals. Sona’s condition, being the eldest children’s daughter in low, in the family becomes unbearable as her younger sister in low has already given a gift of a baby boy to the family. Thus, natural jealousy arouses in Sona and it is depicted as follows:

Sona’s tears were realized sooner than she had anticipated Sushila exhibited no difficulty in conceiving; within a year she gave birth to a baby boy. Great was the jubilation at this first grandchild. (Sunita’s son Vicky, born six years earlier, did not count) the male line was augmented, courtesy of Sushila and Pyare Lal. A boy brought up within the nurturing ambit of the shop would in turn ensure its continuing prosperity when he grew up. (Home 15-14)

Women are raised in society in such an atmosphere that they feel the fulfillment of their life only through child’s birth. This consciousness and expectation
is imbibed in a woman’s mind as soon as she gets married. Each and every good aspect of her personality is overlooked if she is unable to produce a child and she has to face negligence and consequent hatred in the family. Sona’s anguish is well narrated by the writer in the fiction. Pyare Lal becomes father when he is twenty-six and Sona and Yashpal remain childless for longer time which becomes unbearable for Sona. She blames her past karma and some deficiency of her earnest prayers, that she makes to god, for her present misfortune. She knows that she is fair enough to look beautiful; she has an attentive husband and a well set family. The only misery in her life is absence of a child, apparently a boy. She tries her level best to satisfy her in-laws through her behaviour. She becomes a perfect housewife but being childless, she feels everything useless.

It becomes evident from the novel that women are treated as child producing machines in the male-dominated society. They are already treated as sex objects, as it is seen in case of Astha in A Married Woman and in case of Virmati in Difficult Daughters. The patriarchal structure in society never endorse any recognition of woman except decided roles. They are important and valued if they are beautiful and having a good figure. They are devalued if the physical aspects are dull and in attractive. The system doesn’t value a woman for being a good human being keeping the women engaged in domesticity, excepting them as sexual objects to fulfill the bodily instincts. And expecting children from them are the major concerns of Indian patriarchs in society.

The similar is the case with Rupa. Being a childless mother she also passes through the agony of inability to conceive. But the torture and suffering that Sona passes through are not seen in case of Rupa. She utilizes her time skillfully in developing pickle business. Engagement in work keeps her sorrow away and that makes her able to live with self-contentment. Rupa’s husband, Premnath also shows a remarkable sign of understanding that ultimately helps Rupa to tackle this problem. Throughout her life Rupa is presented as childless and through her character Kapur decisively brings out an example of childless mother’s life in patriarchal society like India.

The variation of woman’s suffering is aptly highlighted by the novelist at varied fronts. On the one hand where Sona and Rupa stand for woman’s agony for
being childless mothers on the other hand Kapur effectively combines the other major issues of woman in Indian society and that is the dowry system. Through the character of Sunita, Banwari Lal’s only daughter Kapur efficiently marks this dangerous social evil that finally ruins her life. Sunita’s husband Murli appears excepting something either in terms of money or property from his in laws. Kapur depicts:

During the trip Sona and Sunita exchanged confidences. Why she would never come home why the tickets were returned instead of used. Murli wanted her family to invest in Bareilly, to either open an outlet that he would manage, or failing that, to help upgrade his shop. Her dowry had been small, he demanded redress. They are cheating you, they palmed you off like a poor girl now they are rich they should share. Should she visit Delhi, it would have to be with him, and her life would be hell afterwards. But she would her husband’s demands were.  

(Home 17)

The anguish of a married woman who is victimized for dowry comes in the latter words spoken by Sunita. She clearly mentions that she doesn’t have any desire to live because of this torture. Motherly concern highlights and stays her back to life because of her only son. Kapur continues:

She shared the general belief in her bad Karma. Let her present miseries expiate the sins of her past lives. All she wished to leave this world, it was only her son who kept her back. Here she clutched Vicky to her bosom, her face contorting with tears and tenderness. The boy remained there passively, while Sona looked on. See how children were recompense for everything.  

(Home 17)

Through Sunita’s character Manju Kapur effectively exposes the wretchedness of Indian women in the male dominant social structure. The ideology, the value and the social system, are such developed that the average women in the families like Banwari Lal’s feel themselves trapped under the unjust male influence. Always believed and accepted as submissive to the thoughts and opinions of family male, Indian women find it next to impossible to come out from such cruel system like dowry. Basic and primary reason behind this situation is the conventionality of Indian
society. Indian society is comparatively more orthodox and never allows freedom to women beyond certain extent which is not seen in the developed nations like USA, England and France etc.

In the lives of people where education is very less and conventionality is still followed insisting, the women live helplessly subjugated to the male supremacy in the family. Conventionality appears much more rigid in the joint families like Lala Banwari Lal’s family. In an average Indian family girls are raised with the sufficient training of being submissive and convenient to the would-be in-laws. Born and brought up in this type of average are avoided, Sunita silently endures all the pain given by her husband and her death also creates many questions.

Through the telegram Lala Banwari Lal gets the news of Sunita’s death which reports her burnt in the kitchen through accident. Sunita’s death also arouses many doubts; whether she herself committed suicide in the house or was she burnt to death by someone else in the family. This issue of dowry and Murli’s demands indicated the death as not merely as an accident. Sunita’s accidental death signals the number of women die in India every year due to the crimes like dowry. These types of women seem much more conscious about their parents. Sunita also indicates here that she don’t want to exploit her father. Moreover, they don’t find any way to come out because they are trained to adjust and settle with the in-laws anyhow. A married woman is not welcomed or treated well again at her father’s house if she divorces or breaks the relationship.

In the conventional family a woman seldom inspires to revolt and generally they try to compromise even with the tortures and harassment for the sake of children. Sunita also appears here adjusting to the pain given by Murli. It has been seen that women endure and sustain the marriage life with a hope to see the issues settled. Indian women also appear conservative in their mentality as they many times blame their previous bad Karmas for their present misfortune. Scientific way of thinking and living is not instilled in Indian men and women and therefore, even after claiming equality of men and women, we come across thousands of incidents which prove that women still suffer because of male dominance in society.
With the death of Sunita, a new member joins permanently the house of Lala Banwari Lal. Banwari Lal brings with him ten year old Vicky, Sunita’s son. Vicky is not welcomed happily in the house but Lala Banwari Lal thinks him as his duty towards his dead daughter. As Sushila is already blessed with two sons named Ajay and Vijay, the responsibility of Vicky is assigned to Sona, the eldest and childless daughter-in-law. Vicky’s arrival in Banwari Lal family is beautifully captured by Manju Kapur. She writes:

Lala Banwari Lal was unable to bear even the suggestion. They had a moral responsibility to Sunita’s child. His head was bent, his tears were falling. He would carry the cures of his daughter’s death till the day he died. Had he remained in Lahore, this never married into a family of equal status. *(Home 21)*

Childless Sona is thought proper to allot the responsibility of newly come child. Sona craves for her own son and can’t sympathies with Vicky, born and brought up with his wicked father. Having a child of one’s own and adopting a child of someone else are altogether different matters. Here it becomes difficult for Sona to adapt as his child. Kapur Writes:

In the days to come it became clear that Vicky fell to Sona’s lot by default. Sushila’s two sons were still small, she had her hands full. Sona’s were palpably empty.

