

NISHA'S JOURNEY FROM RESISTANCE TO SELF-DISCOVERY IN MANJU KAPUR'S HOME

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ABSTRACT

Within the boundaries of a traditional Indian joint family, Manju Kapur's Home follows the path of Nisha, a young lady negotiating gender expectations, society conventions, and personal goals. Nisha is raised in a world where male privilege controls every element of existence, having been born into a business-focused joint family. Sona, her mother, continuously reinforces traditional gender stereotypes by embodying the idealized position of a devoted wife and homemaker. Nisha internalizes the notion that her value is inferior to that of her male peers from a young age. But Nisha has a rebellious streak, unlike her mother. She raises concerns about how boys and girls are treated differently in the home. Her initial reluctance is clear from her wish for education and independence, but she is repeatedly reminded of the constraints imposed upon her as a woman. This essay explores Nisha's development from an oppressed, resistant person to an autonomous, self-aware lady. The study will examine how Nisha's journey mirrors the larger challenges faced by Indian women in patriarchal homes via the prism of feminist theory. Important topics like gender discrimination, the value of education, personal trauma, love and heartbreak, entrepreneurship, and ultimate self-actualization will all be covered.

Keywords: Feminism, Self-Discovery, Patriarchy, Resistance, Gender Roles

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the movement, feminist discourse has focused on women's subordinate status in both society and home. As a social and political movement, feminism aims to confront and eliminate the injustices that women encounter in many areas of life. Women have historically been confined to positions that prioritized domesticity and subservience due to the dominance of patriarchal institutions in society. According to Simone de Beauvoir's seminal essay, "The Second Sex," women have historically been denied autonomy and agency and viewed as the "Other," defined in reference to males. Understanding this historical background is essential to comprehend how conventional family dynamics uphold women's subordination. Renowned Indian novelist Manju Kapur is well-known for her feminist themes and strong female protagonists. The typical narrow-minded attitude towards raising a girl child in India is revealed in

the novel Home. The heroine Nisha's traumatic journey from childhood into adulthood in pursuit of self-identity is chronicled by Manju Kapur in the novel Home.

1.1. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study of Nisha's journey from resistance to self-discovery in Manju Kapur's Home is to investigate the intricate relationships between the protagonist's identity, autonomy and social expectations. Important objectives are as follows:

- To investigate how Nisha's resistance and eventual self-discovery are shaped by the cultural and socio-economic conventions portrayed in the story.
- To situate Nisha's experiences in the broader framework of Indian women's fight for autonomy and identity.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology will be used to analyze Nisha's character with particular attention paid to pivotal moments in her life that represent stages of resistance and self-discovery.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Shalini Srivastava, in her examination of Manju Kapur's novels, explores the multifaceted nature of relationships and the notion of the New Woman. The female characters in Manju Kapur's works navigate the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, exhibiting neither an unwavering adherence to convention nor a complete rejection of it. Chandra Bhushan Singh, in his analysis of Manju Kapur's novels, investigates the evolving social landscape within the context of traditional Indian society. Additionally, Dr. Farzana S. Ali, in her scholarly work, evaluates the female protagonists in Kapur's narratives, highlighting their resistance to male dominance and their refusal to be mere objects of male desire. These characters are characterized by their courage, assertiveness, resolve, and proactive nature.

The novel Home revolves around Banwari Lal, a cloth merchant situated in Karol Bagh. He is a refugee from Pakistan, who has experienced the devastation of his shop at the hands of communal forces. During the partition, he arrives in India accompanied by his son, daughter, and pregnant wife. Banwari Lal is a staunch advocate of living in a joint family. He has two sons, Yashpal and Pyarelal, and a daughter named Sunita, who is wedded to Murli, a temperamental alcoholic who mistreats her due to her inadequate dowry. The story opens with two sisters: Sona, who is attractive, and Rupa, who is less so. The lovely Sona is married to Banwari Lal's elder son, Yashpal, while Rupa is wedded to Prem Nath, a government employee of modest standing. Throughout the narrative, Rupa and Prem Nath remain childless, yet she is fortunate in that she does not have to face the scorn of her in-laws for her inability to conceive. Sona's mother-in-law occasionally remarks, "What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you." (18) Sona dutifully fulfills her responsibilities as a daughter-in-law, having been raised to love, serve, and obey her in-laws. Meanwhile, Yashpal's younger brother, Pyare Lal, married Sushila, a union that is well-received by the family as it is arranged by the parents.

