

Women at Cross-Roads: A Study of Shagun and Ishita in Manju Kapur's *The Custody*



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Abstract

This paper depicts woman's role in domestic Indian society and their relationship with husband and family through two protagonists, Ishita and Shagun as the novel "The Custody" encompasses. This paper looks into concentrating on the problems of women explored with a view to discover and support women's struggle for liberation from patriarchy through the character of Ishita. Manju Kapur is addressing issues like female emancipation, their physical aspiration and their efforts in repositioning themselves in the present social environment in her novel "The Custody" (2011). In this paper, the researcher also has examined that Manju Kapur's novel "The Custody" (2011) effect of desire of the liberty of protagonist Shagun in modern society that impact on their marriage, relationship and domestic life of society, and the changing life style of women of modern era in globalization and their changed view to look upon their life effect on marriage dissolution, and family in modern India. The Custody is constructed around the woman's quest for self fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, autonomous personality and self actualization. Shagun and Ishita are 'new women' confer for their individual place in the society as well as in their family. This paper also look into how Kapur has explores the difficulties of reconciling the devotion to family expected of middle-class Indian women with their aspirations and desire for a life outside.

Introduction

Manju Kapur is one of the renowned Indian women writer and the representation of the suffering but stoic female characters ultimately flouting conventional boundaries has had a noteworthy consequence in her novels. She has mainly talked regarding esteemed contemporary Indian English woman novelist. Like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Anita Nair, Shobha De, Manju Kapur is one of the emergent Indian woman writers in English who live and write in India itself. In spite of some interruptions, protagonists of Manju Kapur's novels represents women of middle class families who bear on deportment towards empowerment and lead them to a world of their own individual, devoid of any prejudices

and utilization where they won't be forced any precincts. One peculiarity of the pictures of women all over history is that social stereotypes have been armored by archetypes. Where they won't have combat rules for them. That time would be ahead of social prejudice and then we can say that the women are empowered. In every era woman has been described either as a mother, a wife, a mistress or an objective of allure and their roles have been discrete in relationship to male equivalent.

Portrayals of women as achievers or leaders have been relatively only some. But even these outstanding representations of power or potency and also noticeable extraordinary qualities of women which inclined to overlook the lives of the ordinary and adequate ones. The

search for control over one's fortune represents the key theme of the novel and refers to the liberty desire to and achieved by a individual as well as by a woman dwelling in between family and self is primarily considered in Kapur's novel *Custody*. The humanisms substance is feasible in Manju Kapur's *Custody* as feminist discussion not because she is a woman writing about women's issues, but because she tries to understand a woman both as a woman and as a human being hassled by visible and invisible contexts. She illustrates a peep of feminism remaining in mind the Indian background. Manju Kapur's *Custody* deals with to be all together both Indian and Universal. The post colonial writers of Indo-English novels settle with a new education and sociability have diverse perceptions of the descriptions of woman in their works. In the post colonial era freedom and liberty thought was carried in to our country and it was also disseminated by western education. The woman novelists were liable for the new picture of woman besieged against the repressive social customs of the male governed society. The image of the woman in the post colonial novel is a crystallized figure of the two diverse cultures. The representation of woman as a curator of extraordinary moral qualities integrated with dedication and sacrifice has turns into an archetype. The picture of woman in quest of her identity has comes out from the archetype image of woman in history. The researcher evaluates portrayal of women as described by Manju Kapur in the novel *Custody* in this research paper. Upala Sen in reviewing the book in Hindustan Times writes: "And what he (Dhondy does in this book is not to restrict the telling) to a simplistic tale of pati, patni aur woe. If adultery is like a shadow to an individual, shifty and unshakable, that socio moral theme finds its reflection in the literary from. Every story has an overt, regular, narrative and a shadowy adulterous subnarrative. Some very adult tales told with child like ease"(qtd. in Kumar : 2013, p.189).