Sona did struggle at this fresh arrangement by the fates for her certain misery. *(Home 21)*

Vicky appears weak in study but as he is their daughter’s son, Banwari Lal and his wife keep him in the family and bring him up with utmost care along with other children of the house. Meanwhile, Sona’s prayers come true. She conceives after nine years of her married life. It comes out as exalting news in Banwari Lal family. Each and every one takes care of Sona who is now pregnant among all the members of the Banwari Lal family, it is Sona who is happiest. She feels herself removed from the curse of barrenness. As she is going to fulfill her expected and set womanly duty of delivering a baby she feels relax and peace of mind. She believes that now she will not be thought unfortunate compared to her sister-in-law Sushila who is a mother of
two sons. It is decided that Sona will deliver her first child through their in-laws only. As she gets pregnant after nine years, no one wants to take any risk in her delivery and so she is not sent to her father’s house after her Godh Bharai Rasam.

In her first pregnancy, Sona gives birth to a baby girl who is named as Nisha. Banwari Lals are very much keen and faithful in astrology. So they contact a pandit and get the horoscope made of the newly born baby girl. As per the horoscope, Nisha is declared mangali. It is believed in Indian culture that mangali people face more difficulties in getting married and even if they get married, they always have quarrels in their married life. Sona is much more conscious about these thoughts and address also to Nisha as mangali occasionally. With the birth of girl, Sona still feels a void in her life as like other average Indian wives, she also wants a son to move further the family line. Natural jealousy is found in Sona because Sushila is already mother of two sons and she is blessed with a girl only. But with the birth of a child her agony of being childless diminishes.

On the other hand Rupa continues being childless but she doesn’t face any frustration because of that issue. Rupa utilize the spare time in pickle business. She engages herself so much in the work that she doesn’t feel space to experience emptiness in her life. After Nisha’s birth, Sona becomes pregnant second time and this time it is a boy who is named Raju. After Raju’s birth Sona experiences a feel of total contentment because as per social conventions her life is now completely fruitful having a son. Sona is always favored more by the family elders and the woman who repeatedly gives birth to girls only, suffers a lot at the hands of family members. They are repeatedly taunted by the family elders and the harassment continues till they give birth to a son. There are many cases in the society wherein women are either divorced or tortured to death due to repetitive births of girl’s child. It stands for another case of women’s harassment in the patriarchal Indian society.

Home presents suppressed and oppressed Indian women under the conventionality. And the lack of education further makes the men and women blind towards the traditions and it results into the rigidity of conventional approach. The rigid traditional tendency not only makes the women’s lives worse but it also results in the growth of crime against women. The strong hold of traditionality makes the women submissive and whenever they reject to be submissive to the set norms, they
are tortured and their revolts are believed against the society. Thus, Sona now feels happy as she has fulfilled truly the womanly duty by giving an heir to the Banwari Lal family.

The other major aspect of patriarchy is found in the fact that only boys are considered as heirs of the family. The male is labeled as the first sex and the female is identified as the second sex. This set notion is applied in the society from the primitive ages. Women, physically tender and weak compared to man are always placed second to man. With the advancement of time, the scenario has changed but still there are many communities and areas in India and abroad where the women are meant submissive and mostly these types of communities are also backward in education.

After Raju’s birth the Banwari Lal family is crowded with children. Sona, now having two children of her own, does not give much attention towards Vicky. Basically Vicky is not a gentle and a well cultured boy and so is not favored by either Sona or Sushila. He is the eldest among all the children and plays with them. Gradually Vicky is told to come to the shop and help in the business. He goes to the family’s cloth shop and helps his maternal uncles. Vicky is also not very good in studies. But everything that is negative of Vicky is ignored as he is a parentless child.

At this stage, the reader comes to know about another major issue of women’s suffering; that is molestation. Child abuse and sexual harassment of women has seen a remarkable growth in the society and many times the events are even not reported and come out in public. In the fiction the little girl Nisha is victimized of molestation and that from her own paternal cousin Vicky. It happens when he has reached to the adolescent period. He is now of seventeen years old with full of sexual urge.

The shameful even of child abuse occurs when Vicky and Nisha are playing snakes and ladders in the house. Ignorant about Vicky’s ill intentions the family members are at ease and engage in their normal routine work. No one doubts this type of hateful activity from Vicky whom they have given shelter in their house and bring him up as their own. Both the cousins are alone in the room at the upstairs and accidently Vicky glances at little Nisha’s fair thighs. Excited Vicky advances his hands from thighs to her panty and touches the reproductive organ of the girl. Stunned
by the behaviour of her cousin she can’t stop a little wine to come out and tries to stop Vicky through telling it as bad.

Sinful Vicky doesn’t stop. He takes full advantage of the situation and catching little Nisha’s small hands tightens the grip so hard that her fingers are spread. He forcibly makes her fingers touch to his reproductive organs and continues it till the task is done. Never seen and thought it before, the whole event affects disastrously on Nisha’s mind. She is hardly at the age of six to seven at this time and the innocent childish mind thinks it as ugly and bad. Moreover, she is threatened by the culprit that if she informs anyone about this incident they will not only scold her but also beat her severely.

The pathos of the situation lies in the fact that the incidents of molestation take place more than one time but the family elders can’t even be suspicious for this kind of act. Keeping their young daughter inside the house, Banwari Lal family believes her secure and protected but they can’t save the innocent little girl from the vulture inside. The acts of child abuse result in Nisha’s abnormalities. She cannot eat and sleep properly. The wicked acts done by her cousin disturbs her so much that she cannot sleep properly during the nights. During the sleep she suddenly screams out often and gets frightened by the glimpse of those mean acts. She can’t forget what has happened to her and stays awake during the nights. She seems so much frightened and feels guilty of committing some crime which it is known as by her family members, they may beat her or punish her. Feeling guilty and ashamed of what has happened to her, Nisha fails to communicate to her family elders about the crime done to her.

