

## **CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN HOME (2006) BY MANJU KAPUR**

**Dr. Nand Kumar**

*Principal & Professor*

*SSSS (P.G.) College Rasna, Meerut*

**Nitin Sharma**

*Research Scholar*

*SSSS (P.G.) College Rasna, Meerut*

*Email: sharmamonika1290das1@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*Manju Kapur is a well-known PostColonial writer in the realm of Indian English fiction. There are many controversial issues that she has raised in her works, and the conflict between tradition and modernity is one of them. The raison d'être of this conflict is the contradictory opinions on the same problem. In-Home, Nisha, the protagonist of the novel, is the chief target of these two opposing viewpoints. In a patriarchal family, Nisha had to struggle for her basic rights - like education, identity, and freedom to marry and to do business. She succeeds in all but fails to marry her lover because of his lackadaisical approach towards Nisha.*

### **Keywords**

*Post Colonial, Raison d'être, Protagonist, Patriarchy, Lackadaisical.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**Received: 26.08.2022**

**Approved: 21.09.2022**

**Dr. Nand Kumar,  
Nitin Sharma**

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**Article No.36**

*RJPSS Apr.-Sept. 2022,*

*Vol. XLVII No. 2,*

*pp. 328-333*

*Similarity Check: 0%*

**Online available at:**

<https://anubooks.com/rjpss-2022-vol-xlvii-no-2/>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpss.2022.v47i02.036>

The conflict between the old and the new is one of the major themes of modern literature. Manju Kapur's novels are no exception to it. There are characters in her novels who stick to the old ways of life, uphold their sanctity, and do not like the idea of parting with them at any cost. On the contrary, there are others, who are more progressive, wilful or utilitarian, they judge everything on the basis of utility and convenience; and if they find any tradition a hindrance in their way, they easily go against it. These contradictory opinions — blind faith — are the to traditions and adaptation to new situations for practical purposes cause of conflict between tradition and modernity. Dr: Shaleen Kumar Singh

Comments in this regard, "In fact 'the impact of these diverse developments' resulted in a dichotomy of Tradition and Modernity. The people who harp on the string of values based on ancient scriptures and customs (that have been too stale or worn out to follow now), were termed as 'traditionalists' and the people who, revolted against such 'customs' and 'traditions' and made and moved on their own paths with the ideologies of their own were known as 'Modernists.'" (Singh 10-11) Kapur's novel *Home* abounds in the instances of conflict between tradition and modernity. This novel narrates the tale of the Banwari Lal family, which consisted of the patriarch, Banwari Lal and his wife, his two sons Yashpal and Pyare Lal, and their spouses, Sona and Sushila respectively. In the third generation, there are Nisha and Raju, the daughter and son of Yashpal and Sona; and it is Nisha who is the protagonist of the novel. Besides these characters, there is Rupa, the sister of Sona, who is married to Prem Nath, an underpaid government servant.

Nisha, the protagonist of *Home*, is a middle-class woman who is trapped between tradition and modernity. In a patriarchal family, Nisha had to struggle for her basic rights of education, quest for identity, and freedom to marry. As a young girl Nisha wants to lead an independent life, but everywhere she finds herself in chains. The restrictions imposed on her by her family are too much for her. Nisha's mother Sona is always desirous to teach her daughter the traditional virtues of a young girl. Sona is the custodian of traditional values, while Nisha wants to break the shackles of age-old traditions. Dr. Sulakshna Sharma Comments in this regard, "Her female characters are educated; and, are stuck between modernity and tradition. They challenge the stifling social conventions. They are rebels that go on to prove that they are capable enough to break the patriarchal fetters of conservative society, if pressed beyond the limits of their patience." (Sharma 1)

In her childhood, Nisha was sexually molested by Vicky, the son of her father's sister, and she was highly distracted by this incident. For the sake of diversion and change of place, she was sent to live in the house of her Rupa Masi. It was here

that Nisha's early education took place. Even during this period of childhood, Nisha's mother insisted that her daughter should visit her parental home from time to time so that she can be groomed in the traditions of the Banwari Lal family. When Nisha was only ten, she was asked by her mother to observe fast for her future husband. Nisha protested and said, "Why should I? That's for older women." (Home-92) Sona has a deep faith in traditions, and remarks sarcastically, "How are you going to get married, madam, if you do not make sacrifices?" (Home-92) The female members of the house compel Nisha to undertake the fast.