Shagun

Manju Kapur has well portrayed in *Custody* the irritation, anguish and travails of Indian

upper middle class-woman who are at a loss to revile social convention and society. Manju Kapur represents two contradictory features of female image, betrayal and barrenness in her most recent novel *The Custody*. Kapur in her novel observes how woman has commence to cultivate as an individual and the primary centre of collide for her befalls the organization of marriage which has, so far away, forms the restrictions of her freedom. The woman now has stirred to the centre and has develops into a vital creature in the social situate. Kapur represents extra marital love of Shagun in her novel and utilizes this sexual autonomy as a device of confrontation to thwart patriarchal traditions and principles. She depicts a womanly character, Shagun who rejoicing her sexuality and re-appropriates its generative attitude throughout a conscious inversion of patriarchal ethics. Manju Kapur represents two opposing feature of female personification, disloyalty and childlessness in her novel '*Custody*'. Betrayal authorizes a woman but barrenness eviscerates her. Infidelity replicates and preserves women's right to longing, and the quest of the accomplishment of female sexual longing is a symbol for women's egalitarianism politics.

Kapur in her novel *Custody* examines how woman has started to cultivate as an individual and the main core of conflict for her turns into the association of marriage which has, so far, forms the restrictions of her liberty. Kapur exposes with the character of Shagun that woman now has inspired to the hub and has become a crucial component in the social organization. Kapur demonstrates illegitimate relationship between Shagun and her husband's boss Ashok Khanna in her novel and uses this sexual freedom as an instrument of resistance to thwart patriarchal myths and values. She depicts a female character Shagun who rejoicing her sexuality and re-appropriates its generative belief through a consciousness of patriarchal principles. Her sexuality is a dome of happiness and outfit in which she is empowered to employ her body for herself. She defies the male subjugated

and patriarchal system of observation and control. Shagun and Raman's marriage has been approved beside ordinary appearance; she is the beauty, he is the one with glowing projection. She convenes Ashok Khanna, a business man who is attracted by her beauty. Kapur mentions fine expression of her beauty in the novel. Shagun is also enticed by his loving words and sterling elegance and leaves behind the essential constraints of marriage and flouts its sacredness through sexual transgression. But as a married woman she worried from her love affair, her reservations about being trapped. As Kapur mentions in the novel, "In the beginning she had so brave and matter-of-fact, now she was more fearful" (Kapur, 2011, p.80). She encounters with contradiction as she neither sustains the sturdy stoic and self-sacrificing figure of her precursors nor restrains her perilous feminine wishes. She is confused in betwixt of whether to surrender herself to social conventional or come out as dissenter is a problem for her. Her mother who having patriarchy visions, her mother requests her daughter that not to convey disgrace to the family and be a purpose to scorn with her extra marital relationship. Her annotations show social outlook and treatment towards a female in extramarital relationships also signify that the support association for the female is inadequate in material world as society emits a malicious outline on the female who is infidel.

Kapur illustrates in *Custody*, Shagun who has vanished her individual person self in her earlier marriage life with Raman now looking for the missing self in her love affair with Ashok. This relationship provides her an amusing experience and makes her to be independent, convinced, potent, self-governing and ingenious as her chasing sexuality egalitarianism and self-reliant. She replicates her individual personality with boldly and then forms appropriate retort incisively. Shagun delineates her wish, preference and sexuality as she examines, distinguishes and acknowledges herself. She considers in Ashok. As he states: "Traditonal versus modern values, individual versus society"(Kapur, 2011, p.81).

Shagun has not capitulated to the notions of the patriarchy society but deploys with her ability and potential to defeat troubles so to obtain pleasure in her new relationship. The supremacy ensuing from investigation, elucidation and empowerment of the female sexuality occurrence steers to self-realization and self-affirmation as an individual in Shagun. Shagun chases her heart and asks for a divorce from Raman and gets on a new life with Ashok. So, the association of marriage which in our country is much more than sex and children is disenchanted of its purity through divorce. Shagun tells Raman which clearly shows her longing for freedom in her life, "Don't make this harder. I have left you the best part of the marriage. Surely my freedom is not too much to ask in exchange?" (Kapur, 2011, p.109). Shagun emerges as a 'new woman' in the novel who recognizes the prospective of her 'being' throughout a procedure of fetching by induction herself on personal struggle with society on the basis of the precedence of expected preferences over social proprieties. She, as a woman, in this new correlation of her selection is an important and new literary create, conscious of the preferences release to her and rouse to the compound and modified prototypes of existing and adoring against the hostile and disheartenment governing outlook.

