

ISSN INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
ISSN-2321-7065

# IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEW TRENDS IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**(NACTELL - 2019)**

March 29, 2019

Organized by



**Department of English & Research Programmes  
NOORUL ISLAM CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

Deemed to be University u/s 3 of UGC Act 1956  
(Accredited by NAAC with "A" Grade)  
Kumaracoil, Thuckalay - 629180  
Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu.

Jointly organized by



**KANYAKUMARI CHAPTER**

**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**

K. Mihi Nancy

Research Scholar

Annai Velankanni College

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

Abishekapatti, Trinelvei, Tamil Nadu, India

kmihinancy@gmail.com

Dr. F. Meena Theresa

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor

Annai Velankanni College

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

Abishekapatti, Trinelvei-627012.

Plethora of Traditional Norms and Struggle for Change: A Feminist Reading of  
Manju Kapur's *Home*

Abstract

The paper aims to analyse the traditional norms of the society which have been imposed on women in Manju Kapur's *Home*. It unveils some of the inherited norms followed in the society which directly affect the women in the novel. It highlights how the character called Nisha has been struggling to overcome all the customized life patterns in the society. Nisha, as a growing new woman raises questions since her childhood against all the norms followed by her mother and other members in the family. But she alone is unable to change the society and thrust towards the traditions at the end of the novel.

The word tradition means an inherited, established or pattern of thought, action or behavior that has been used by the people in a particular group or society for a long time. Indian tradition has been one of the well known ancient traditions in the world. It has its own custom and norms that have been followed for more than centuries. Following these traditional norms strictly and blindly has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, traditions are fruitful beliefs handed down from generation to generation. On the other hand, traditions play an important role in controlling the way of life. Most of the traditional practices often become great barriers against women empowerment. It is evident in Manju Kapur's *Home*.

Manju Kapur is a much acclaimed writer known for her projection of traditional families and feminist concerns in her novels. Her novels present the women belong to the nineties where they had no rights to raise their voice against the conservative systems. The novel *Home* is a story of three generations of a traditional migrant family. Lala Banwari, a cloth merchant is the patriarch of the family. He strongly believes in the ethos of joint family as a true patriarch. But his elder son Yashpal deviates from his norms and falls in love with a poor girl. Banwari Lal, as a father accepts the marriage after giving emotional blackmail to his son. His daughter-in-law Sona is unable to bear a child for ten years and spends her days in fasting and prayers to make her womb a fruitful one. After ten years of struggle in the patriarchal society, she is blessed with a girl baby named Nisha. The remaining story deals with the struggle of Nisha towards individuality in the traditional society.

Manju Kapur skillfully portrays the conservative traditional ideas which have been strictly followed by the members of Banwari Lal's family. Marriage is an indispensable factor in south Indian families. Indian tradition believes that the arranged marriages are long lasting compared to love marriages. Arrange marriages are mostly welcomed by the people because there is no harm for the family name or for their customs. In the novel, Yashpal's

love marriage with a poor girl is considered as a status issue for the family. Since his parents have been the followers of traditional values for years, they are unable to take this threat kindly. But at the same time the family is fully satisfied with the arrange marriage of their second son Pyare Lal mainly “his father was pleased with him”(11). Except Yashpal, all other marriages in the family are fixed only by the parents and there is no choice given to the bride or groom in choosing their life partners.

Marriage turns as a mere obstacle for the women to obtain freedom. They are tended to live in a conservative society where the home has been the only area to fulfill all their duties. They are supposed to assure themselves by performing their duties in different roles as mother, sister, daughter and daughter-in-law. Their major function is to serve as a machine that will bring forth the next generation. The condition of being infertile is considered as a karma or curse in the society. This is evident in the novel that Sona has been childless for first ten years and faces embarrassments and pity for her condition from the society. Her mother-in-law often makes sardonic comments on her state of being infertile. “Two years passed. Sona still wasn’t pregnant, though twenty and old enough. ‘Enjoying, enjoying,’ muttered the mother darkly, imagining the use of birth control” (11). Though the family is much fond of grand children, Vicky, the son of Banwari Lal’s own daughter is never counted in the list of their heirs. Only the male line is accepted as inheritors of the family.

