

GENDER ROLE CONSTRUCTION AND GIRL'S CONDITIONING IN MANJU KAPUR'S HOME

Abstract:-

Manju Kapur has left her own mark on contemporary Indian English novel. She has won a reputation as a frank and sensitive chronicler of the lives of Indian middle-class families and, above all, their women members. Being a feminist she is aware of the fact that, women under the patriarchal pressure is subjected to social ostracism. They are biased in lien of their sex and are discriminated. In Indian patriarchal society, a man heads the family and holds the rein of power in his hands. Women internalize patriarchy's notions about themselves and remain obedient, self-sacrificing devoting their self for the service of others. This internalization leads women especially mothers to become patriarchy's agent and groom their

daughters to internalize features of so called 'good woman'. All her novels depict this oppressive mechanism of a closed society. In her third novel Home, Kapur talks openly about oppression, sexual abuse and gender discrimination that occur in joint family. It is about the family of Banwari Lal, the shop owner, his sons Yashpal and Pyarelal and their wives and children and it explores the world of joint families and destructive limitations of Indian family values. The protagonist Nisha learns her life-lessons from her early childhood. Sona, her mother always tries to mould her in feminine virtues.

Keywords:

Construction And Girl's Conditioning , Social Ostracism , Achievement.



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INTRODUCTION :-

Gender is a social construct that contains cultural aspects, the concept of nurture, and the ideologies governing feminine/masculine, appearances, actions, and behaviors. To state an example of these gender roles, males are supposed to be the educated breadwinners of the family, and occupiers of the public sphere whereas, the female's duty is to be a homemaker, take care of her husband and children, and occupy the private sphere.

From the time of birth itself, infants of both sexes are conditioned by parental and other adult responses to behave, think, act, and interact in gender-specific role manifestations. There are different traits and attributes that males and females are socialized to accept as their own in society. Girls, for the most part are encouraged to be cooperative, compassionate, caring, and nurturing; largely in preparation for roles as wife and mother. Boys, in contrast, are socialized toward independence, assertiveness, competition, and achievement; they are often expected to suppress their emotions and feelings, especially ones that are tender or relate to vulnerability. Thus, gender role classification begins at birth and continues throughout one's lifetime. William J. Goode, in *The Family*, says,

“What begins in infancy continues through the years. For generations, girls have been praised for their maternal behavior with dolls and boys were told they were sissies if they showed the same behavior” (1989:75).

Girls and boys behave differently because they are reared or conditioned differently. In India, traditionally women are taught to remain obedient to man, citing examples from myths, stories, rituals, conventions, beliefs and laws which depict and reiterate that woman is inferior and subservient to man. So also in the family parents instruct girl-children to serve to the male members of the family without a word objection. Thus girl-children internalize the inferiority. The attributes of the masculine and feminine are constituted through gender paradigms which is to give a sense of identity to the individual in a society.

In *Home* Sona is a mother with traditional thinking. Nisha is Sona's precious daughter born to her after ten years of bareness. From her early childhood Nisha is taught to preserve her clothes and complexion. Sona denies her to go out in the sun to play. From her early childhood Nisha is conditioned by Sona as a girl. The following dialogue between the two emphasizes the gendered attitude. When Raju, Nisha's younger brother goes out to play Nisha insists:

“I want to go too.”
 “You can't;” said mother shortly.
 “Why? Why can't I?”
 “It is better for girls to remain inside”
 “Why?”
 “You will get black and dirty...you will look like sweeper woman who comes to the house. You want to look like a kali bhainsi?”...
 “Now how can you be like me if you get dirty and black playing in the sun?
 Who will want to marry you?” (Kapur: 51-52)

Every evening Nisha is dressed up in lacy frilled frocks, with matching socks and shoes hairs combed into ponytails with multi-colored bands. Nisha wants to play in the park when she watches boys playing cricket with enthusiasm and excitement. Unfortunately her outfits do not match her inclinations. She is reconciled to preserve her clothes and complexion by playing board games with her grandmother.

