
Theme Of Caste Endogamy And Women In Manju Kapur's Home

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Abstract:

Marriages in traditional Indian families are arranged on set rules of caste Endogamy rather than individual choice. Matchmaking of an individual for marriage, in most cases, depends on his class or caste. Class and Cast are chief concerns of traditional marriages rather than individual love. This paper aims to explore theme of caste Endogamy and its impact on women in the Manju Kapur's novel, Home(2006). It tries to discuss how caste endogamy significantly affects women's lives, particularly in marriages and family roles. In Manju Kapur's novel "Home," caste endogamy significantly affects the lives of the characters, particularly women. Set in a conservative, patriarchal family, the narrative revolves around the Banwari Lal family, who strictly adhere to the custom of marrying within their caste to maintain social status and familial control. The patriarch, Banwari Lal, enforces rigid social expectations, controlling the marital choices of his children to preserve caste boundaries. Deviations from these norms lead to severe repercussions, as seen with the character Nisha, who struggles against the pressure to conform to caste endogamy. The novel illustrates how women's identities and futures are largely dictated by marital choices decided by their families, rather than their desires. Female characters face constrained autonomy, experiencing emotional repression as they navigate the expectations of being ideal daughters and wives. Nisha's love for a boy outside her caste highlights the conflict between personal desire and familial obligation, ultimately forcing her into an arranged marriage aligned with traditional values. In this context, marriage represents not only a partnership but a means of control over women's lives. It portrays a repressive system that restricts women's choices, forcing them to navigate between personal desires and stringent caste and community expectations. Through the character of Nisha, the author Manju Kapur examines the intersections of caste and gender, highlighting the control exerted over women's lives, choices, and bodies, making endogamy a key theme for understanding gender dynamics in the narrative.

Key Words : Manju Kapur, Caste, Gender, Patriarchy, Society. Individual love.

Introduction

Manju Kapur is an Indian English novel writer who won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999 for her novel, *Difficult Daughters*. Her notable novels are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*. She is recognized for her exploration of social issues, particularly those related to gender, family, marriage, tradition, and the tension between modernity and conservatism in Indian society. Her works often portray women navigating the restrictions of a patriarchal system while seeking personal independence. Kapur delves into the inner lives of her female characters, emphasizing their resilience as they balance personal ambitions with societal norms. While her main focus is on gender and family struggles, she also incorporates themes of caste, especially regarding endogamy, to illustrate its interplay with gender, class, and family dynamics in her novels. Kapur's novels present a feminist viewpoint, emphasizing the challenges and inner struggles of women and seeking independence in a patriarchal society. She portrays women confronting traditional roles as daughters, wives, or mothers, and highlight their quests for personal identity and desires. Her characters frequently deal with issues related to marriage, personal love, education, and societal pressures. In her novels, Manju Kapur examines the challenges faced by women within the constraints of caste endogamy, illustrating how tradition of Endogamy restrict women's freedom of choosing a life partner in marriage. Her work highlights that women's struggles are influenced not only by gender roles but also by rigid caste expectations and social norms. Kapur depicts caste endogamy as a controlling force, enforcing social boundaries that limit women's marital choices and suppress their personal desires to familial obligations and caste honor. Women are burdened with the responsibility of maintaining caste purity and social hierarchy of caste structure. Her narratives show that marriage in Indian society is both a gendered and caste driven institution, demanding that women align with both gender and caste expectations. This intersection often leads to the suppression of women's desires and ambitions, as they are pressured to accept arranged marriages that reinforce caste endogamy. Endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific social, caste, religious, or ethnic group, often influenced by cultural and social norms. It aims to preserve the group's identity, traditions, and socioeconomic status. This practice is contrasted with exogamy, which involves marrying outside one's group. Caste endogamy refers to the social practice of marrying within one's own caste, a practice prevalent in a country especially in India. In the traditional Hindu caste system, society is divided into hierarchical groups (castes) based on occupation, social status, and ritual purity. Caste endogamy aims to maintain the social structure, caste identity, and distinctions between different groups. Historically, caste endogamy has played a significant role in preserving the boundaries between castes. This social practice also reinforces caste-based privileges and restrictions, sustaining social stratification. While modern legal systems in many countries, including India, are against caste-based discrimination, the practice of caste endogamy persists in many communities due to deep-rooted social customs and familial obligations.