The term ‘patriarchy’ directly or indirectly has a powerful connection with traditions. It is a part of Indian tradition and the norms introduced by the tradition are mostly patriarchal. It is evident in the novel that education becomes an interrogative phenomenon in the life journey of women. It is believed that women must have less education than men in the society. Sona clearly represents this idea when Nisha seeks permission to continue her studies. Sona is highly unconvinced on the idea of educated girls and thinks that “People are suspicious of bride that are very educated” (140). She thinks that the life of woman is just to

look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food she has cooked with her own hands. Her main aim is to find a suitable partner to her daughter. So she trusts in the idea that “it is better for girls to remain inside”(51).

Traditionally men are considered as the bread winners of family. Manju Kapur mirrors this idea by depicting the men of Banwari Lal’s family as hard workers to earn profit in their business whereas their women must remain in the home to fulfill the domestic duties. After the demise of Banwari Lal, Yashpal becomes the patriarch of the family but Sona’s position remains unchanged like every woman in the family. The men are fully aware of the increasing demand in the market and work hard to introduce new salwar kameez, jeans etc to the new generations. Though they involve themselves in introducing modern dresses, their patriarchal minds repudiate the idea of modernity in the home. It is visible in the novel that Nisha is interrogated by the whole family when she wishes to obtain emotional freedom by commencing a new business outside the home. “Why was Nisha being allowed to do business? If tomorrow her daughters-in-law upped and said they wanted to do the same, what face would she have to refuse? And what about the money?...”(289).

Manju Kapur traces the concept of individuality and freedom only through the character of Nisha. She is portrayed as a girl of new generation. Her modern attitudes within the surface of traditional family show her rebellious spirit against the conventional society. Right from her childhood she refuses to observe anything without raising questions. Sona is able to sense this rebellious and questioning attitude in her daughter, “The first time Nisha was told she had to fast for her future husband. She protested. ‘Why should I? That’s for older women.’ Sona rolled her eyes. Only ten and girl was beginning to argue. She had never questioned anything for her mother asked her to do”(92).

Nisha, as a modern girl does not wish to lead her life as a slave of customs in the society. Unlike other women in Banwari Lal’s family, she is very intelligent in her studies.

She takes admission in one of the colleges near Karol Bagh and starts discovering a new world around her. She likes to live her life without any tortures of the traditional ideas. She falls in love with a low caste boy and goes with him to so many places and returns to college “feeling adventurous, daring and modern” (145). She totally becomes contradictory towards other women in the family and projects herself as an independent woman. Sona asks “Who gave you permission to cut your hair, suddenly you have become so independent, you decide things on your own. ....where did you find all these things”(150).

Manju Kapur has portrayed the character of Nisha as a voice among the silenced in the family. She does not want to confine herself with in the cage called ‘home’ and searches her happiness only outside the home. According to Simone de Beauvoir, the two prerequisites for women’s freedom are economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society. Nisha struggles to make this idea true by representing herself as an entrepreneur in order to assert her economic independence and liberation in the society though her success is refused to be acknowledged. When she repays half of the twenty-five thousand loan, Yashpal hardly accepts the achievement of his daughter in her own business. “Sometimes it occurred to him that she was more intelligent, methodical, and independent than Raju. Still, it was his duty to see that she married. Her fulfillment lay there, No matter how successful her business was” (295).

As Nissim Ezekiel in his poem ‘Enterprise’ rightly said ‘Home is where we have to gather grace’. Nisha is no exception. Her marriage with a widower Arvind restricts her freedom and individualistic attitudes as a modern woman and changes her role as an ideal house wife. Though she has crossed all the limits of traditions, she is on the verge of losing her modernity in the name of ‘marriage’ as Beauvoir said,

In marrying, woman gets some share in the world as her own, legal guarantees protect her against capricious action by man; but she becomes his vassal. He is the economic

head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name, she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle... she becomes his half...she loses some of the rights legally belonging to the unmarried woman (Beauvoir 449).

Marriage winds up her long struggle for the reconstruction of old principles, self development and individuality by introducing a new set of family principles. Like other women in the novel portrayed by Kapur, Nisha is also caught in the web of family duties and customs of the society. Thus her desire to escape from the traditional norms is failed and she, like her elders is thrust to pay honor to Indian traditions by performing her role as wife, mother and daughter-in-law in her new family.

### Works Cited

Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, Edited and translated by Parshly. Penguin Books, 1986.

*Current Indian Writing In English*. Essays and Interviews. Edited by Kanwar Dinesh Singh, Sarup Book Publishers, New Delhi, 2010.

Kapur, Manju. *Home*. Penguin Random House, India, 2006.

Kalia, Pooja. "Quest for Feminine Identity and Struggle for Change in Manju Kapur's *Home*." *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR)*, Vol.7, No.2, Feb.2018.