On Rupa's request Sona sends Nisha to her house when she has nightmares and refuses to eat anything. The reason for which is that the child is shocked after getting sexually abused by her cousin Vicky. Every weekend Nisha spend with her own family. Sona insists her daughter come home to be groomed in the traditions of the Banwari Lal household. At the age of ten Nisha has been told to fast for her future husband. When Nisha protest she rolls her eyes and tells her she herself never questioned anything her mother asked her to do.

Sona makes Nisha to stay home from school to learn how to be good wife. According to Sona she has to sacrifice to get marry and since she is 'Mangli' she has to start it from an early age. She asks Nisha:

“What kind of wife are you going to make; if you can't bear to fast one day a year for your husband?” (Kapur: 92)

Adhering to the religious scriptures and cultural norms girls are encouraged to walk on a chalked

path. The stories and myths and their morals are narrated to prepare her for her role as an ideal wife, imbibing the qualities of self-sacrifice, empathy, tolerance and nurturing.

After eleven years Nisha returns home from her aunt Rupa's, her mother is horrified to discover that, at sixteen, Nisha's cooking skills are negligible. Nisha in turn also found that her mother's idea of a daughter is one who helps her every time anybody ate. Sona thinks it is not study but cooking which will be useful for girl in her entire life. Sona is worried to find Nisha could not peel off potatoes or cut the ginger quickly. "How will you manage in your future home?" Sona asks Nisha. Her ideas about woman express her traditional thinking:

"This is the life of a woman: to look after her home, her husband, her children, and give them food she has cooked with her own hands." (Kapur: 126)

Sona thinks Rupa has spoilt Nisha. She is useless and good for nothing. Sona has to teach her everything from start. Sona asks Nisha,

"Now quickly cut up cucumbers for the salad – here – do it like this, rub the top take out the bitter, then wash, then peel, then slice, do the same with onions, tomatoes, and green chilies." (Kapur: 125)

Along with attention to her culinary skills, Sona takes special care to include her daughter in all her *Pujas*. Her attempt is to make up for negligent upbringing. Nisha needs to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. She expects her daughter shine brightly in the art of service and domesticity. She makes Nisha to listen 'Vat Savitri Katha' and says to her,

"This is what you must be like." (Kapur: 133)

In Indian society, we see girls are trained in household skills and serving other's needs from late childhood, as they are prepared to be 'ideal' women. As Sudhir Kakkar points out,

"Late childhood marks the beginning of an Indian girls deliberate training in how to be a good woman and hence the conscious inculcation of culturally designed feminine roles. She learns that the 'virtues' of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in the various household tasks." (1981 : 62)

During Vijay's wedding preparations Sona pays special attention to Nisha's clothes. Nisha is now seventeen,

"It was time that clothes were engaged to do their job properly, to set off her looks, as hers had been done so many years ago at a wedding in Delhi." (Kapur: 136)

In conditioning the girl child women, especially mothers show concern in encouraging their daughters to follow the stereotypes. The myths of Parvati, Sita and Savitri are repeated to inculcate the traditional image of women, which leads to selfless behavior and in turn, to insensitivity to injustice. Like Kasturi in *Difficult daughters* and Sita in *A Married Woman*, Sona wants her daughter, Nisha to absorb the tradition and to learn how to be a good wife. She insists Nisha to fast for her future husband and becomes angry when she protests against it. Again, it is daughter's marriage that worries her and here in case of Nisha her being mangli makes Sona more anxious and she insists Nisha to keep Karva Chaut fast and to do the Vat Savitri Puja. She asks Nisha to listen to Vat Savitri Katha, "See, this is what you must be like." (Kapur: 133) "How are you going to get married, madam if u do not make sacrifices?" "I don't want to marry." Mumbles Nisha. "Who will look after you if you don't marry? (Kapur: 92)

When on her lover Suresh's prompting Nisha cut her thick hair like Suriya, Sona becomes furious over her. Nisha, who according to her mother become so independent and without permission took the decision to cut her hair and spend money and time in the beauty parlor. Sona cannot bear her daughter crossing the threshold or beating the tradition. When Nisha's affair with Suresh is discovered and Nisha in protecting herself says to her mother that she also had love marriage Sona bursts out,

"This girl will be our death. My child, born after ten years, tortures me like this. Thank god your grandfather is not alive. What face will I show upstairs? Vijay gets his wife from fancy furnishing while my daughter goes to the street for her." (Kapur: 197)

