

**ANNULMENT IN THE NOVEL CUSTODY BY MANU KAPUR****D. Anushiya Devi,**

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is eminent writer of 20century. Custody (2011), her fifth novel is exceptional and it is largely set in the thriving, upper-middle-class colonies of Delhi in the mid -90s, against the backdrop of the initial surge of foreign investment in India. It is a story of custody of children and the Indian Judicial system. Kapur encapsulates the lives of opulent, metropolitan middle – class Indians with their perturbing confidential matters, deteriorated relationships, their hankering for wealth, self determination and tranquility. Kapur evaluate the destitution of modern life as the story encircle around Raman and Shagun who are couple along with fascinating Ashok Khanna, Raman’s boss and Ishitha, divorcee who suffers with infertility. The novel presents the plight of wedlock, which is unimaginable. Custody consist the plot of metropolitan upper middle class family lives, which notwithstanding being wealthy are bankrupt in values and significance. Kapur utilizes the establishment of marriage in the Custody, explains the story of two wretched families by divorce. A sequence of altercation follows along with disagreements, intense Conversation reveals the wicked side of divorce. It explains how the main protagonist, Shagun looses healthy family life, husband and children by her extravagance. In spite of all hers trials she gets nothing except distress.

Key Words: *Suffocation, extravagance, separation, divorce, remarriage, possessiveness, custody, distress, disintegration, Family.*



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Introduction:

Custody begins with the battle of main characters, Raman who is working as marketing executive at a global drinks company. His wife Shagun is with her astonishing personality. They had two children, Arjun, the boy with eight years resembles his mother and Roohi, who is with 2

years, resembles her father. This fiction reveals the unimagined uncertainties of matrimony. The wife's sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the constant shifting of the children, like commodities, from one home to the other, are evoked with painstaking sincerity. Although marriage is well-trodden territory for Kapur, here her possession of the subject is complete. *Custody* is a novel that is true to the universal angst of modern marriage with its burden of individualism. The novel starts with the love scene involving a couple, the protagonist Shagun with Ashok, who is boss in her husband's office. Kapur explains that morals and ethical values have no place in love making. The battle rises between husband and wife with the center of Raman's boss Ashok. This battle becomes central figure and on the whole enthralling story of how family love can shatter into an infatuation to hold children, body and soul.

Fragmented Marriage And Its Consequence:

Custody by Manju Kapur is an excellent example of a fragmented marriage and its consequences on children who are played like pawns in a game of legal chess. Before marriage Shagun wants to become a model. Whenever she meets Ashok Khanna that dreams again raise in her mind. She could not agree her suffocation. She wants to do something which can keep her in luxury life. It leads husband and wife go through separation, divorce, remarriage and elevation of custody of hostage between the battles of the parents. Shagun does not accept her fate as dutiful housewife. When Raman discovers their love affair, Shagun has to decide what she wants to do, or what she can do. She asks Raman for a divorce but he turns into a vengeful person. In another part of Delhi, Ishita, whose marriage collapses because she cannot have children of her own. She tries to find some satisfaction and a sense of identity in social work but she abandons it when she meets the divorced Raman. Since she is drawn to him she believes she can be happy as a step mother. In the second half of the novel, the story focuses on the custody of the children, the bitter legal battle and the price of freedom.

At the beginning of the story we see Raman in his traditional role of father and husband, of head of the family who goes out to the world to find fortune to his family, who has to be looked after when he comes back home, but also does not care much for his own wife or children. His professional career is more important than them. He seems to be married to his job and company. His parents would never question him. They assume that a woman's selfhood, status, respectability and realization lie in wifehood and motherhood. The household functions as a producing and reproducing unit. The husband produces and goes out into the public sphere and

wife gives life to children and takes care of them at home in the private sphere. Amid the demands of the four grown-ups Raman, Shagun, Ashok and Ishita in this tale of broken marriages, the children remain quietly in the background until the novel's second half. It is then that we begin to see the disastrous side-effects of the bitter fight for their custody, the tyranny of blood and their trauma, torn between two mothers, two homes and two countries.

Cause For Fragmentation:

The disintegration happens in *Custody* due to the extramarital affair of the parent, the in-laws treatment of a woman who cannot conceive and the changing parenting scenario in middle class Indian homes. Shagun, the green-eyed beautiful wife of Raman, falls in love with his charismatic, handsome boss Ashok Khanna, who has never been in love before and is determined to possess the woman he now loves. It does not matter to him how but he goes about conquering Shagun's mind, body, and soul like a seasoned, persuasive marketer. He represents everything that a woman of today would find difficult to resist. The pace of the story gains momentum as their affair begins to become more fiery, daring and passionate. Shagun has no regrets about lying to her husband or to her own mother. The extent of her selfishness and ability to be cruel is visible in the choices she makes. For example, she leaves her kids with her mother to go off for weekend trysts with her new found lover. Yet she convinces herself all the time that she is a devoted mother to her children. She goes to all lengths to brainwash her children against their own father, knowing that this would be use to negotiate her terms of divorce when it is final time. The story skirts out closest to the society's traditional norms and conventions. Manju Kapur demonstrates her intrinsic level of detailing with tiny social observations such as how Shagun's mother does her best to coax her to remain faithful to her husband and in retaliation Shagun threatens to completely stop confiding in her mother if this is how she is going to take sides. It is evident that marital life in India is fast disintegrating and being shaped by foreign elements such as extra marital affairs, materialistic pursuits, and so on. As a parallel story, the plot swerves to troubles of Ishita, who is the daughter of Raman's mother's friend and neighbour. Reflecting the dismal marriage scenario that prevails in most middle class Indian families, Ishita's problems begin when she is unable to conceive. Her mother in law calls her shameless, her sisters in law stop talking with her; the father in law and her husband avoid her. She appears very insignificant before them. "She looks smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air and smaller than drops of dew, caught between

blades of grass in the morning”. Moreover her mother-in-law and sister-in law who doted on her and acted as though they were all dear friends changed overnight when they realize that Ishita is medically pronounced as unable to have children.

