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## Understanding a Concept of 'Home': A Multi Perspective Approach

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**Abstract:** The concept of 'Home' is commonly interpreted as a place of abode where family members live and grow together nurturing their interpersonal relationships. Metaphorically, 'home' symbolizes belongingness, love, safety, comfort, warmth, etc. It is a socially, personally, religiously, and culturally shaped entity. The present paper aims to understand the meaning of the concept of 'home' from a variety of perspectives encompassing the aspects intertwined with it over the ages; its significance from religious perspective; a view from the branches of social sciences and knowledge; and its expression in literature. In general, earlier the concept of home was perceived as a place of security and safety, however, in the modern era it encompasses many complexities and conflicts experienced in the domestic sphere of human life.

**Keywords:** home; abode; experiences; relationships; religious perspective

### Hypotheses

The concept of 'home' holds a significant place in the life of human beings as it is not restricted to being just a physical abode where family members live together but a socially, personally, religiously, and culturally shaped entity which exhibits its meaning through lived experiences and relationships.

### Aims and Objective of the Study

1. To identify the aspects intertwined with the concept of 'home' over the ages.
2. To interpret the meaning of the concept of 'home' employing a multi perspective approach.

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## **Research Methodology**

The researcher has employed descriptive analytical interpretive research methodology in order to understand the meaning of the concept of 'home' from multiple perspectives by referring to a secondary data available on the topic.

## **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The present study is limited to understanding the meaning of the concept of 'home' at the introductory level, while exploring the aspects intertwined with it over the ages. The scope of the study encompasses understanding its significance in the life of human beings as expected in religious practices; as it is viewed by the branches of social sciences; and the way it finds expression in literature.

## **The Aspects Intertwined with the Concept of 'Home' Over the Ages**

The concept of 'home' can be considered as an umbrella term for a place of abode where family members experience belongingness, love, comfort, security, warmth, stability, safety, etc. Home is something where family members feel like returning to, to recharge; can define themselves while allowing themselves to be their true-selves; and are accepted as they are. It is a storehouse of memories representing interactions between individuals, physical spaces, and linear-cyclical time spans. 'Home' is a realm where things are 'culturally and socially bounded' and it becomes 'the centre of our experiences of space,' which induces a sense of 'home', either individually or collectively (Mallett, 2004). The concept of 'home' is synonymous with house, abode, residence, dwelling, domicile, homeland, and many more can be added to the list. The concept of 'home' has gradually evolved in terms of its meaning, nature, and purpose from natural shelters like trees and caves of the prehistoric period to the technologically advanced multi-storey houses of the modern era.

The nomadic lifestyle of human beings changed with the invention of agriculture around 10000 BC and from here onwards the concept of permanent settlement was developed in the form of villages and further more complex and varied settlements. The physical structure and the material used to build a home changed over the period of time and so as the meaning associated with it. The unified and stable settlements defined its meaning and the oneness of the specific community established a sense of belongingness and identity. During the 18th and 19th centuries it was tagged with the concept of heaven and a place of refuge. Cultural values attached to it, rituals performed and traditional environment at home add an extra layer of meaning to it. In the modern era, socio-economic development changed the family structures, working patterns and so as its meaning and purpose. It was not only considered as the place of abode, but also a place for family life, emotional security, and privacy. This plays a crucial role in changing the perspectives of interior-designers and architects to define the spaces to resonate the variety of needs and aspirations that home offers. Arrangement of larger rooms provide space for communal gathering in order to foster strong bonds among the family members, whereas separate rooms value the privacy and personal spaces of individuals. Space designated to honour the ancestors reflects the connection of the

living members with ancestors, moreover, having a home at hometown or ancestors' land reflects the connection an individual has with his/her own motherland and its history forming his/her identity. Technological advancements during the globalisation process have certainly blurred the lines of traditional concepts of home and family relationships incorporating new ways of connecting with family members and experiencing the feeling of home. "In other words, the concept of 'home' is a complex amalgamation of people's perception of space, experience of space and daily use of space that shaped their meanings and cultural values within it" (Mallett, 2004).