Sushila arrives with an extensive dowry that includes a scooter, refrigerator, cooler, double bed, and sofa. In contrast, Sona feels a sense of inadequacy, as her own dowry from her parents was considerably less substantial. Within the predominantly patriarchal framework of traditional Hindu society, significant importance is placed on a woman's role as a mother. There exists a strong cultural inclination towards having sons, which is viewed as essential for achieving spiritual continuity and preserving the family lineage. In her quest to secure her position within the family, Sona faces challenges in conceiving. She engages in prayers, fasting, and diligently follows various rituals believed to alleviate her infertility. After a decade of marriage, Sona finally gives birth to a lovely daughter, eliciting joy from everyone, as having a girl is regarded positively in traditional households. The arrival of Nisha is celebrated, and shortly thereafter, Sona gives birth to a son named Raju, prompting further family rejoicing. Sona's mother-in-law expresses her contentment, stating, "Now I can die in peace." (41) Nisha, raised in a business-oriented joint family, grows up in an environment dominated by male privilege, which influences every facet of her life. Her mother, Sona, epitomizes the traditional role of a devoted wife and homemaker, thereby perpetuating established gender norms. From a young age, Nisha absorbs the notion that her value is subordinate to that of her male siblings. The birth of a son revitalizes Sona's sense of purpose,

leading her to treat her children unequally. Nisha does not receive the same level of maternal affection and attention necessary for her healthy development, as Sona focuses her nurturing on Raju. This gender bias results in restrictions that prevent Nisha from playing outside with her brothers. Even as a child, Nisha resents these limitations and questions the rationale behind the constraints imposed on her freedom of movement. Nisha expresses her discontent, exclaiming, "I want to go too." Her mother responds curtly, "You can't." Nisha presses further, "Why? Why can't I?" Her mother replies, "It is better for girls to stay indoors." (151) Nisha's inquiries reflect her refusal to accept her mother's directives without question. She challenges the unequal treatment of boys and girls within their home. As a girl, she is expected to maintain her fair complexion, deemed essential for her future as a bride in traditional Indian society. Although Nisha is undeniably attractive, her unfavorable horoscope complicates her prospects; she is labeled as Mangli, a designation that foretells misfortune unless she finds another with a similar fate. At the tender age of ten, Sona faces pressure to fast for her future husband, while Nisha resists, asserting that there is an appropriate age for such responsibilities. Instead of focusing on her studies, she is compelled to think about marriage. She questions, "Why should I? That's for older women" (92) expressing her reluctance to endure a day without food or water. Sona reflects on her own childhood, surprised by the audacity of a ten-year-old who dares to argue. In her own experience, Sona never questioned her mother's commands. Simone de Beauvoir discusses the intricate dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, suggesting that the mother does not see her daughter as a superior being but rather as a reflection of herself, projecting her own complexities onto her. When this 'alter ego' asserts its independence, the mother may feel a sense of betrayal. In Indian society, women have historically been confined to domestic roles, limiting their engagement with the outside world. Consequently, Nisha's initial defiance is apparent in her aspirations for autonomy, yet she continually faces reminders of the limitations imposed upon her.

Sexual abuse of a young girl within the home by a relative is a deeply concealed yet prevalent form of maltreatment. This abuse transpires when a family member partakes in inappropriate sexual conduct towards the child. The process often begins with the perpetrator fostering a close relationship with the child, such as providing preferential treatment to establish trust. The youngster is persuaded to conceal the abuse by the abuser. He might threaten to hurt the child, like in case of Nisha.

