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NISHA, THE PROTAGONIST'S STUGGLE AGAINST STRICT CODE OF CONDUCT FOR WOMEN BY MALE-ORIENTED SOCIETY IN INDIAN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL 'HOME'

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Abstract: *Manju Kapur is a new name among the post-colonial writers. But her novels have earned a great name for her in the world of contemporary Indian fiction. Like the other women novelists, she has also focused her attention on the problems of women under the norms framed by male oriented society. Therefore, she presents her woman protagonists fighting against old taboos, strict code of conduct, restrictions of old conventions and gender discrimination. Woman in Indian middle-class family still, has to rebel for her social and economic emancipation. She has suffered a lot under the heavy burden of old norms, traditions and rituals. In spite of her long suffering, she has not given up her urge for self-identity, self respect, liberty and empowerment in the family as well as in the society. Indian woman is no more a poor creature dependent on the mercy of man.*

Key Words: post-colonial writers, contemporary, novelists, norms framed, oriented society, society.

Though the novel 'Home' presents a minute study in the life style of a middle class Joint family in India, presenting a complete picture of a joint family with its merits and demerits pleasure and pains, disputes arising from small matters, and life's security to all the members of the family because of large number of persons in the family, But there is someone in the family who feels suffocating in an atmosphere of old traditions and strict code of conduct for women as Sona, the mother of Nisha tells her "It is better for girls to remain inside" (P. 51) Nisha does not like the narrowness of ideas in her family, so she goes to stay with her aunt Rupa who is broad minded and far away from the traditional thinking. Her husband too believes in openness and encourages Nisha for her education while her mother always stalks of her marriage which Nisha does not like. She has been revolting since her childhood and does not believe in superstitions and old conventions which hamper the progress in life of young girls. Her mother Sona always tries to convince her to have faith in old rituals and traditions as that of keeping fast for girls. Nisha is very bold to reject all arguments of her mother even Rupa her aunt does not like her sister's attitudes

"There was an age for everything, and when the child should be thinking of studies, she was forcing her to think of husbands." Nisha is very much impressed by her aunt's broad-mindedness Rupa's husband also cares very much for Nisha's study. Nisha feels tired of her mother's traditional thinking as she is worried for the marriage of Nisha and does not care for her career. Rupa and Sona are quite different in thinking Rupa wants that Nisha should go ahead through her education but Sona wants to train Nisha in house-hold affairs as she tells her sister Rupa- "We are old fashioned people tradition is strong with us, so is duty." Nisha has to come back to her mother unwillingly "After eleven years Nisha returned home to assume her place as a daughter of the house .. now there was less interest in her school... Her mother discovered to her horror that at sixteen Nisha's cooking skills were negligible. Nisha discovered to her horror that her mother's idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time anybody else."

Nisha's aunt Rupa and her husband visit Sona's house just to see how Nisha is adjusting in that traditional and suffocating atmosphere in which there is nothing talked about except Nisha's training to enable her to perform her household duties. It is only Rupa and her husband who support the views of Nisha who has to fight against the old conventions.

Nisha after passing her board examination is admitted to college, but not for the sake of higher education and make her career, but for her family it was a just a time pass"-

"it was not as though she was going to use her education, working was out of the question and marriage



was around the career"

During her journey from home to college, she happens to meet a boy every day in the bus. Gradually the boy named Suresh begins to talk to her. In the beginning it was confined to formal talks, but the everyday meeting in the bus brought them closer and closer to each other. Their formal meetings converted into love affair and they began to meet in a coffee-house. Nisha began to miss her classes. They sometimes meet in a room which is arranged by Suresh. Now they begin to talk of their marriage. But Suresh tells about his parents not being rich enough on this Nisha tells him-

"Haven't I told you my parents did love marriage they are not narrow minded."

Nisha is bold enough and therefore she is ready to marry Suresh and encourages him to proceed in this matter by asking his parents to talk to her parents. Nisha lets her aunt Rupa know about her affair with Suresh and her plan to marry him when Rupa asks if she knows everything about his family. Nisha very boldly answers her aunt Rupa which stuns her-

"How does it matter? It is him I want to marry, not his family."

Nisha tells her family everything about Suresh and makes her intention clear to marry him in spite of his belonging to a different caste. She boldly tells "Either I marry him or no body". Hearing his decision, her parents arrange a meeting between Nisha & Suresh, though they have already met the parents of Suresh. Suresh tells Nisha that if her parents do not agree for this marriage, he will withdraw, but Nisha is bent upon marrying him. Rupa remains present in this meeting on another table, but hearing the whole conversation between Nisha and Suresh concludes -

'From this Rupa gathered that Suresh was weak. It was Nisha's will that was pushing the whole thing'.

But on the other hand, Nisha was not ready to hear any argument against her will. She tells Rupa very boldly "they can't force me to marry some one I don't want to".