Nisha's skin declines due to the skin disease and this becomes another hurdle in addition to her being a 'mangli' in her marriage prospect. Sona makes her daughter to wear two dozens of bangles on each arm, to protect the world from the sight of her scars. Sona does not empathies her daughter's misery all she is worried about her marriage. On the evening of the visit of Nisha's one of the suitors, Sona gives Nisha to wear a Banarasi silk with gold threadwork ignoring that her daughter's hidden lesions prickle in alarm. When Nisha protested,

“I'll die in it,” her mother scold her, “Once you get married you can feel hot and cold as you like.” (Kapur: 218)

Sona does not grant Nisha permission to do a course in fashion designing. She tells her,

“Once you are married, and in your own home, you can do what you in-laws think fit.” (Kapur: 227)

In the novel, Nisha being educated emerges as spirited new woman and refuses to be treated as an object. She wants to create her own identity and doesn't want to trap her entire life within the four walls of home like other women in her family. She requests her father Yashpal; “If only you could take with you, Papaji,” she pleaded in a rush, “I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do”. (Kapur: 267) Her father chooses for her job as a teacher thinking 'It will be a good time pass'. (Kapur: 268-269) Nisha is not satisfied being a teacher and persuades her father to allow her to do business like her aunt Rupa. She gets an idea to start business of salwar-suits. With this innovative idea, she demands a year from her father to prove her ability. She pleads: “Give me a chance to show you what I can do” (Kapur:287). She pleads her father “I know I can do a better job, please Papaji, please, if you could help Rupa Masi why can't you help me?”(Kapur: 285)

Sona agrees Yashpal's decision to allow Nisha work as a teacher with the thought that when she married she could leave her job but when Nisha want to start her own business. Sona is not pleased and says,

“She is going to get married, why waste time and money in all this? (Kapur: 289)

Nisha could not forgive her mother for this statement. Later when Nisha establishes herself as a successful businesswoman, she declares that she would marry only with a person who or whose family would let her work. Sona objects Nisha's decision. According to her, working is all right as a time pass, but if her daughter starts making conditions, who would marry her? Nisha astonishingly make success in her salwar suit business. Her father found her more intelligent, methodical and independent than her brother Raju. But it was his duty to see his daughter married.

At last, Nisha's marriage is fixed with a widower in his early thirties, the similar mangli named Arvind. They get registered marriage and Nisha gets entrapped into the inescapable cage of 'Home'. As pointed out by Clara Nubile in *Danger of Gender* (2003).

“Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of, 'being a woman-wife-mother',” (Clara: 12).

Nisha also gets entrapped into her own home and cares for mother-in- law. When she becomes pregnant, all family members ask her to leave her work. On Rupa masi's advice she handovers her business to Pooja on condition not to use her name and spoil her fame thinking she can resurrect it again in the future. “But this time with your baby, this will not come again”(Kapur:334). After ten months of her marriage, Nisha delivers twin- one girl and one boy. Now in the midst of her family in her own home, she, while playing the roles of daughter-in-law, wife; and mother, is very happy and satisfied.

Thus, Kapur in her writing endeavors to comprehend and dismantle the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender discrimination. Born and brought up in Indian middle class family in metropolis, Nisha finds herself a victim of gender-biased Indian socio- cultural ethos. Kapur shows Nisha at the end emerged out as a successful businesswoman and thus seems to conceive Judith Butler's idea of gender as performance. According to Butler, the meaning of gender depends on the cultural framework within which it is performed, and hence it defies fixities and universalities, because gender is a continuous performance, acquiring new meaning with each repeated performances or citations depending on the context in which it occurs. Butler sees gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does. Furthermore, she sees it not as a social imposition on a gender neutral body, but rather as a mode of "self-making" through which subjects become socially intelligible. Butler says:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. (Gender Trouble: 33, italics mine)

In different contexts Nisha performs her role as a daughter, beloved, businesswoman, wife and mother. Kapur seems to pronounce, like Butler, the idea that the bodies are sexed and inscribed with socio-cultural gender norms.

Nisha reveals so called masculine abilities when she emerges as a business woman. She tackles every problem on her own. She proves herself to be dashing and dares in decision making and becomes self-assured woman.

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