Ishita

Custody explores the changing pattern and milieu in upper middle class Indian society. Ishita is second leading heroine of this novel who wants to freedom her bareness and represents with depraved stepmother condition. Kapur shows the realism of modern marriages in which the characters like, Raman, Shagun and Ishita feel at some accent emptiness and aloofness in their life. Ishita is simple looking Indian girl who believes in traditional marriage and who wants to surpass a peaceful life with her husband Suryakanta. Ishita is victim of Indian patriarchy notions as her in-laws wants grand children for their family After the eighteen months of her marriage life with her husband Suryakanta, Ishita did not convince. She is criticized by her in-laws and society for

that reason. In Indian culture, after freedom society has not changed their views yet. In Indian culture, infertility seems as woman's liability and not the dilemma of the couple. Ishita went to hospital for diagnosed her problem of infertility. She went for medical checkup, her mother-in-law is conscious about her childless problems. Ishita budge from healer to seer, herbalist to hospital worriedly looking for some decision, obsessed with optimism, doubt and desolation. So, the greatest component of her infancy is shattered in the chase to accomplish motherhood. A gynecologist examines her and 'severe blockage of her fallopian tubes' is declared and she inveterate 'a childless woman'. She collects very minute empathy, particularly from her in laws, who deem themselves the distressed party. Her infertile issue makes in her marriage with snowed under anxiety, social disgrace, emotional abuse and psychological stress.

Ishita recognition her matrimonial life with Suryakanta is stressed and infertility interrupts the adoring relationship. Kapur describes the reality that in a conventional society woman faces disgrace due to her infertile body. Ishita's husband ready to give her divorce who was once did not live without her for a second, meanwhile Ishita thrown out from her in-law house. She undergoes with ethereal as she is penalized for her imperfect body. Divorce makes her life depressed and loneliness and she began to feels sense of failure in her life. Ishita's parent supports her lot to re-emerge in her life after stressful and negative experience of marriage life. Now, she tries to forget her unsuccessful marriage life and re-arranged in her life which she has left before five years due to her marriage. She takes her father's name and gets on a new expedition. She also tries for further a study which feels her unemployment issue of her life. Ishita subdues her incapability and gives her motherly love on Roohi, a motherless and deserted girl. When Ishita meets Raman and knows about the reason of his divorce, bondage of relationship established among both broken hearts. Ishita has faced in her body with only of

self- expel, self- suppression, and beholding only indigenous patriarchy and now with relationship with Raman she acquires liberty with her body. Raman pleases the physical requirements of her female body. Her maternal impulses are satisfied as she celebrates a warm affecting attachment with Roohi. Ishita's and Raman's bodies and feelings harmonized, they get married in a court to begin a life anew departure after the pungent wounds of their earlier broken marriages. Ishita prefers her life partner and takes pleasure in the matrimonial and motherly happiness in her new-fangled house. Her motherly feelings fill with love, care and fondness for Roohi and her happiness is Ishita's main concern. She with assurance converses before the Judge in the court. The judge cross-examines the little child Roohi declares Ishita by talking in her support and alleging her to be Roohi's mother. Even if Roohi is a minor but her custody is specified not to her genetic, but to her stepmother, Ishita who loves her more than biological mother Shagun.