Sexual harassment to girl child is a major issue of the society nowadays and Manju Kapur effectively uses Nisha and Vicky as the characters who highlight incidents of child abuse occur inside the house by the family relatives and so they are suppressed and do not come to surface. These types of occurrences are kept within the home to save family’s fame and prestige in the society. Thus a direct indication towards social hypocrisy and pretence is witnessed through the narrative and social reputation is placed supreme in the society. Actually to decrease the acts of molestation social awareness is necessary and full care and attention are needed for young girls and boys in the family. The incidents of sexual harassment are generally
found in extended joint families where girl child is living with maternal and paternal uncles and many cousin brothers. Sunita Sinha Rightly comments:

Kapur handles the theme in a matter of fact manner and draws our attention to the fact that the scary incident is considered unthinkable to be discussed and brought to the open. These are our social realities, even if we normally keep them under wraps and the family tries to suppress and gathers around the girl to comfort her. (170)

Nisha’s molestation by cousin stands as an alarm for all those parents who think that their girls are completely safe inside the joint family. Many times women can’t raise their voice against such events as they are living under male dominance in the family. Child abuse may be in case of young boys too. Sometimes we come to know about the incidents of sexual harassment of small boys by the adult male. It has been declared a punishable crime by the Indian constitution, but still its implementation is needed on urgent basis as any negligence does not only affect badly on the victimized’ psyche but also passively inspires the culprits in the society.

The family elders cannot understand the real cause of Nisha’s suffering. They ask her but out of fear she is unable to tell what has happened to her. She is an innocent child. So she can’t understand its innocent child. So she can’t understand its seriousness. Finally to give her a change it is decided that Nisha will live with Rupa Masi till she gets normal. Rupa is already childless and she is a generous lady who willingly accepts Nisha and takes her care with love and affection.

Rupa’s husband Premnath is also an educated man with good understanding the couple is facing the void of their own child and in this situation they get Nisha to bring up. Thus Nisha fulfils this void and the couple invite her as their own daughter. At Rupa Masi’s house, Nisha feels at ease because here she doesn’t has any one to disturb her. She feels completely happy and delightful in the company of Rupa Masi and Premnath Masa. Nisha’s family’s reaction is noticeable in this regard:

‘Nisha will bring raunaq to that household’, said Lala Banwari Lal comfortably. ‘Rupa is someone who takes care.’ Sona looked proprietary, while Yashpal told himself that children were meant to be shared. (Home 72)
Rupa and Premnath become the real parents of Nisha and they take care for all the things including her school and education. They come out as the ideal guardians of Nisha who is brought up properly for the next ten years at her aunt’s house. Kapur describes the care taken by Premnath for Nisha’s schooling. She writes:

He visited all the suitable institutions in the area and filled in every form. It the child passed the entrance examinations, and she was so bright there was no reason why she shouldn’t, then his final choice would be the New Horizon Public school. He liked the compound, the facilities were modern, the principal caring, Nisha would do well there.

Both he and Rupa appeared for the parent teacher interview. She lives with us, we are her guardians. They had decided to say this to avoid the bothersome requests for the signatures of the parents. (Home 73)

Through the example of Rupa and Premnath Kapur beautifully parents the truth that there are people in society who do not differentiate between girl and boy and bring them up equally who also understand the importance of education for girls and take almost care for their upliftment. Banwari Lal family underestimates the importance of education for both girls and boys. Almost all males of the family have left education after secondary or higher secondary school. They also prioritize the boys and importance is giver much more to them compared to girl, Nisha. The gender partiality and injustice is highlighted her in Banwari Lal family. Girls are meant for marriage and domesticity and boys are expected to excel in business. Thus there can be seen a direct indication for women’s confinement and deprivation from independence.

Nisha passes ten years of her childhood in Rupa Masi’s house. During the weekends she visits her own house occasionally. After Vicky passes the matriculation exam it is decided that now he should be returned back to Murli as the father must have some plans for him. Lala Banwari Lal and Vicky reach to Bareilly but instead of being thankful for bringing up for so many years, Murli shows the indications that he doesn’t need any help of his son. Lala Banwari Lal leave Vicky in Bareilly and returns back but to his surprise, Vicky returns back to Karol Baugh within several days. Manju Kapur narrates Vicky as a burden on Banwari Lal family. She writes:
It took a month for Vicky to escape Delhi. He tries to beat me, he is abusive, he has a woman, and I will kill myself if you send me back. His stories were so wild, no one believed him. But he was still young enough for his elders to feel responsible for his welfare. Lela barware all refused to force him back.

They wrote to the father. Get him married once he settles down he will be happier. Vicky declared he would only marry if he could live with them. Otherwise what would he do with a wife in Bareilly?

After much discussion they agreed to build him a small room plus bathroom on barsati. In this way they would fulfill an obligation, without having to see him all the time. Once he stood on his feet, he could setup independently somewhere. (Home 77-78)

It becomes evidently clear that Vicky does not find any strong bond with his father and socially well settled and economically stable his maternal uncles can definitely assist him in life. He is more attached with the Banwari Lal family because the love and affection he gets there make him realized that his maternal relatives feel a sense of responsibility towards him. In no time his father finds a girl for Vicky and his marriage is finalized. During this time Murli’s instruction to Vicky makes it clear that he uses Vicky to take his share from Banwari Lal’s property. Murli always appears greedy for his in lows wealth. He says to Vicky:

Murli found an opportunity to inform his son that his future lay with his mother’s family. He should guard against letting them get rid of him cheap, they had short-changed his mother and now they were trying to do the same to him. (Home 78)

Manju Kapur is excellent in narrating the events and happenings inside and outside home. Vicky marriage is the first ever marriage after Pyare Lal’s marriage. Vicky’s marriage is described with sufficiently details. The description of barat marital rituals, wedding etc. are interesting. Kapur writes:

At six in the morning, Vicky returns to the Gupta Dharamsala a married man. The newlywed’s touch the elders’ feet, ask for blessings,
and have money pressed on to them. The bride cries continuously. She is patted and soothed continuously. Laugh sister in law clutching babies look sympathetic. The older ones look indifferent; their attention taken by collection wedding presents, distributing saris and suit places brought from Delhi, ensuring everyone has a box of sweets.

(Home 88)

Rupa’s care and attraction is beautifully presented by Kapur. She writes:

As Nisha grew Rupa bestowed careful love on her, mentally standing before the tribunal composed of her sister and brother in low. Defending herself against neglect on the one hand and stealing the child’s heart on the other. The business that had occupied her attention so successfully seemed more meaningful when she saw Nisha peering into the pickle jars, or tasting the sweet and salty aam papar drying in the sun under an old muslin sari. (Home 91)

Conventional womanly duties and roles are taught to the girls during the childhood. The present fiction shows a clear example of how the set norms and rituals are instilled in women’s lives very early. We come to know that Sona, Nisha and other women of Banwari Lal family keep fast for Karva Chauth and the conversation between Sona and Nisha is very significant as it shows how the traditional roles for women transfer from mothers to daughters. Kapur writes:

The first time Nisha was told she had to fast for her future husband she protested. ‘Why should I? That’s for older women.’ She didn’t want to spend the day without food or water.

Sona rolled her eyes. Only ten and the girl was beginning to argue. She had never questioned anything her mother asked her to do. ‘How are you going to get married, madam, if you do not make sacrifices?’
‘In school nobody does it.’
‘They are not manglis.’
‘They could be no answer to this, but Nisha tried: 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.’ mumbled Nisha.