Nisha's cousin, Vicky, sexually abuses her. It affects her psychologically and mentally. She screams in her sleep. Nisha is unable to reveal the matter to anyone. Rupa believes that there is something in their home that frightens and disturbs the innocent spirit of Nisha. Rupa, her aunt, and Prem Nath, her uncle, try to talk to Nisha's father about the subject of Vicky, but no one in the family is willing to believe stories like this about Vicky, who they regard as their child. Many family members may find themselves in a state of shock, disbelief, or denial, particularly if the abuser is a family member they have always trusted. They may find it difficult to comprehend that such a transgression could take place within their own family unit. To solve this problem, Nisha is sent to Rupa's family. She feels at home with them there. Her uncle Prem Nath helps her study and spends a lot of time telling her stories and teaching lessons.

The Banwari Lal family regards the education of girls as a secondary priority. Although Nisha's educational journey begins positively at her aunt's residence, her uncle, embodying the patriarchal figure in the family, meticulously weighs the advantages and disadvantages when selecting a school for her. Factors such as distance and gender play significant roles in this decision-making process. A girls' school is deemed appropriate for providing a conventional upbringing, and it is believed that minimizing exposure to boys is in her best interest. Upon enrolling in school, Nisha excels in her examinations, revealing her natural aptitude for academics. At the age of sixteen, she is summoned back to live with her family to look after her grandmother. Once home, her mother, Sona, begins to instruct her on the qualities of being a good wife. Sona believes that education holds little value for a girl from a trading family, as her ultimate goal is to marry and raise children. The traditional mother desires her daughter to emulate her, prioritizing domestic responsibilities over academic pursuits. Sona is taken aback to find that Nisha's culinary skills are lacking. "How will you manage in your future home?" she questions. Nisha promptly responds, "Auntie said there is always time to learn cooking, but only one chance to study." (125) She attempts to defend herself, her aunt, and her upbringing. Despite the challenges at home, Nisha successfully completes her board exams in Humanities with a commendable seventy percent. In spite of societal limitations, Nisha is granted the opportunity to pursue higher education, which becomes a pivotal moment in her life. College introduces her to fresh ideas, new friendships, and an expanded perspective, fueling her aspiration for independence. Education instills in her the confidence to envision a future that transcends marriage and household responsibilities, setting her apart from her mother and other women in the family. She yearns for a life in which she can make her own choices, signifying a significant shift in her aspirations.

Patriarchy has a huge effect on caste-based love, posing major obstacles for people, especially women. To maintain caste purity and family honor, patriarchal traditions in caste-based communities impose stringent restrictions on women's choices, including who they can marry or associate with. Women's autonomy in romantic relationships and marriage is severely curtailed, and they are viewed as the guardians of communal identity. Nisha aspires to spend her life like her aunt rather than her mother. Nisha joins Durga Bai College for her English honors. In college, she falls in love with Suresh Kumar, an engineering student, but they cannot be married in nuptials because of social conventions and hurdles. Since Suresh is from a lower caste and cannot possibly marry Nisha, her family forbids her from leaving the house when they learn of her affair. Nisha says, "Who cares about castes these days?" in support of Suresh. "What you really want is to sell me in the market." (199). Nisha suffers in silence because she is not able to share her private sorrows with her mother. She wants Suresh to declare his undying love, defy prejudice and authority. But Suresh does not give any response. Though she controls her sorrow, she is not able to forget Suresh. The family advises her, "once you get married you can feel hot and cold as you like...Marriage into a family will enable you and your children to live comfortably for the rest of your life." (200).

Nisha's unfortunate circumstances persist, as her initial marriage proposal collapses due to her previous association with Suresh. This setback incites resentment from her mother, who exclaims, "Are you satisfied, Madam? This is the result of your wandering. This is how people speak. Are you content with our disgrace?" (221).