Caste Endogamy and Women

Caste endogamy, i.e. the practice of marrying within one's caste, is a central aspect of societies based on the caste system, such as in India, where the maintenance of the purity

of the caste and social order is linked to family honor and social expectations. Women, in particular, are largely affected by this practice, as their role in marriage and society is considered crucial to maintaining caste boundaries.

Caste endogamy ensures that women's marriages are arranged within their own caste, thus limiting their autonomy in choosing a life partner. Women are often seen as bearers of family honor and their sexual behavior is carefully monitored to prevent any transgression of caste boundaries. Marrying outside the caste is considered as a social disgrace and shame to the family of women. Women are expected to marry within their caste to ensure the continuity of caste hierarchies and privileges. The caste system of endogamy is a means of maintaining the social order, and women are at the centre of this process. Their roles as mothers, wives and daughters are linked to maintaining the purity of caste lines. Men, although subject to caste restrictions, often enjoy more freedom in marriage and relationships, while women face stricter consequences for violating caste norms. Arranged marriages, which are usually endogamous, reinforce caste-based structures by linking families of similar social status and caste. For women, this means that their marriage is often dictated by family and caste considerations rather than personal choice or love. Women who resist caste-based marriages or who seek love outside their caste often face strong opposition, leading to emotional, psychological and sometimes physical punishment. Women are expected to sacrifice their personal desires in the name of preserving caste honour, and their marriages are often seen as transactions between families meant to strengthen caste ties.

Manju Kapur's novels are the mirrors of Indian society and chiefly deal with the matrimonial issues. In her novel, *Difficult Daughters*, for example, the protagonist Virmati faces a lot of familial and social pressure because of her relationship with a married teacher from another community. The novel shows how caste endogamy, among other social expectations, limits personal autonomy, especially for women. Although caste is not the central theme, the nuances of family expectations related to marriage within a person's community, class and status are deeply intertwined with plot of her novels. In the novel *Home*, Kapur presents a story of three generations of Banwari Lal family who came to India after partition from Pakistan. The novel is chiefly concerned with Nisha, the protagonist of the novel. She falls in love with Suresh who belongs to a low caste, Paswan, as per Hindu caste system. Since Suresh is a lower caste person than Nisha, her parents do not agree to marry their daughter with him. She is confined in the home and the search of a suitable groom for her is started by her parents. She becomes the first woman from her family to be advertised for matchmaking. Finally, she is married to a widower, Arvind. The novel evidently presents the prevalence of traditional Endogamy while arranging marriage for a woman in Indian society.

Theme of Caste Endogamy in Home

Home (2006) is the third novel written by Manju Kapur. It deals with the theme of Caste Endogamy and Women as its victim. In Manju Kapur's *Home*, caste endogamy significantly influences the characters' lives and marriage decisions in a traditional middle-class family in Delhi. The narrative focuses on Banwari Lal family's adherence to old