‘Who will look after you if you don’t marry?’ (Home 92)

Five years have passed of Vicky and Asha’s marriage and now Asha becomes used to with the condition of the family. Many times she observes the difference of her area and the place where Sona and Sushila live. In no time she identifies Vicky’s position in the family and she frequently ask questions too to Vicky about these matters but they go in vain as she belongs to a poor family and having lost her father at early age, she is silently endures the situation. Asha’s agony gets highlighted in below mentioned lines of the fiction:

It was through her own treatment that Asha fully realized her husband’s marginal status. She was careful to be especially sick in front of Sona and the grandmother, but their response were slow. Days passed before they asked if something was wrong, and when her pregnancy was confirmed they talked of sending her to Bareilly for her confinement Asha did not care if this was tradition, she could only feel the indifference of a plan that involved going home to a mother who could not afford modern treatment for her delivery. She got around this by saying she could not leave Sona Maji for even a day, her heart would break. (Home 103)

Asha gives birth to Virat and the couple gradually becomes conscious of their future. Asha always pushes Vicky and inquires about their future. Vicky wants to build up a new room on the terrace and plans to arrange for a tailor there who can prepare Baba suits. He wants to start a new venture of her own for the security of his family and wishes his grandfather’s help for that. He thinks that Lala Banwari Lal can build him a separate room for his business. He does not want to rely on his maternal uncles for the life time. He arrests his own right over Lala Banwari Lal’s property and wealth and thinks that either they should help him in building up his business or they should give his own share of money.
Vicky tells his plan of babasuit business to Lala Banwari Lal. He has also throughout the name of his new venture; ‘Virat Babasuit.’ The eldest family male does not like his demands and thinks that Vicky should be contented with what they have given to him. The family has brought him up from the age of ten years. They educated him, employed him in their shop, married him, kept him in themselves after marriage built a room with bathroom for his family in barsati and still take care of his family. Even after getting all these benefits, Vicky and his wife are not satisfied with what they have.

Vicky’s demand is discussed with Yashpal and Pyare Lal and both the uncles reject the idea of any further help to Vicky. Meanwhile a major sad incident occurs in Banwari Lal family. Lala Banwari Lal who had already crossed seventy-three, gets a massive stroke when he was busy in the shop. Immediately the family patriarch is admitted in the hospital but after the initial treatment the doctor’s witness very less chances of health recovery. Lala Banwari Lal remains bed-ridden for several months in the house and is died when severe stroke comes for the second time.

Eldest patriarch of the family is died and all the social and business related responsibly come on Yashpal’s shoulder. The family members do not feel in a position of enduring the void created by Lala Banwari Lal’s death. The qualities and peculiarities as mentioned by Manju Kapur are not worthy. She writes about Banwari Lal’s death:

The patriarch was dead, and all connected to the family came to condole. Many cloth traders and relatives near and distant gathered at Karol Baugh house to pay their respects to a man who had embodied all the virtues of the old-fashioned bania, honest sincere, industrious, whose love had held the entire family together through trials and disagreements. During his entire life, he had made no enemies; the many tears shed for him were ample testimony to that. (Home 119)

After Banwari Lal’s death the family gets worried about grandfather who has turned much grief-stricken after her husband’s death. It is decided that Nisha should now be brought back in the house because only she was believed very close to the old lady. After passing ten years in a free environment, Nisha now return to her own
home which she had to leave due to molestation. After Nisha’s return her traditional minded mother Sona begins to mould her as per the set conventionalities for women. Different types of religious story like Karva Chauth Katha and Vat Savitri are interwoven in the fiction to exhibit the authentic picture of traditional Indian women. Sona stands for the first generation woman who has a deep faith in traditional values and notions for women. The traditional domesticity is appropriate as per her opinion and so she brings up Nisha with sufficient supplements of set customs and norms. Kapur writes:

In the month of jesht, in the middle of summer, under a banyan tree-that is, a branch of a banyan tree stuck into a pot by Sona- the women of the family gather for the puja. It is hot, the stand fan a few feet away moves the air about indifferently, the branch of the banyan tree wilts and will die in a few hours.

The gods are first bathed, fed, and prayed to. Sona, as oldest daughter-in-law, is the one who performs these rituals. Asha, Sushila and Nisha sit around her. The grandmother watches avidly from the veranda bed.

(Home 128-129)

Along with these issues, the issue of dowry also prevails in the fiction. After Vicky’s wedding, the next marriage that takes place in the family is Ajay’s. Ajay the eldest son of Pyare Lal is married to Seema. Seema is a simple girl born and brought up in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. Nisha also reaches marriageable age but she wants further education. So it is decided that till a proper proposal comes she can continue the college education. After Lala Banwari Lal’s death the brothers think about purchasing the upper area of the shop for business expansion. Both the brothers wanted to purchase 1500 square foot area above the shop before a few years when their father was alive the owner offered them the whole area in fifteen lakh rupees. But Lala Banwari Lal had rejected the idea of any expansion. He had bitterly expressed his resentment and had told that they may purchase the property after his death.

Now both the brothers feel the need of business expansion because the boys in the family now have grown up and they must be settled down properly. Ajay was
already married and Vijay and Raju also have reached to marriage age. Now after Banwari Lal’s death when they approach for purchasing the upper part of the shop, the owners demand twenty five lakh; partial amount in cash and remaining in black. The prizes of property are rocketing in Delhi and both of them find difficult to purchase the property. Increasing prizes are beautifully explained by the novelist. She writes:

    Property prizes are going up what to do?’ replied Yashpal pacifically. Look at how much you need to buy places way out of Delhi. They keep advertising: greenwood, Meadowvale, Hill view, Sunny acres, I don’t know what all miles away.

    Pyare Lal started into middle distance his brother’s mind could meander maddeningly around trivia, while his own seldom strayed from areas fruitful to business. (Home 158)

Here the issue of dowry highlights in the fiction. Along with Banwari Lal’s major shop in Karol Baugh, there is another chief business group named Bansals. They have already made inquiries of Pyare Lal’s younger son Vijay for their daughter Rekha. Bansal is a well-established family in the area and Pyare Lal thinks that with the dowry of this proposed marriage they can easily purchase the required area above the shop. Manju Kapur writes:

    He thought of his younger son, twenty one a college graduate, and now needy for marriage. Already the Bansals, a large furnished store in Karol Baugh, had made inquiries. Should the Bansal dowry match the price of the flat upstairs it would be a sign that this union was meant to be. (Home 158)

    Pyare Lal’s thinking proves that dowry still plays a major role in arranged marriage in India. Educated and well to do families pretend to be fair with the girl’s family but the bitter reality is revealed through these types of cases. Presently it has been prohibited by the government and it is declared illegal to ask or demand for dowry but the reality is different. Still there are many classes and communities in India who have very low rate of literacy and these types of uneducated societies still follow the bad conventional customs like dowry, child marriage etc. it is seen that the
customs like dowry are more prevalent in the families and societies which have strong base of tradition and conventions. It is also evidently true that lack of higher education becomes the prime reason behind this type of bad custom. Lack of higher education leads to the immature ideology and for the reason of safety and security dowry is preferred in many cases.