In *Custody* Kapur depicts the gendered nature of custody which is battled in India. Generally men refuse to grant divorce while women usually have greater claim to the children but she refuses to do so. Both the parties counsel the legal advice. The battle lines are drawn early and both parties fifth to its end. The cycle of rage between Shagun and Raman not only fuels itself but is complicated by the new stepmothers and fathers acquired through second marriages. Kapur is adept at dealing with this complicated family configuration, and the insecurity it brings to the step-parents as well as children. In Ishita's plight, as see the second wife's desperate struggle to replace the biological mother, while Ashok presents a more ambiguous kind of care. Neither does she spend too long on whether Shagun's infidelity scandalizes society, but focuses on how it affects her characters. The concept of family shame and social propriety is firmly in the background, the women characters in Manju Kapur's novels are not traditional women who think that marriage is their destiny and they are to obey their husbands. The women in the novels of

Manju Kapur differs from this category of woman and breaks all social taboos, and conventions and emerge as a new woman who is aware of herself. The women in the novels of Manju Kapur are the personification of the new women.

Kapur tries to depict the susceptibility of woman: how a woman seems at herself and her troubles. *Custody* is not only about infertility and infidelity issues, but the novel undergoes beyond that the issue of divorce, dichotomy of modern society, and relationship between parents and child are various themes woven by Kapur. Kapur tries to show that woman should endeavor to comprehend and apprehend herself as a human being and not just as an attachment to some male life. In her all novels woman stands for diverse sorts of qualities. They do not suffer but preserve their place. Kapur characterizes new principles, according to which woman is not to be taken as a meager puppet, a creature of lust and temporary enjoyment, but man's equivalent and honored partner. Her female character Shagun has extra-marital relationship with one person Ashok Khanna. Her both women Shagun and Ishita are victims of a patriarchy Indian society which does not allow women to avow their privileges pertaining to their individual autonomy and believe the very issue of identity-crisis as absurd concerning women. Kapur illustrates women's anguish in marriage-life and then choosing to come out of the suffocating bondage by choosing for divorce. She portrays in her women protagonist deciding to favor for divorce rather than live a domineering life of prejudice and anguish. Her women Shagun and Ishita leave their husband or shatter the marriage which does not permit them to be liberated and living their life in their own way. Kapur shows that through divorce they will be liberated from the torment and torture of a dejected or undeserved relationship it does not decipher the troubles and women have to persist to struggle and endure on different levels — economic, emotional and psychological.

In conclusion, research has analysis in this paper that the structure of the woman

character in *Custody* as a person in her own precise is at formerly analytic of the author's supplement of women's ambition as well as deterrence of conventional customs. It utters of her aims to consider an idyllic character on one side and on the other it illustrates the writer's capability to shatter the convention. However, the transformation in the fictional work of Kapur shows woman is associated with amends in women's position in Indian society. Feminine aesthetics from time to time grounds numerous change between authorial perceptions and that of the character itself. While the character's accent is used to utter her anxiety and her will to talk, the authorial tone points out her essential incapability to speak up. Subaltern talk, in other words, does not accomplish the dialogic level of expression. Kapur has accepted the feminine aesthetics as it is but the tendency towards a feminist aesthetics is what provides her hope. It is this that set up the dialogue- the two way communication in her novel. It completed the literary backdrop enlarge to contain as the centre what was previously considered periphery. This prototype change may be observing in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and more recently Manju Kapur along with many existing women writers of Indian English fiction. Kapur skillfully reveals feminist concern in her novel *Custody*. Kavita rightly observers : " Manju Kapur's novels offer a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in a patriarchal world" (Kavita, 2013, p.179).

Hence, *Custody* is entirely representation of Indian Modern woman, who tiled new path in the peripheral world. Self boldness and seditious spirit existing in this novel, which demonstrates the new woman is rising in modern Indian society. Kapur's novel divulges the unimagined suspicions of modern marriage occurring in present time. The wife's perception of suffocation, the husband's trepidation of inferiority and the continuous shifting of children, like possessions, from one home to the other, are inducing with

meticulous seriousness. *Custody* develops into somewhat further than just social observations, but a novel that really reveals to the universal anxiety of modern marriage lives in Indian society, with its dilemma of independence.

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