tradition of caste endogamy which advocates to marry within their caste to maintain their social status and family honor, rejecting any union outside their community. Nisha, the protagonist, embodies the conflict that arises from these rigid expectations. Despite her achievements, her family's main concern is her ability to find a "suitable" partner within her caste. This tension highlights the social pressures that diminish her personal autonomy and her aspirations for individual love and independence. Kapur critiques the social norms and preference of caste endogamy, illustrating how they limit women's choices and reinforce traditional norms in modern India. The novel demonstrates the constant struggle between individual desires and family obligations, revealing how entrenched caste endogamy continues to exert a significant influence on Indian traditional families. It highlights the influence of caste endogamy even in modern Indian society through the character of Nisha. The novel explores the interactions between individual aspirations for freedom and the often burdensome demands of family and tradition. It illustrates the challenges faced by women in Indian society. The novel revolves around the lives of three women, particularly focusing on Nisha, who grapples with the traditional values of her orthodox family. The story begins with two sisters, Sona and Rupa, who share similar hardships. Sona, beautiful in appearance, is married to Yashpal, the son of Lala Banwari Lal, a cloth merchant who emigrated from Pakistan and settled in New Delhi. The family adheres strictly to conventional ideas and arranged marriages, eliminating the possibility of love marriage. Even as adults, the sons have no autonomy in decision-making due to the patriarchal structure led by Banwari Lal. After marrying Yashpal, Sona struggles with infertility, but eventually becomes pregnant and gives birth to Nisha, who is burdened by the stigma of being a Mangli. Nisha enrolls at Durgabai College, where she experiences newfound freedom and independence. She makes a close friend, Pratibha, and develops feelings for Suresh, a student at a nearby engineering college. While Nisha fantasizes about a life with Suresh, she is caught between her affections for him and the constraints imposed by her orthodox upbringing family. Nisha secretly develops a love for Suresh while feeling constrained by her family's traditional expectations. Their relationship flourishes in private meetings at cafes and cinemas, but societal norms regarding caste create obstacles. Nisha's family disapproves of her love for a lower caste boy, believing it's sinful: *'Once or twice she tried conveying her point of view. Their only real objection was that he was poor, and of another caste. If they did not approve, why couldn't they just let her go, her life was her own. Suresh and she were educated, they could both work. But anything she said was countered with her youth, her ignorance, her betrayal of them.'*¹

They impose restrictions on her, treating her like a caged bird and preparing for an arranged marriage for her, which adds to her despair. Despite the lack of freedom and the pressure to conform to family obligations, Nisha remains devoted to Suresh and struggles with her desire for love versus her duty to her family, feeling misunderstood and trapped in her situation. The given text explores Nisha's struggle between her love for Suresh and the expectations of her family, who dictate her destiny: *After three years of thinking that Suresh*

*was her future, Nisha had to adjust to the idea of another man in his place. A better man, according to her parents. Would he be able to gauge the extent to which she had been touched?'*²

Despite her deep feelings, class and caste discrimination hinder her relationship with Suresh, forcing her to sacrifice her dreams for family obligations. Nisha feels isolated and powerless, seeing herself as a puppet controlled by tradition and culture, ultimately surrendering her emotions and future to her family's decisions.

Conclusion

Caste endogamy serves as a means of patriarchal order and social practice of traditional norms, significantly affecting women's lives by restricting their freedom to choose life partner. It keeps women subordinate to male relatives and the existing caste system. While some families may accept these societal norms, others face challenges in resisting them, showcasing the intricate link between caste, gender, and personal freedom in societies where caste endogamy is common. Endogamous marriages restrict women's choices to marrying within their caste, which can result in unhappy relationships due to a lack of understanding between partners. These marriages often become costly and extravagant, requiring women to marry men they may not know well. This limitation may lead to issues such as domestic violence, dowry disputes, and divorce. Caste endogamy has been a long-standing practice in Indian Hindu society, rooted in the hierarchical norms of the caste structure. The theme of caste endogamy in the novel, *Home*, illustrates the ongoing tension between tradition and modernity. While characters like Nisha suffer under strict caste marriage expectations, her eventual marriage reflects a compromise between tradition of caste Endogamy and modernity. The story not only captures the deeply rooted practice of caste Endogamy in society but also suggests the possibility for change as younger generations seek to balance personal desires with societal norms. Overall, the novel conveys a message of struggle between individual choice and social expectations, highlighting the gradual and often painful efforts of an individual person within rigid systems. Thus, the theme of Caste Endogamy in relation to Women is chiefly presented in the novel.

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