Vijay’s marriage with Rekha is finally decided and the amount is also decided as dowry with Vijay’s marriage Banwari Lal family now have two young daughters in low Seema and Rekha. With the help of received fund from the Bansals, Yashpal and Pyare Lal redesign their old shop in modern outlook they purchased the business. Ajay married first and already joined the shop and gradually the elders have the plan to involve Vijay and Raju too in the family business. The business was extended and the shop was modified.

But with Vijay’s marriage many things changed in Banwari Lal family. The elder daughter-in-law Seema belong to average background so she does not object anything in the house and gets settled easily. But Rekha belongs to a well to do family and so when after marriage she is accommodated upstairs in the house she instantly finds uneasy to get settled. Primarily she objects for the bathroom as between three married women and three men there is only one bathroom in Pyare Lal’s part of house. Pyare Lal accommodates two newly married couples in few rooms upstairs. So a demand for expansion of the house arises from Pyare Lal’s house Yashpal and Sona do not have any problem particularly for the space as their only son Raju is still in higher secondary school.

The demand rises day by day and Pyare Lal, after consultation with his sons and an engineer a close relative to Rekha’s family, brings a proposal for demolition of the house and reconstructing it into five storeyed flats that can happily accommodate each and every family. Pyare Lal also says that if his brothers does not give consent for demolition, they may take their share from the business and move out from the house. The family that was united and happy as a joint family. Now gets changed with marriage and growing children. The family stays united up to the time Banwari Lal lived.
Pyare Lal wires a builders who is willing to consult a building of five storeyed flats agreed to allot some storeyed to the family and will sell other flats to other customers. It is agreed that the root right will be with builder and he will also give ten lakh rupees to each family which they can utilize in business. The idea of Pyare Lal included the peaceful accommodation of everyone and flourishing of business through the fund. Initially, Sona rejects the idea of house demolition but when she is explained about the new facilities and ample space she gets agreed.

To consult a new building the complete demolition of the house is requested and for that purpose the house must be totally vacant. Everybody was agreed upon the new constructions but the family gets trouble due to Vicky is living in the barsati and is not willing to leave the house. His wife Asha gets the news about the proposal of new house and allotment of flats to each family. She already knows that Vicky’s maternal uncles believed Vicky as an additional burden. Vicky and his family is thought as a parasite, a leech who forcibly sticks to their uncles in expectation of some share from the property.

Vicky is informed by the family males about the reconstruction of the house he is told that they will help him to find out a nice flat in Karol Baugh on rent near the shop and he can live there independently. There was employed in the shop and got salary. But Vicky and Asha have ill intention in mind. They want some money, property, share in return and allotting a sprite flat to Vicky in their new house can cost them twenty five lakh rupees which they can’t afford to pay for Vicky.

Vicky does not agree to the proposal and shows his disagreement for leaving the house. Actually it is Asha who instigates Vicky for the property share and supports him during their conversations. The family sends Rupa as a mediator and informs Vicky that if he becomes an obstacle in their way, he may be beaten by goondas in the market. Vicky knows that there is only permission up to three storey building in Karol Baugh and also knows that the family is going to build a five storey building illegally with some bribe to the authorities. The builder is afraid that knowing this Vicky may go to court and take a stay over the construction.

Meanwhile after completion of school Nisha joins the college. College education is not compulsory for girls in Banwari Lal’s traditional family but it is
thought that till she gets married she can continue the education. She is admitted in Durga Bai College for English honors. It is a girl’s college which is found suitable for Nisha to save her from any type of close contacts from boys. Nisha begins her study and during the daily routine journey from Karol Baugh to her college she happens to meet a boy named Suresh. Suresh is studding in Khalsa College of Engineering. Their familiarity begins from short conversations and the contacts grow stranger. Suresh is a lower caste boy who identifies himself as Suresh Kumar. Their contacts grow in friendship and gradually in love.

On the other side the family decides to settle the matter with Vicky peacefully. They start negotiations for the prize with Vicky to move him out completely from their life. Rs. 10 lakh are decided to give to Vicky to remove from the house. The money is given to Vicky; six lakh in black and four lakh in cash. With Vicky’s coming out the demolition of the house begins and till the completion of construction of flats the Banwari Lal family moves in hotel palace heights as per the arrangements made by the builder. Three rooms are allotted with meal to the family and both the brothers settle in the rooms with family.

Vijay along with his wife is sent to live in her in law’s house till the new house is ready. Raju is sent to Rupa Masi’s house for the period and the remaining members stay in hotel. After the sufficient time of construction the new house is ready for living. Before moving in the new flats, the family arrange puja and havan to keep the evil eye away from the family. Now after Lala Banwari Lal’s death there is a drastic change in the family. They have redesigned the shop with expansion and the Karol Baugh old house is converted into modern style flats.

Now Nisha’s contacts with Suresh increases. Both of them meet each other after and before college time. Suresh appears a modern man having the larger opinion of life. As a young girl Nisha is in search of someone who can understand her and love her with respect. Nisha has seen her brothers getting married and now was her turn of marriage. Proposals come from well reputed families and everything gets decided but finally when horoscopes are matched the other party sends rejections presenting the cause of Nisha being a mangali. In Suresh she finds a proper match. It is Suresh who loves her and exhibits a genuine care and concern for Nisha. Nisha doesn’t want an arranged marriage. She is a modern girl having the modern way of
thinking and approach. She does not belong to the first generation of women who are used to with domesticity and keep themselves confined in homely duties only.

Nisha stands for the modern new woman who struggles to come out from the set conventionality for the women. But problem occurs in her case because here is typical orthodox family. The joint family structure wherein Nisha is born and belongs to, is set as per strict conventional norms for women. Any deviation from set pattern for woman only brings isolation and alienation. Woman for the Banwari Lal’s are meant for household duties producing children, bringing them up, cooking etc... They never think of women’s engagement in education and business. Since they have strong social relations and reputation they have followed the social system of arranged marriages for their sons. Selecting one’s partner by oneself directly is not accepted in the family and inter caste marriage hardly has any possibility in Banwari Lal’s family. Thus things do not appear so easy for Nisha to get approval for love marriage with Suresh.

Moreover, Suresh belongs to a lower caste. But being a modern woman and brought up in the free environment of Rupa Masi’s house, Nisha is found against the rigidity of caste system. She takes full liberty with Suresh and keeps her affair a secret in the family. Both of them often go to watch the morning shows and during the darkness of the theatre they love each other but do not cross the limit. She behaves as a modern girl who is not afraid of the consequences of pre-marital physical contacts. One thing that needs to be noted here is that Manju Kapur’s protagonist in Home is not match bold and advanced in terms of freedom as her protagonist in Difficult Daughters who come out as free and independent. Virmati crosses all limits in pre-marital physical relations with her lover Harish in Difficult Daughters whereas Nisha and Suresh advance physically but they maintain the limit to sexual advances.