Nisha does not care for her family while Suresh fears her family as they are rich people. But Nisha encourages him and assures that she will convince her family. She is not a timid girl rather much courageous and bold to break all ties of her family. She loves Suresh by the core of her heart. She cannot forget him even for a moment. She cannot focus her mind on her study even during her examination. In her focus is the idea of marrying Suresh-

"Oh Suresh, if we could marry, these demons will vanish...Don't be afraid of my family-oncemy examinations are over, we will talk to them, fight them, run away if necessary."

Thus, we find that Nisha is really far away from being chained in the shackles of old taboos and strict code of conduct made by male dominance. She is bold, awakened, believing in the idea of self-identity. She believes that every woman should have a right to take decisions of her own life. There is a strong urge in her for self-recognition and empowerment. She seems to represent the novelist's opinion regarding the liberty and self-identity for women in the modern time. Nisha's intensity of love could not win over the timidity of Suresh. He finally broke up her heart by saying "My family is not agreeing (213). Even after her meeting with Suresh, she tries to contact Suresh, but he is never available and thus finally "Suresh had vanished from her life and there was nothing she could do."

Thus, Nisha's break up with Suresh was a soothing moment for the family, but at the same time there was question of finding a suitable match for Nisha who was Manglik and secondary she has become quite aged. Now there was the question of the marriage of Raju her younger brother. But a younger brother cannot marry before an elder sister as people will presume so many doubts like "there was something wrong with the girl and it would ruin her chances for ever" (242). But Raju's marriage was settled as Sona considered a big dowry in his marriage. Nisha's skin got an infection and it stood as a big problem in her marriage. All type of treatments were taken, Nisha took up



the job of a teacher just to keep busy. But she was getting late for marriage. Where Raju was married and his wife became pregnant. Nisha felt a sense of frustration that all persons in the family had been living their lives in their way except she as "where was her life going to begin" (273). Nisha was bold enough to take decision of leaving home as she could not bear that she should be ignored in the family. She tells her aunt Rupa -

"I am fed up Masi, I will go to an Asram and devote myself to homeless widow".

Nisha does not accept defeat in her life and she thinks of starting her own business instead of working as a teacher. She tells her parents that like Rupa Masi she will start her own business-

"I want to make salwar suits. If it does not succeed, I will go back to teaching. I promise, only give me a year".

Her father warns her of all type of risk in business, but Nisha does not lose heart and boldly accepts all challenges of her business. Her boldness and daring spirit can be seen in this lines -

"She would no longer be the poor unmarried sister, not allowed to touch the baby or any other that might come".

On the other hand her parents are also in search of a boy for her marriage. At one place talks are finalized as the boy is also manglik, but a widower who easily accepts Nisha. Therefore, Nisha's mother wants that Nisha should give up the idea of starting her business but Nisha rejects every argument of her parents and -

"She vowed she would return every paisa to him, she had thirty days in which to generate enough income to pay next months rent."

Nisha successfully runs her business boldly and pays half of the amount of the loan. She is perfectly devoted to her work 'Nisha Creation' the name given to her show-room and collections of suits. The talks of marriage are already in discussion and the meeting with the proposed boy and his family is fixed but Nisha is not ready to yield and accept all the condition of that family. How bold and frank she is to say -

"If I am going to marry him, I should be able to say what I like."

This statement of Nisha speaks volumes of her boldness and awakening. She does not conceal anything like a shy girl who yields easily to every condition of the boy, the would be husband. Nisha's boldness and frank speaking is an example for the girls in traditional middle class families in India. She lives her life in her own way. Her life would have been happier if Suresh her boy friend too had been as bold as Nisha. She is always occupied with the idea of her business which she had started before her marriage and she made it a condition to look after her business even after her marriage Nisha asks her husband to inform her mother about his visit to her father's place to see how her business is going on. When her husband asks Nisha to ask her mother-in-law Nisha very boldly replies "can't you inform her?" (323) At her husband's asking her mother who remains silent. "Still Nisha went, but without the support that would have made her comfortable and secure. She saw every inch of the way to Karol Bagh...."

Even after her marriage, she has to fight for her right and liberty. She does not want to spend her life in slavery of her husband and mother-in-law. She wants to live like a liberal woman working according to her will, though she has perfect respect for her mother-in-law. She is very careful about her business. Her husband's little indifference irritates her. It can be seen in the following lines :-

"if you are never going to talk or share things with me why don't you take me back to my mother's house? You have done your duty, married and made me pregnant, when the baby is born you can collect it."

So, it is obvious to note that Nisha is not a timid girl like other girls who accept everything of their husband supposing it as their lot. Nisha is bold enough to speak frankly what she has in her heart. Her boldness is a lesson and a message to all the women that marriage does not deprive them of their rights of living freely, a life of liberty from all traditional narrow thinking. Besides her boldness and courage, she is gifted with all qualities of a cultured woman. She wins the heart of her mother-in-law who develops boundless love for Nisha.



Thus, Niha is a loving creation of Manju Kapur's Novel 'Home'. She comes up as a new woman perfectly awakened for her rights and identity. She compromises with the situation that arises after giving birth to twins. She is an intelligent girl who finds her home' which she makes sweet by her wisdom and understanding. She does not yield to what is wrong or narrow.

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