

Matrimonial Dispute in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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Abstract

The present paper focuses the trauma after marital life. Manju Kapur is a renowned Indian female contemporary writer. She writes about the suffering of the upper middle class, educated women and the women who have caught between the duty and desire after their marriage. In her *Custody*, the protagonist Shagun, is dissatisfied with her husband Raman's income. Despite of loving her husband she shows much interest on money which leads to the destruction of their lives. Ishita, another protagonist, also being treated ill for her infertility. Yet, in many Indian houses they think that, it is only women who are reasonable for not bearing the child and they do not consider their sons. The matrimonial dispute among parents affect their children in high level. Though Ishita is divorced for being infertile, she becomes mother to Raman's daughter Roohi. Her woman in the novel is a transforming woman in the patriarchal society.

KEYWORDS: Manju Kapur, Marital dispute, Betrayal, Dispute, Infertility, Custody, New Life

The Indian novel in English, which has now established itself a part of Indian literature, has every claim for recognition as distinct objects. One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though, it was probably a fountain head of story-telling; the novel as we know today was an importation from the west. Many important female novelists like Sashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and so many writers published their novels and other works in the postmodern era. They use the theme of love, marriage, loneliness, longing and quest for identity.

Among the above-mentioned female writers Manju Kapur, the Jane Austen of modern Anglo- Indian literature has given the best works to analyze the sufferings of modern educated upper middle-class women. Kapur is born in 1948 in Amritsar. She is married to Gun Dalmia and has taught English at Delhi University under the name Manju Kapur Dalmia. She is known to write books based on love, betrayal, marital dispute, women's subjugation. She has written six novels so far: *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (200), *Custody* (2011), *Brothers* (2016). Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* has won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best first book in Asia in 1999.

Kapur's novels give awareness to the modern Indian couples and explains the complications after the marriage. The current paper is an attempt to deal with the matrimonial discord and how the children suffer in Manju Kapur's fifth novel *Custody*. Marriage, also called matrimony, is a social or ritual union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them and between them and their

children. Today many people do not understand the value of marriage. They take it for granted. A couple who gets married must understand each other and live for each other. They should share both happiness and sorrows. When there is a difference of opinion, it leads to a conflict and moreover now a days it results only divorce. G.B. Shaw, the greatest Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London school of economics, in his novel *Candida* remarks:

Marriage is an institution that brings people together. Marriage should be based on intense, profound love and a couple should maintain ardour until death separates them. A great marriage is not when the perfect couple comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences (*Candida* 126).

Discord is nothing but the state of not agreeing or disagreement. Matrimonial discord is a lack of adjustment in the marriage. It embodies a break down in the obligation and companionship in the marriage life. It is clearly depicted in Kapur's *Custody*. This novel revolves around two different situations and two different women in the same society and how they are interlinked in life. This also illustrates how the duel between the parents affect the life of children.

The novel opens with the arrange marriage of Raman and Shagun. Raman works hard to give his wife a good life. They have two children, Arjun and Roohi. As Raman gives much importance to job he is denied the central position in his family. The quarrel starts between them. Shagun wants to live a sophisticated life and she is ready to do anything for that. After she falls in love with Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss in Soft Drink Company, she starts to move away from her responsibilities. In order to marry him, she demands divorce from her husband. She says that she can take Arjun with her and asks Raman to take the custody of six-month-old girl Roohi. This is unendurable to Raman and this led him to suffer psychotic and hysteric manifestations. Another issue in this novel about the marital life is between Ishita and Suryakanta. Their marriage life fails since Ishita is unable to give birth and only she is blamed and considered she is the only cause, as she is a woman.

The most captivating part in *Custody* is that Kapur brings together the two divorcees, Raman and Ishita as a successful couple. Ishita gets the custody of Roohi and her happiness is beyond the limit. In this we find Kapur's own definition of marriage: "Marriage is when two people decide to live together forever. Should the change their minds they go to court and get marriage cancelled. Finished. Divorced. They become strangers. (*Custody* 341). As the title *Custody* suggests the story revolves about the distressing conflicts between divorced parents for the custody of their two children and how their custody is finally undertaken. As a result, the children have become the game piece in the hands of their parents. Arjun and Roohi suffer a lot and they become the victims and prey to their parents' dispute.

It is apparent that Shagun one of the protagonists of the novel, falls in love with Ashok and it makes hate her husband completely. She begins to blame him whatever he does, though Raman pours his love on her and remains faithful to her. In case of Ishita, her trouble starts when she is stamped as an infertile. Her in-laws make her husband to hate her. Here it is evident that both Shagun and Ishita undergo pain for biological reasons, one for the passion and the other for barrenness. Shagun never worries about her

family but only cares about to fulfil her desire whereas Ishita gives her love to Roohi and Roohi gets pampering from her that she expected.