Once with the intention of full sexual pleasure, Suresh takes her to a vacant room in Vijay Nagar and tries to advance physically but Nisha stops him saying they should keep something for the marriage. Nisha often tells Suresh to come with his parents to her house for the marriage proposal. Suresh’s parents are not in direct opposition for the marriage but they believe that Banwari Lal family should give the approval for that. When Nisha’s affair is caught by the family members, the reaction of her parents is remarkable and indicates the stereotype mentality of Indian parents.
It is also shows the rigid conventionality of Indian families in case of marriage of their daughters. The parents of Nisha appear here possessive and their behaviour signifies their claim over Nisha as their asset. Manju Kapur writes:

    Father: *Beti*, there is no comparison between the lives of your elders and your own. Our marriage was performed with full blessings of your grandfather. Who is this boy? How has he turned your head so much that he tells me what you will do? (*Home* 197)

Nisha’s mother is also very upset about her selection of a lower caste boy. She seems more worried about Sushila’s reaction on Nisha’s love marriage and compares Vijay with Suresh, the first belonging to well reputed family and the second to a poor one. She also remarks that fortunately Nisha’s grandfather is not alive to witness such a disgrace. As Vijay has married to a rich and reputed family of his own caste, the same is a desire of Sona for her daughter. She wishes to show others about their wealthy in laws. But Nisha’s selection wipes out her dream. The consequences and actions taken by the family are nicely captured by the novelist. Kapur writes:

    The first step the family took was to ban her college-going. She was as yet publicly untarnished; they hoped to contain the damage. You can study at home; we have given one medical certificate for your convenience, Madam, now we will give another. (*Home* 197-198)

Nisha’s troubles increase as revelation of her affair causes uneasiness in her relation and behaviour with her family members. Kapur’s narration in this context is unique. She compares Nisha’s condition as, ‘worse than the dirt under their feet’. (*Home* 197-198) She is not allowed even to go upstairs as there are chances that her Chachi might encourage her for revolt. Nisha’s parents want her to marry in a family that can keep her and her children comfortable and happy for life time. The reason behind their stern rejection is that Suresh belongs to other caste. Nisha warns her parents not to enforce her to marry anybody. She clearly indicates that she is not a thing who can be sold in the market of marriage. She tries her level best to convince her parents about the nobility of Suresh and his family. As per Nisha’s opinion she owns her life and it is her right to decide her life partner and live independently. But
the conventionality pre-dominates the modernity and independence. Nisha is very clear about her decision and tells Suresh:

Oh Suresh, if we could marry, these demons will vanish. You told me so many times you love me, lifetime together, remember? What you said Moti Mahal only shows how good and noble you are. Don’t be afraid of my family – once my exams are over we will talk to them, fight them, run away if necessary. (*Home* 208)

Nisha appears firm in her decision but finally Suresh proves a coward as he does not show any daring for their marriage. During the secret meeting he tells Nisha that His family is against their marriage as her family is not agreed to their relation. Suresh doesn’t show any sign of going against his family and parents himself as helpless and coward before Nisha. Finally, Suresh disappears from Nisha’s life and it creates a vacuum in her. The following days proves restless for Nisha as her failed love-affair only brings anguish in her life.

Nisha’s parents begin a search for a proper match for her. They soon get a proposal from a groom who owns his shop and wants an immediate marriage. Yashpal rejects the idea of urgent marriage and the proposal is rejected. Yashpal decides to advertise for their search of a mangali boy for Nisha. Previously any girl of Banwari lal family was not advertised for marriage. But as Nisha is a mangali, the family gives an advertisement for search of a mangli groom in the matrimony section of Hindustan times. The responses arrive but none of them suits Nisha’s choice and so all are rejected.

Being a mangali girl, Nisha suffers from getting married. She doesn’t get that many proposals as their brothers had received. Gradually all girls, who were Nisha’s companions in schools and college, get married one by one which in return intensities Nisha’s pain of being unmarried. Meanwhile, she is affected by a skin decease named eczema. Skin irritation develops in her body and gradually it increases day by day leaving Nisha desperate and frustrated.

During this time Yashpal receives a marriage proposal for Raju. The proposal come from Vijay’s wife Rekha’s cousin and the family is well settled promising the strong family ties further. More attractive thing was dowry. The family will give
attractive dowry to Raju for the marriage. So finally the marriage of Raju is decided with Pooja, Rekha’s cousin. Nisha cannot endure the festive mood in the house as leaving Nisha unmarried the family is going to arrange her younger brother’s marriage. It creates a very uncomfortable situation for Nisha in her own house. She feels trapped inside her house. She feels confined within illogical and conventional belief of being a mangali. She experiences herself victimized at the hands of social pretence and rigidity of traditionality. She feels herself ignored and isolated by her own family members.

Raju’s wife Pooja is of rebellious nature as she doesn’t appear submissive and obedient to the family elders. She doesn’t allow anyone to enter in her room. Being a part of modern well-to-do family she is reflected as a modern woman. Sona observes the odd behaviour of Pooja in the house. Her son, who was previously unwilling to marry a burnt girl, now seems following her completely and neglecting the family responsibility. Pooja behaves as if her in-law’s house is a hotel. As Raju goes to shop, she also leaves to her friend’s house and calls Raju to pick her up. It is Sona’s expectation to have a daughter-in-law who is homely and should be like a sister to Nisha, Sona’s only daughter and Raju’s only sister. But Pooja’s behaviour exposes her as altogether as an independent woman. Raju and Pooja go for cinema and restaurant occasionally but never take Nisha with them. They even do not bother about the family members who wait for them up to late night.

Pooja’s behaviour causes clash between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Sona condemns Pooja and calls her shameless. Her generational gap gets highlighted between Sona and Pooja. Sona who is an older and mature woman also expects the same traditional approach from Pooja. Moreover, the family background and time also affects the behaviour of women. Sona, who is norm and brought up amid traditional culture, easily had absorbed the joint family system of Banwari Lal family and had never ventured to go against family values and integration. On the other hand, Pooja is brought up in modern culture and had witnessed the modern life-style of married women. So both of them are right own stands. But even after living a modern lifestyle Pooja could win the heart of their in laws which she fails to do. The following lines present Sona’s agony as a mother in law:

‘Of course madam thinks she is too great to be with us.’
It has started. It continued.