### **A View of 'Home' From the Branches of Social Sciences and Knowledge**

In order to understand the concept of the 'home' highlighting its meaning and purpose one needs to adopt a multi perspective approach and explore the crucial role it plays in shaping human life in every sense. From a sociological perspective home plays a significant role in socialization where cultural values, social behavioural norms, and gender roles are imbibed among the family members through power dynamics at work. It becomes a space where family members can define their personal as well as collective identities. The identities formed and the relationships maintained in the light of housing design and domestic labour shape the meaning and experiences associated with the concept of home. Most importantly a nurturing and stable home acts as a centre of overall development of a child encompassing psychological, physical and social aspects. Home as a social institution forms and maintains family dynamics and kinship networks while transmitting socio-cultural values from generation to generation.

From an anthropological perspective every culture has developed its own meaning of 'home,' a place of emotional attachments and life experiences, which is different from the synonymous concept 'house', a physical building made of walls and roof. In every culture home has become a centre of socio-cultural practices, rituals and exhibits the meaning associated with the socio-cultural location. In such an environment home powerfully reflects the symbol of identity, cultural heritage, cultural traditions, as well as personal history. Anthropologists believe that home is a dynamic entity, which can be perceived as a relational and context specific socio-cultural experience actively constructed through daily socio-cultural practices, interactions and the symbolic elements associated with the space. Further, anthropologists also examine the home environment in the light of gender roles and relationships among the members along with home design, home interior and the technology used to build the home.

From a psychological perspective home offers a feeling of being safe and at mental peace where family members can relax, feel secure and recharge themselves through emotional attachments linked with memories, experiences and relationships with other members in the family. Further the boundaries maintained within the home atmosphere giving space to everyone contribute to the development of a sense of autonomy and control.

From a spiritual perspective 'home,' a place to learn, to evolve and to grow, is the starting point of spiritual exploration and nourishment. The feeling of being safe, loved and understood at home, fosters a sense of belongingness and connection not only with other family members, friends, but also with the inner selves through prayers, meditation, introspection and spiritual practices. Further, the experience of inner peace leads to renewal of body, mind and spirit while maintaining balance, harmony and unity within oneself and with others.

Along with these developmental contributions in the life of human beings, 'home' also signifies another side of the coin. From a political perspective the concept of 'home' signifies a nation; distinguishing 'us,' members sharing a unified national identity, from 'them', people outside the nation. Home is a common political metaphor signifying unified issues and public opinions. As in the home, citizens feel safe and secure in their nation; however, it can also be a site of exploitation, specifically for marginalized groups within a nation. Further, it can also be a site of resistance challenging the oppressive regimes. From a postcolonial perspective home is a complex concept reflecting experiences of migration and forced exile and identity associated with homeland and new culturally hybrid land due to colonialism and imperialism. In such an environment search for home reflects a search for self and a struggle to find a sense of belongingness while defining an individual's place in the hybrid world of intertwined different languages and cultures. On the other hand, in a postcolonial atmosphere, home can also be a symbol of resilience and hope while working as a centre of resistance against the imperial and colonial forces challenging their narratives in order to reclaim the socio-cultural identity of the colonised and marginalized communities.

From a traditional feminist perspective home confines women to domestic labour and childcare isolating her from public life and opportunities which would make her economically independent. Home becomes the space of exploitation when class, social categories, race, etc intersect with gender roles to define women's experiences. They also consider home as a site of abuse violence, physical exploitation, emotional and psychological harm due to dominance of patriarchy in the environment. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* expresses that home is the place where gender roles are reinforced on women, with which women are not actually born. Whereas modern feminist think that this marginalized status of women can be changed by challenging traditional gender roles reinforced on women at home and providing them with opportunities for self-expression and becoming independent.

### Significance of 'Home' from Religious Perspective

Home acts as a centre for the development of socio-cultural-religious practices and nurturing them yet further by transforming to the next generations. Every religion practiced in the world holds home as the starting point of inculcating religious practices among its community members.