As an educated girl, Nisha questions the logic behind such fasts but fails to get any satisfactory answer from any quarter. The next day, returning to her aunt's house, and learning that her aunt does not observe the Karva Chauth fast, Nisha tries to know its cause. Rupa replies, "You think the whole world fasts for their husbands? Really, that sister of hers needed her head examined. There was an age for everything, and when the child should be thinking of studies, she was forcing her to think of husbands". (Home 95) Although, as a second thought, keeping the peculiar situation of her sister in mind, Rupa adds politely, "Your mother has to follow the traditions of her family. Besides, your uncle does not believe in fasting. If I don't eat, he won't either." (Home 95) These contradictory remarks of Rupa justify Hamlet's assertion "for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." (Hamlet 250)

Sona as a traditionalist woman has no faith in the proper education of a girl, and regards culinary skills as her sole accomplishment. On the contrary, Prem Nath and Rupa give greater importance to studies. When Nisha returns to her parental home after eleven years, Sona felt frustrated at the negligible culinary skills of Nisha. Traditionally, cooking has been the main domain of womenfolk, and Sona cannot think beyond that. She is thoroughly Tennysonian in this regard; if a girl does not know the art of cooking, 'All else (is) confusion' for her. While, there is Rupa who wants that Nisha should excel in her studies. Defending herself, her aunt, and her upbringing, Nisha says, "Masi said there is always time to learn cooking, but only one time to study." (Home 125) Sona curtly replies, "That Masi of yours has ruined your head. What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful for her entire life". (Home 125) Right and wrong are absolute terms and a perfect poise of mind is required while dealing with them. Dr. Shaleen Kumar Singh rightly comments in this regard, "The conflict of Tradition Versus Modernity is deliberately not settled by Manju Kapur as this is still a debatable and an unanswered question among academics whether who is right and who is wrong, in our society yet it is beyond doubt that the one (woman) who raises a voice against odds has to suffer

and the one who surrenders will definitely have to suffer admitting it as their misfortune.” (Singh 14)

1. After the completion of school education, Nisha was allowed to take admitted to Durga Bai College for far higher studies. But her family regarded it as merely the period for the preparation for marriage. While traveling from her home to DBC, Nisha met a young boy named Suresh, and both express their undying love for each other. Suresh advises Nisha to get her hair cut according to the latest fashion, and she acts accordingly, but it created a lot of hue and cry in her family. In a patriarchal family, a girl is not empowered to take independent decisions even about her own hairstyle, she has to seek the permission of her parents. The novelist aptly comments about the reaction of Nisha’s parents,” Who gave you permission to cut your hair, suddenly •you have become so independent, you decide things on your own, where did you find the money, the time, the beauty parlor, where did you find all these things ?” (Home 149-150) These curiosities reveal the dictatorial attitude of a patriarchal family which regards a girl merely as a puppet in their hands.

As the love affair between Nisha and Suresh continues to develop without any interruption, they ultimately decide to marry. As it is said that the course of true love never does run smooth, so there were several social and religious hindrances in their union. Socially, Suresh belonged to the Paswan caste which is a low caste in social hierarchy, and his social status was far below the Banwari Lal family. There was a religious obstacle also, Nisha was a Manglik and according to ecclesiastical canons, a Manglik girl can marry a Manglik boy only. Despite these hindrances, the lovers decide to broach this topic with Nisha’s parents, and Suresh is entitled to do this job. Accordingly, Suresh visited Nisha’s father at his shop and expressed his desire to marry Nisha. Reaching home, Yashpal ironically congratulates his daughter for finding her life partner. Nisha’s brother Raju was also beside himself, and says angrily, “Has she been seeing a boy? I will break his legs.” (Home -175) Sona also says, “This girl will be our death.” (Home 175) Nisha vainly tries to remind her parents about their own love marriage, but she is silenced due to caste and social considerations. Her parents advised her, “Nisha, dear daughter, leave all thoughts of this dirty low-caste man, what can he give you compared to what we can arrange for you?” (Home 199) But, due to the indifferent attitude toward Suresh, Nisha ultimately ends up marrying a widower of her parent’s choice. About this unique trait

of Kapur's protagonists, Dr. Shalini Srivastava rightly comments, "Her female protagonists are strong women with indomitable wills. They follow tradition yet are modern in their outlook. In their struggle to search and discover their real self they at times adjust, succumb and follow while at other times they strive to move on their own path, take their own independent decisions, and shape their lives the way they feel best and emerge as a modern women." (Srivastava 107-108).

2. Another cause of conflict between tradition and modernity is Nisha's desire to do business. After the end of her love affair with Suresh, Nisha was highly perplexed. She earnestly requests her father to start some business in order to alleviate her feelings of loneliness. This request of Nisha created an uproar among the womenfolk because they pay greater attention to traditions in comparison to men. Nisha's mother and her Sushila Chachi, the wife of Pyare Lal, were highly critical of this plan. Nisha's mother said, "She is going to get married, why waste time and money. in all this?" (Home 289) Sushila was equally censorious and questions Nisha's propriety of starting a business, "Why was Nisha being allowed to do business? If tomorrow her daughter-in-law upped and said they wanted to do the same, what face would she have to refuse? And what about the money? Would what she earned be her own, or go back to the family, as in the case of the sons." (Home 289) this hue and cry are because of the fact that the unmarried girls rarely foray into the field of business, and traditionally, trade has been men's domain. However, when Nisha is given the chance to start her own work, she manages her affairs well, and breaks the myth of men's superiority in the field of business.

In brief, tradition versus modernity is a perennial social issue, and it is a lot of humanity to select either of the two ways of life. The female protagonists of Manju Kapur have a marked preference for modern ways of life. Her protagonists challenge the stifling social conventions and make the heroic struggle to come out of them.

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