‘She treats the home as though it were a hotel. The minute Raju is gone, out she goes, to her parents, to her friends. Then she phones him at the shop to pick her up. Cleverly she tells him her own family has cinema tickets, let’s go, making sure that she doesn’t have to take Nisha. After that they go to a restaurant, then they come home, late, late sometimes eleven, twelve, doesn’t matter if we are waiting. A thousand times I have told the boy the sister is your responsibility, you have to look after her, but she has so many ways to make him neglect his duty.’…‘The minute I say the slightest thing, she runs and complains to Raju…. ‘But does that mean she should turn him against me - me, his own mother, who gave him birth from this flesh and blood?’ Sona beat her chest. ‘Whose milk he drunk for two years – two whole years?’ (Home 264-265)

Sona’s anguish throws light on many aspects of human relationships. A mother who sacrifices her years, endures pain for nine months, passes through the critical stage of delivery expects only and only love from her child. But Raju here fails to realize this basic aspect of mother child relationship. Through Sona’s character, we come to know the suffering of a mother who sacrifices many things for her children but finally gets only dissatisfaction. Women have been presented through varied perspectives in Manju Kapur’s novels. A daughter is depicted rebelling against the family like Virmati in Difficult Daughters and Nisha in Home, model Indian mothers are depicted like Kasturi in Difficult Daughters, Sona in Home, Sita in A Married woman and Nisha’s Mother in The Immigrant who pass through lots of sacrifices in their lives for upbringing of children.

Strife in the house between Pooja and her in-laws disturbs Nisha most. After Suresh’s separation she faces two major problems in her life that are her skin decease and Pooja’s divide and rule policy. When a baby girl is born to Pooja, Nisha takes her care as the paternal aunt of the baby. But gradually Pooja doesn’t allow Nisha even to touch the baby due to the fear of getting infection to the baby. It becomes unbearable for Nisha and her condition gets worse in the family. Kapur writes:
Nisha could have enlightened her aunt as to Pooja’s divide and rule policy, could have described the subtle discrimination continually exercised between herself and her mother, but she does to cry instead. It was easier and she could not be blamed for anything, she said.

‘Arre, what is this?’ The aunt stroked her niece’s arm, gently rubbing her hand up and down the dry skin.

‘Why are you touching me? You may get infected’, hiccupped the niece. (Home 280)

The skin decease and her identity as a mangali make her life unbearable. Additionally, the torture made by Pooja turns her life from worse to worst. Nisha tells to Rupa aunt, her only intimate in the family:

‘You see, Masi,’ said Nisha, the minute her mother was out of earshot, ‘there is no place for me in this house…. ‘Which prince are they waiting for? Or have I to remain here forever?’ cried Nisha. Her aunt’s presence made her want to scream, shout, pull her hair, and enact the drama her mother was always disapproving of.’ (Home 280)

Nisha’s condition becomes more pathetic. Being a mangali spinster who endures love betrayal from Suresh and odd behaviour of her sister in law gets psychological effect over her behaviour which finally increases the eczema. Nisha joins play-way, a playschool nearly her house and engages herself there up to noon. Growing age and unmarried status encourages Nisha to be self-reliant and raise the identity of her own.

Nisha expresses a desire to her father to join business. She shows her interest in cloth business of their family. Her parents also think that they should support their daughter and they firmly assume that in their absence it will be her self-reliance that can only protect her. After the initial discussion Yashpal decides to help Nisha to begin a business. Her arranges a shop and invests twenty-five thousands rupees. Nisha opens a shop and names it as ‘Nisha’s Creation’ which prepares the salwar suits for the ready-made garment market. She hires a tailor named Mohseen Khan who helps her in preparing the suits.
She gets good amount of business and in no time she repays the money to her father which he invested for her business. Her engagement in business gives her a sense of self satisfaction and self-dependence. Now she was no more a burden in the family. She was a self-reliant woman who has own identity and stood on her own feet. She feels so happy at this situation and decides that whatever happens in her life she will never stop working in her shop. Her business skills are also acknowledged by her father and Yashpal feels proud of his daughter.

Time passes and Nisha’s growing age becomes a major concern for her parents. Yashpal and Sona know that marriage is a prime requirement for the fulfillment in life. They felt that even though their daughter has economic stability, it is her marriage that will bring complete happiness in her life. Yashpal and Sona think that single status will bring only isolation and loneliness in Nisha’s life. So they again search out for a proper match and this time they make sure that the groom should be agreed to Nisha’s working. Soon they find a mangli widower named Arvind. The meeting of would-be couple is organized and during the conversation Nisha firmly declares that she cannot leave her established business after the marriage.

Arvind appears enough shrewd to accept Nisha’s condition. Arvind and Nisha’s pre-wedding meeting presents Arvind’s intention behind marriage. Kapur writes:

They were looking at each other now. It seemed possible to ask a personal question, ‘What was she like, your first wife? Was she pretty?’

He looked at her. His face relaxed, he almost smiled. ‘She was not chosen for her looks,’ he replied.

Nish felt comforted.

‘I have to marry and we are not interested in such things. My mother needs someone in the house.’ (Home 303)

Arvind’s answer and mentioning his mother’s need for a woman in their house is a direct indication of his intention to keep Nisha confined in domesticity but Nisha cannot clearly understand his purpose behind the marriage. As per Arvind’s demand the marriage is performed a registered one and Nisha begins her marital life with
Arvind. As per the pre-condition, Nisha initially leaves the marital home and handles her shop effectively. Arvind has only his mother in his family to take care of and so she doesn’t find it difficult to handle the two fronts, shop and home. It continues for several days but gradually Arvind begins behaving like a typical husband and doesn’t show much concern for Nisha’s business.

With passing of time Nisha is insisted upon to pass more time to take care of Arvind’s sick mother. She is allowed to go to shop taking her mother-in-law’s permission. A self-reliant business woman once again finds herself trapped in home and homely duties. She is repeatedly informed to take care of her mother in law. She is also told to fill up the barrenness of the house through giving a hair to the family. Nisha had expected that with the approval of running the business her marriage would bring on end to her problems and give her a space to flourish as a self-reliant woman. Dr. Honey Sethi and Seema Dhillon comment in this context that Manju Kapur appears as a writer who possesses a clear vision of women’s predicament under male dominance and beautifully brings out the truth before the readers. Her fictions focus on women’s zeal to set up their individual identity. According to Dr. Honey Sethi and Seema Dhillon marital rift arise in the protagonists’ lives which distance them from their male counterparts.

Nisha fulfils all the duties perfectly in Arvind’s house. She becomes an ideal wife, a perfect daughter-in-law and an efficient caretaker of house. But Arvind’s negligence for her business disturbs her greatly. Furthermore, she doesn’t find any special concern for herself except household work in her in-law’s family. Meanwhile, she gets pregnant. She knows that her pregnancy will only increase her womanly duties and engagement in home. Getting a child will further snatch out her involvement in business and destroy her dream. Thus, Kapur’s protagonist, who is seen adamant to be independent doesn’t succeed in her ambition because of being second gender, a woman. Had she been a man, she could easily be independent and could take own decisions but because she is a woman in a male dominant society, she surrenders to the domesticity and follows Arvind’s instructions and wishes.