In Hinduism, 'home' often features a shrine where daily worship and religious rituals intertwine with cultural values. A dedicated *pooja* room within a home fosters

spiritual growth through worshiping deities and ancestors by means of prayers. In Islam, 'home' is believed to be a private and sacred space to serve as refuge, reflect modesty and a place of worship for family. Home is a place for worship, hospitality, prayer, remembrance of Allah and transforming Islamic values and knowledge to next generations. Sikhism believes that the presence of God can be experienced everywhere, therefore prayers, meditation and worship of God can be performed at home like *Gurudwaras*. For Sikhism 'home' is a place where community members are encouraged to engage in selfless service, '*seva*', contributing to the well-being of others. The concept of '*Miri Piri*' reflects the balanced life expected from Sikhs where they are engaged in both worldly duties and spiritual practices. In Buddhism, the concept of 'home' is understood literally - 'dwelling place' and metaphorically - 'a state of being'. Buddhists believe that 'home' is a place to cultivate compassion and mindfulness leading to experience peace and liberation from sufferings. Similarly, 'home' is the place of attachment to family, wealth, and property representing a temporary state that must eventually be left behind on the path of enlightenment, finding our true home within ourselves. In Jainism, 'home' is a place for inculcating self-discipline and spiritual growth through prayers, readings, spiritual texts and meditation. Jainism believes that vegetarian practices and cleanliness to avoid harming living beings at home inculcate the principle of nonviolence. In Christianity, 'home' is considered to be a dwelling place as well as a spiritual heaven of faith, fellowship, respect, humility, kindness and God's love. Prayers, faith, hospitality, and teachings of Jesus Christ forms the foundation of a Christian home.

### The expression of 'home' in literature

The concept of 'home' has been explored in literature basically through emotional, physical, social, spiritual, and cultural lenses in order to represent the themes of safety, love, belongingness, search of identity, loss, displacement, etc. 'Home' can be explored as a metaphorical space in literature to represent a sense of self, state of mind or a place of emotional stability; it can also be purely imaginative and fantasy based. The complexities and conflicts experienced within the domestic sphere of human life are often examined through family dynamics and socio-personal growth, which often finds expression in literature.

The ancient Greek epic poem 'The Odyssey' by Homer explores the concept of home as the protagonist, Odysseus, returns to his homeland after a long-arduous journey. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* highlights the crucial role that a home, a dwelling place, plays in the context of slavery and social justice. Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* explores the concept of home as a central theme to highlight the conflict between the traditional Indian culture and Western influences. Hala Alyan's novel *Salt House* explores themes of identity, family and belongingness attached with the concept of home. *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* is a non-fictional work by Sebastian Junger exploring the concept of belongingness and home in the light of social relationships and community. 'Pemberley', a grand home of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, symbolises his social status and wealth. The tragedies happening to the residents of Wuthering Heights from *Wuthering Heights* by Emily

Bronte reminds that most often the members of the family and their choices break or make a home.

## Conclusions

It can be inferred that home is the dynamic concept which can change and its meaning can evolve as the circumstances and lives of the family members change. It can be considered as a place of abode; a feeling of belongingness, attachment; it can exist in an individual's mind or even in relationships with other members of the family and community. Individual's understanding of home is largely influenced by his/her experiences, lived relationships and past memories of life events. Thus, it can be emphatically stated that home is not only a physical space where family members live together, but also a socially, personally, and culturally shaped entity which exhibits its meaning through lived experiences and relationships. Sometimes, a person can be a home for an individual, when he/she feels safe, loved, attached, comfortable and at ease with him/her and that person can be a family member, friend or colleague at the workplace.

It is difficult to usually agree upon a specific definition of the concept of home across the universe, as it is explored and interpreted by every socio-cultural group, critical schools, and individuals by associating its meaning with the memories and relationships experienced within. It is the subject of ongoing interpretations and debate across the world and needs to be explored beyond its materialistic characteristics considering its multifaceted nature, shaped by socio-cultural-psychological aspects, to gain enhanced understanding of its significance in the lives of human beings.

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