

THE REPRESENTATION OF DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MANJU KAPUR'S CUSTODY

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Abstract

It is well said that a family can be a nemesis in one's life and it can also be significant in framing someone's identity. Manju Kapur is one of esteemed contemporary Indian woman writer in English. She illustrates several emerging controversial matters in the social scenario like infertility and dysfunctional relationships as she says, "All issues are grist to the writer's mill. Depends on what inspires, what pushes the narrative forward....I look at the consequences of these actions, which I find more interesting." (Penguin India 29 March, 2011).. This paper focuses upon the fresh concept of Manju Kapur in her fifth novel "Custody" published in 2011. This exposes the greed of Kapur's protagonist for luxurious lifestyle and peace which causes dysfunctional relationship between husband and wife. This is also a family saga where children, Arjun and Roohi suffer both mentally and physically due to their parents' venomous legal fight for custody.

Key Words: Family, Greed, Dysfunctional Relationships, Custody.

Manju Kapur amazes readers with her impressive grip of Indian customs and feelings. She comes under feminist influence unconsciously as she explains, "I am aware of feminist thinking....it is impossible to live in the world today as a thinking person and not be one, and this applies to both men and women. I don't set out with a conscious feminist agenda, but in describing the relationships between men and women, a feminist perspective is often inevitable." (Jain 21 June, 2014). For some couples, marriage seems to be flawless but for others, it only brings heated discussions, disrespect and frustrations. She lays out complexities of society, family and relationships in her novels like "A Married Woman", "Difficult Daughters", "The Immigrant" and "Custody". Kapur pens a realistic portraiture of an ugly divorce and an obsessive dogfight of parents for their children's in custody. She paints the canvas of her plots with all kinds of characters who gradually modify with the changing trend of society. This novel mainly hints at transformation or collision of patriarchal ideology of Indian society.

Manju Kapur delineates family relationships and influence of modern Indian society on human relations. She not only pores on human relationships but also concentrates upon their feelings and mental turmoil. Manju Kapur explores the shallow mindset of modernized upper middle class family of Delhi. She details series of family disputes which lead to traumatic effects on the psychology and hearts of children.

Kapur's Custody captures the thirst of protagonist for wealth, freedom and peace. The fiction is about a woman who succeeds in liberating herself after struggling between her aspirations and family. Her morality and dedication for her loved ones transform into an archetype. She feels hard-boiled to fulfill her family duties and asks her husband for divorce. This draws a curtain between Raman and Shagun.

The novel Custody mainly covers the twin problems of termination of marriage and custody of children. The family disputes, incompatibility between Raman and Shagun and urge for materialistic pursuits become the root cause of their divorce. The opening lines of fiction indicate sarcasm used within the story as Kapur writes, "The couple lay among stained sheets and rumpled quilts, eyes closed, legs twisted together like the knotted branches of low growing trees. Slowly their breathing became less noisy. Her head grew heavier on his shoulder; his hand across her stomach became heavy and their eyelids lay uneasy thoughts. They had things to do, place to do, lie to tell, the woman particularly". (1) On the front side, this appeals to be a love-making moment of husband and wife. However, this exposes hidden love-affair of a wife with her husband's boss, Ashok Khanna. The fuel of her extra-marital affair incinerates the sacredness of marriage. Kapur applies this sexual autonomy to scotch conventional customs and rituals.

The stereotypical and conventional attitude of

Raman swallows the self-identity of Shagun which further widens the gulfed breach between both of them. Raman is an industrious man, so he fails in his personal life. He works hard for the betterment of his family but forgets to spend some valuable time with his wife and children. His family also assumes that a woman's selfhood and recognition lies in her role as a dutiful wife and caring mother. Her status is confined within the four walls of home. This makes Shagun disgruntled and she finds nothing hopeful in her wedding. The cycle of rage between the couple destroys the purity of their relationship. On the other side, there is Ishita, living in Delhi whose marriage disintegrates because she cannot bear her own biological children. She begins to feel relaxed and gratified in social activities but later on, she gives up this when she meets Raman, a divorcee. Her closeness towards Raman makes her think that she will be happier as a stepmother.