Another aspect of Nisha’s married life that is exposed by the novelist is that Arvind doesn’t show any love towards Nisha. All the time like a kid he tells to Nisha about his mother. Nisha is doubtful whether he is interested in her or not at all. Arvind
expresses concern for Nisha occasionally but the main motif behind his marrying Nisha remains the same that is to bring home a woman who can take care of this mother, his house and himself. Ammaji’s importance is nicely presented by Kapur:

Amma, again Amma, never any thought for her. Never how have you been, is your back paining, has the baby started kicking yet?’ Anger began to tremble below her considerate exchanges. Why did he have to marry if he was to treat his wife to indifferent looks, she thought sweeping aside the tenderness he showed at night. She wanted something in the day as well. Not this preoccupation, not this looking through, not this ignoring of their coming child. If he felt so little for her, she should go home to her tailors, why enact this farce here?

(Home 328)

Nisha has been her own brother who changed after marriage and follows his wife with interest and affection. She compares Arvind and Raju and thinks that even after marriage; Arvind doesn’t show much affection for her. Kapur narrates:

She thought of how Pooja’s presence had weakened the link between her mother and brother, and wondered miserably at her fate. Restlessly she served them; restlessly she walked between the kitchen and the veranda. (Home 328)

Manju Kapur finishes the story of Banwari Lal family with Nisha’s giving birth to twins. Nisha becomes a mother of a son and a daughter. Through giving an heir to the family, her duty is believed fulfilled. Her shop, ‘Nisha’s Creation’ is now managed by Pooja that she knows from Raju when he Visits her house. Previously well-established businesswoman now has completely become a perfect house wife, fulfilling the traditional roles of women. Undoubtedly, the passion to come out from this conventional domesticity still prevails in Nisha but she observes herself helpless in front of her husband, children and mother-in-law.

The word ‘home’ denotes a place where one expects peace and happiness. Peace and happiness are co-related and so real happiness can only bring real peace. Home is meant for satisfaction and happiness but this notion of ‘home’ is hardly
found in this fiction. Shifting of home of many characters questions their homely experience. Shagufta Parween beautifully explains:

Displacement, dispossession, unbelonging, quest for home, and resettlement dominate the novel’s matrix. The family’s home is shifted from Lahore to Delhi. Women leave their natal homes to settle in their married homes. Nisha is shifted to her aunt’s house, and returns back after more than a decade to ultimately reallocate herself in her husband’s house. Vicky leaves the house, his mother’s death had made hateful to him, to live in Banwari Lal’s house where he is despised. Finally he leaves his grandfather’s home to settle elsewhere. Individuals are thus, uprooted from their environs and are forced to house themselves in new places. Ancestral ties are severed and new attachments made while struggling to cope with the isolation and unhomeliness that swathe the people. (143)

The last incident of the novel describes Nisha clutching the girl child to her bosom. Nisha’s gesture denotes a special indication. Caressing the girl child signalize that being a woman she sympathizes for daughter who will have to face same gender troubles as she has undergone through in rigid patriarchy. Her own sacrifices, endurance and sufferings can be the fundamental reasons for her affection towards the daughter who again will have to be a puppet at the hands of set conventions against women’s independence. The milk spurting out from her breasts, while she picks her newly born daughter up, is an authentic proof of her special concern and love for daughter as she belongs to the same gender. Nisha emerges as a ‘new woman’ who struggles hard to set her own identity through ‘Nisha’s Creation’.

Neeru Tandon’s comment is important in context of ‘new woman’ which rightly suits to Nisha’s character too. She says:

The ‘new woman’ today challenges the traditional notions of ‘Angel in the house’ and ‘sexually voracious’ image. The ‘new woman’ is essentially a woman of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society and tries to improve it. (126)
The fiction can be interpreted from multiple aspects as it is a story of home wherein a family lives, grows, separates and remakes a family. Firstly, it can be viewed as a saga of Banwari Lal family. Banwari Lal family members stand symbolic. The family symbolize an average joint family, an important component of Indian society. Through joint family structure, the fiction relates to the social conventions which are often found rigid and cruel. The inter-caste marriages are not still accepted in society which is properly demonstrated through characters of Nisha and Suresh. Silpi Rishi Srivastava rightly explains Nisha’s struggle and says:

Nisha’s desire for establishing self identity, a value charged, almost a charismatic term with its secured achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation. (197)

The novel also exposes the truth that social conventions are followed to gain selfish motifs like dowry. In many communities arranged marriages are done to get social reputation and thereby to get financial benefit. Dowry appears as a major theme in the novel itself. Every marriage in Banwari Lal family is thought from perspective of dowry. Dowry is taken in Vijay’s marriage from Bansals. Raju’s marriage is urgently decided and arranged for attractive dowry only. Thus, *Home* exposes social pretence of being reputed and gentle. It is depicted that for many boys are sold in the marriage market and Kapur highlights the social pretence through the dowry. Family life, attachment towards home and its importance always prove much more important for a woman. Discussing Nisha’s struggle in the patriarchal world, Satish Kumar Harit says;

Through Nisha’s story of failed affair, her struggle for emancipation, her frustration and ultimately getting moulded into the traditional mode of life, the novelist has shown that it is too much for a delicate girl to go beyond the values of a family life. (108)

Secondly, the fiction can be studied also from the perspective of human relationship in a family. With passing of time, we come across through various complexities of relations in Banwari Lal family. Vicky, who looks simple and noble initially, turns out as a selfish outsider and demands money to leave the house. Sona’s mother-in-law, who is hostile to her in beginning because of her being childless,
becomes normal and loving after Nisha’s birth. Suresh who is seen loving and sincere in his love for Nisha, turns out as coward and cheater as he makes physical advancements with Nisha but does not appear daring enough to marry her at any cost. Nisha, with the passing of time, herself feels unwanted and neglected in the family after Pooja’s arrival. The worst experience is witnessed by Nisha when she is denied to touch Pooja’s newly born child due to the possible infection. Purneet Kaur rightly summarizes the fiction and throws light on Nisha’s character. She writes:

She challenges the male exercise of having control over woman’s body. The unmarried woman of twentieth century is still considered as a burden on her parents until she is married. She is seen as a spinster or a piece of shame if she marries late. Any love-affair before marriage is a sinful act on the part of girl. Unwed mothers, single or unfaithful women are assigned outcasts. Nisha’s relationship with Suresh is looked as a big downfall in the reputation of the family. (20)

The novel also highlights women’s major issues like barrenness of woman after marriage, molestation, love marriage versus arranged marriage, religious beliefs relating the marriage like being mangali and search and struggle for self-reliance. The protagonist, Nisha, is victimized by objection of inter-caste marriage and religious notion of being mangli. The blind pursuit of set norms, rejection of any flexibility and lack of scientific approach of life brings only oppression of the weaker gender.
Work Cited