In traditional patriarchal societies, physical blemishes such as scars or rashes on a young girl's body are often perceived as flaws that severely impact her prospects for marriage. A girl bearing visible marks frequently elicits pity and indifference from society, as she is regarded as less desirable in the matrimonial arena. Consequently, her worth is unjustly diminished, and her family may endure societal pressure or stigma, with others questioning her suitability for a good match. The girl frequently finds herself compelled to make significant compromises in her life, such as entering into a marriage with someone considerably older, previously divorced, or in a less advantageous financial or social situation. These unions are often perceived as arrangements rather than partnerships of equals. Within her family, she may face marginalization or subtle neglect, as her perceived shortcomings affect the family's honor or social standing. A profound sense of guilt, deeply rooted in Nisha's psyche, manifests as a skin condition known as eczema. Her skin becomes itchy, inflamed, and prone to bleeding. Substantial resources and time are devoted to various treatments, not to alleviate Nisha's suffering, but to restore her beauty, thereby enhancing her prospects for marriage.

Nisha experiences profound loneliness while remaining idle at home, a feeling that threatens to overwhelm her. She yearns to work in the family shop alongside her brothers. She implores her father, stating, "If only you could take me with you, Papaji," and adds, "I have observed girls working in shops. Why should it only be Ajay, Vijay, and Raju? Surely, there is something I can contribute as well." (267) This statement underscores her deep desire for independence and self-identity, as she perceives herself as equal to her brothers. In response to her plea, her father permits her to enroll in a nearby play school. However, Nisha quickly becomes disillusioned with the children there and resigns from her position. This situation exemplifies a woman's submission to societal expectations. Nisha is forced to conform to a profession that does not align with her aspirations. Working in a shop is often deemed inappropriate for women. Nevertheless, Nisha challenges the prevailing social norms and, with her father's support, establishes her own business—a boutique named Nisha Creations. For the first time, she experiences a sense of pride, feeling that her father has placed his trust in her as he would have in a son. This endeavor serves not only as a pathway to financial autonomy but also as a statement of her capability to thrive outside the confines of marriage. She engages a tailor on a monthly basis and procures materials for suits from her father's establishment. With a steady influx of significant orders, she rises to prominence as a successful businesswoman in the Karol Bagh market. Within a year, she repays half of the loan she took from her father. She diligently monitors her workers, and when she is unavailable, she relies on her mother, Sona, to oversee them. By building a successful enterprise, Nisha challenges the perception that a woman's worth is solely defined by her roles as a spouse and mother. This chapter of her life marks her evolution from a passive victim to an active catalyst for change.

Despite her accomplishments, the pressure from her family to marry persists unabated. Ultimately, she consents to an arranged marriage with Arvind, a man from a prosperous background. Nevertheless, her decision to marry is not an act of capitulation but rather a practical choice. Unlike previous situations where she felt compelled to acquiesce, Nisha approaches this marriage on her own terms, ensuring that her independence remains intact. Her union illustrates the intricate dynamics of women's liberation within traditional frameworks. While she adheres to societal expectations, she does so with a reinforced sense of self, demonstrating that her journey has been meaningful. A month after their

marriage, she becomes pregnant. Despite her desire to visit the shop during her pregnancy, her mother-in-law and husband oppose her plans to go out. In the end, Nisha gives birth to twins—a son and a daughter—thereby achieving the goals set forth by her marriage. Finally, her sister-in-law, Pooja, takes over her business.

4. CONCLUSION

Nisha's transformation is characterized not by overt defiance but by a subtle affirmation of her identity. Her experience illustrates that self-discovery often involves a delicate balance, where both resistance and conformity can coexist. She neither entirely escapes nor fully submits to patriarchal conventions but instead carves out a space for herself within them. Her narrative stands as a testament to the resilience of women who navigate restrictive structures, discovering ways to assert their agency while still honoring familial obligations. Nisha's journey in *Home* encapsulates the challenges faced by many women in traditional Indian societies. From her early acts of defiance to her eventual self-actualization, her story serves as a poignant reflection on gender roles and personal agency.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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