In a marriage life dedication and being loyal to each other are the major sources of getting happiness and prosperity. Otherwise it leads to the grievances, dissatisfaction, misery, depression. In modern era the marital life becomes much complicated. Instead of loving and caring each other, they seek to blame each other. Problem arises when people run behind the materialistic pleasure. The development of computerization and urbanization has imported socio-psychological changes in the perception and ideals of the people, specifically, the urban population.

At the beginning of Custody, being a head of the family, Raman plays a traditional role of a husband and a father who goes out to the world and compete with the people to earn money for his family. Like many men he seems to be married to his job and the office. And he knows nothing about his children's progress and importance of sparing time with his wife has been reduced. This dissatisfaction makes Shagun thinks that nothing is promising in her married life. Here starts the gap between them both. Shagun rebels for freedom which is long denied to her. She fights for the freedom she has long wanted which is at the cost of her children and happy married life. She boldly forsakes her husband, though in Indian society, husband is like a sheltering tree without which life of a wife becomes tedious. Kapur pictures, Shagun as a type of woman who celebrates her beauty and re-appropriates its generative principle through a deliberate contradiction of patriarchal morals.

Meanwhile, Ishita who is unable to give birth to a baby, is isolated in her house. She is branded as sterile and criticized by her in-laws and she is given psychological tortures. Though she is being a good wife and daughter-in-law, she is considered to be failed as a woman as she is infertile. As she is divorced by her husband, she hates herself. The arrogance of men makes her much inferior and weak. But there is a twist and turn when she remarries Raman. She is given the position of being a mother to Roohi. Despite of worrying about her past bitter life, she restarts her new life with her baby. She believes that she can be good mother to Roohi. Kapur tries to prove that the same society has the different types women like Shagun, who leaves her husband and children in order to attain her own desire. And on the other hand, Ishita, who takes duty of Shagun and tries fulfil it. She over powers her inability and showers her motherly love upon Roohi.

Kapur in one her interviews with Anjana Rajan in web article suggests, "Adults should behave like adults, not like the children they were fighting over. Really, why did people have babies if they were going to the messes of their own desire?" The parents who divorce are not aware of their children. In case of Raman and Shagun, Arjun becomes rude, harsh and he lacks in his education and Roohi, a small baby longs for the motherly love. In her novel, Kapur points out that agony in the mind of the women is due to the frustration in love, infidelity, infertility, betrayal, divorce and disintegration of their marital life.

Generally, a woman dreams and expects a lot about her marital life. She likes to fulfil all her longing desires and wishes after her marriage. But she is unaware that the same expectation will ruin her life. There emerges a conflict in her relationship with the

society and in her inner psyche. And she tries to find her identity and individuality which make her to break up the family bondage. Kapur propounds:

When Shagun started her affair, she had thought a lover would do to her experience, make up for all the things she has missed having married straight out of college. She had heard of other women who look lovers- their whole lives didn't change. She thought of her nights with Raman. They lay together, tossing and turning, sleeping in fits and starts, staring into darkness. (Custody

Kapur's novel deals with everything that is connected to modern family and patriarchal society. It demonstrates the contemporary picture of today's woman who is eager to free herself from the domestic walls of her house to build of her own. As her female characters are well-educated, it makes them to have an independent thinking and makes them to stand boldly against the society which is ready to tie them down with the patriarchal society rules and regulations. In the modern period, many run behind the money. It drags them to the hell in rest of their life. Our society also should understand that barrenness is neither a sin nor an intentional act on the part of a woman. Custody vividly gives the message that barren woman has to be respected and should be treated equally. Kapur satirizes upon the idea of family duty which is over ridden by individualism. One should not uproot the traditional values and morality to attain their individualism. Marriage, as an institution must be treated celestial to sustain the value of future generation.

As a matter of fact, the novel Custody teaches us that over expectation about marriage exploit the life, a couple who is not sparing time with each other and the misunderstanding between them result in the failure of marriage life and explicit their own off springs. Money is needed in life but it is not everything. For a prosperous life, a good wife should not consider her husband as only a money-making machine, at the same time, a husband also should not run behind the money without giving preference to the family. One must know to balance both their duty and desire. And ultimately Kapur proves that adjustment and acceptance result in fulfilled life and it is the way to gain the fruitful life.

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