Status Of Children:

In Kapur’s novel the children become the family’s material stakes. Ishita convinces her husband to manipulate events invent lies over Roohi’s illness. She exercises power over the small child by teaching her what she has to say in court in order to win the custody of the little girl. Their lawyer, a friend of the family does not oppose to Ishita and Raman. Their unscrupulous behavior undoubtedly manifests that the more the members of a normative patriarchal family confines themselves to its social internal structures to maintain power over others and have control of their possessions the more they transgress ethics and democratic laws. More appreciative was the insight into the difficult situation divorce puts the children in. Through Arjun and Roohi we are shown how a perfect childhood can get messed up and how the care takers egos and their personal desires can take a toll on the innocents. Some of the most well chapters were those involving the kids and how the adult’s fiddling with their mind cannot only coerce them but as well leave a lasting impression that eventually make them into adults with troubled emotions. Ishita cannot dominate the boy who is older and capable of discerning her dishonest behavior, but she can control the little girl, Roohi, to whom she gives a new name, Roopi. This new name represents that the child is hers and not Shagun’s. To a certain extent the readers feel compassion for the barren Ishita who still suffers from the reminiscences of her past frustrations and social ostracism. As she is under society’s constant supervision she needs to demonstrate to herself and to the others that she is a good loving mother for Roohi. Entrapped in such suffocating family, her egoistic love compels her to break whatever democratic ethical agreements set. As a victim of the norms of patriarchal normative households, Ishita turns into the worst oppressor: She never speaks to Shagun; nor does she make the effort to understand her as a mother and woman who also wants to be happy. Roohi’s custody constitutes Ishita’s last chance to cure her past frustrations and be accepted as a good mother and exemplary wife among those dictate or abide by patriarchal socio- cultural norms.

Judgement Of Custody:

While the parents are embroiled in a legal battle for custody of the children, they do everything they can to make the children feel worse. Their son is a replica of Shagun’s selfish, cruel and

indifferent to anything but his own satisfaction, he was in boarding school which was Alma mater to Ashok and almost came into the custody of Shagun and their daughter is a miniature of Raman, who is very loving, understanding and generous. The children find their own ways to tackle the crisis because they are confused and feel divided loyalties swarm around them, throwing them into tough, emotionally disturbing situations with their parents. And for any child, having to choose between parents is the toughest and most emotionally devastating thing to contend with. Their lives are catapulted and crushed by the ever slow, grinding wheels of the rigid legal system in India. This is when the quiet, reliable cousin Nandan steps in to help Raman who is totally clueless about how the legal system works in India. Worst of all, he begins to realize that marriage to Shagun whom he had loved blindly had been a big mistake, one for which his children too would pay a heavy price. Who will get custody of the kids?-that becomes the question for Raman and Shagun. Their legal battle turns inevitably ugly. Throughout the novel, a true story of modern marriage that exists around us. This is true in today's world. The book highlights the voice of the children and sheds light on their situation when parents are replaced by lawyers and lovers. It is story of marriage that disintegrates and intertwines with cruel and heart-rending consequences. Once lovers and companions, husband and wife become enemies locked in an ugly legal battle over their two children. Shagun fights for years for her Roohi, but Roohi, who is her flesh and blood, asserts to the judge that she wants to be with Ishitha. In the words of Kapur, "I said Ishitha as my mother. I want to stay with her"

Conclusion:

Custody is the riveting story of how family-love can disintegrate into an obsession to possess children, body and soul, as well as a chilling critique of the Indian judicial system. The story represents an emerging group of young, successful, educated Indians who can choose the direction of their destiny so easily no matter what the underlying moral implications are like. Kapur's narrative, deals with the marriages that collapse, social hypocrisies and battles for children that intertwine with anguish and conflict in order to depict a worldwide reality of politics of possessiveness and unequal power relations in normative patriarchal families which is a site for constraint, oppression, violence, possessiveness and disintegration.

Between two wrecked families' children become mere objects in their hands. We can see calamitous effect of the pungent struggle for their custody. The brutal and familial disagreements had bad impression on the innocent mind of the children. The "torn between two

mother, two homes, two countries”. Shagun’s egotism upset Raman who is a heartfelt, faithful husband. In the novel everybody – the children, the father, the wives need to pay the emotional price.

Here we need to think that although none of the characters come out wholly shining, Misery, anxiety, tension does bring out the worst that would apply to any conflict situation. Manju Kapur is known to write books on women centered themes takes on end of long term marriage, divorce and the subsequent custody battle. She shows how a modern house wife can think of not wanting to stay in a relationship and look for liberation and happiness outside her home and even that did not make one wants to hate her for her choices. Achieving this balance is art and *Custody* did that.

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