In Custody, the love-affair of a woman with an outsider and the harsh behaviour of in-laws towards a woman, incapable to conceive a child become the chief reasons of dysfunctional relationships. This only leaves behind broken hearts of every relation in family. Ashok Khanna, the boss of Raman, falls in love with his green-eyed wife. He only gets obsessed with her and desires to pursue her at every cost. He is not concerned about her marriage whether it survives or not. He handles this matter as a powerful marketer and never thinks of emotional upheavals undergoing in Raman's mind. He offers everything which is nearly impossible to resist for any ordinary woman. And Shagun also becomes more persistent and bold in her love-affair. She chooses charismatic, handsome Ashok over her faithful and hardworking husband. She claims to be a devoted wife but this is never observed in her actions and decisions. She exceeds to such an extent in her selfishness that she even provokes her children against her husband to make her path smooth and clear for divorce.

Raman discovers the love affair of his wife with his boss, Ashok with the help of a detective. He finds out the disloyalty of Shagun to him. The two close and near persons deceive him. This vanquishes him more than anything in his lifetime. Raman cannot bear all these things affably and he gets a severe heart attack.

However, Shagun remains cruel and rigid on her decision and refused to return to Raman. She declined all traditional feminist ideologies which her mother tries to coax her to act as a dutiful wife and caring mother but she remains deaf to these queries and jeopardizes her mother that she will not confide her mother any longer if she continues to speak on Raman's behalf. A sense of bewilderment and anguish kicks off the wretched legal fight between Raman and Shagun over the custody of their children. It is firstly initiated by Shagun herself when she challenges him to meet him in the court for the custody. The kids are shuttled between their parents due to their ego battles who once promised to give them a caring, loving and happy upbringing. In the second part, the disastrous effects upon children become evident when they are disrupted between two mothers.

Along with this, Kapur skirts out the parallel story of Ishita who lives near to Raman's house and is the daughter of his mother's friend. The problem of infertility approaches her as the attitude of her well-wishers like her sister-in-law and mother-in-law changes all of a sudden when they understand that she is incapable to bear a child. This clears the dirt which is obscure in middle class Indian families which further results in Ishita's divorce. Her infertility is discussed in detail with the doctor by her mother-in-law who later on, refuses to accept and give her space in her home. In spite of consoling and standing with her as her daughter, she rejects her even as her daughter-in-law. A loving and promising husband leaves her in isolation and barrenness overnight. She finds self-identity and recognition in the company of unprivileged children. She indulges more and more in social activities which provides her peace of mind and satisfaction. Yet she discontinues these works as she is elevated socially after marrying Raman. She feels empowered and supports her husband in winning back his children against his ex-wife. In court, husband and wife manipulate incidents to get the custody of Roohi and Arjun. It is unmistakable that the unscrupulous action of a guardian and father flocks the early childhood of children. The difficult situations of divorce and an ugly legal fight for custody mature their innocent minds eventually.

Gradually, Ishita influences the small girl,

Roohi but fails to impress elder son of Raman and Shagun, Arjun who can acknowledge the whole situation thoroughly. Her thirst for the status of a loving mother enforces her to suspend democratic ethics. As she is under the social ostracism, she never tries to understand Shagun and her urge for liberty. Ishita can only establish herself in the patriarchal social - scenario as a caring mother and dedicated wife with the custody of Roohi. Arjun and Roohi pick their divided paths to deal with confused and disturbed situations into which their parents thrust them. Raman gradually realizes that his children will have to pay the price of their parents' separation. The woman, whom he loved undoubtedly once, now has proven to be a biggest mistake of his life.

The novel limelights the true saga of two lovers who promised to be true companions in their sacred marriage but this is all replaced with their differentiated ambitions to earn more money and to live liberated lives. This heart- rending story depicts the dysfunctional relationships of a happy family which later on converts into

disintegrated family. Apart from this, Manju Kapur discloses woman's queries for freedom, self-reliance and survival in the male-dominated society. This highlights the aspirations of young and educated ones in the modern society who can go beyond any extent to reach their targets and explores their dysfunctional relationship. The dogfight of parents for custody also reveals the critical judicial system of the nation.

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