

**MANJU KAPUR NOVEL CUSTODY: A STUDY****JOJAPPA. P**

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In Custody, Manju Kapur has presented the images of modern middle class Indian women. Here two chief protagonists Shagun and Ishita represent extra-marital affair and infertility respectively. Both are devastated although through different reasons. The theme of children's custody is subtly woven with the diverse effects of divorce and re-marriage on children. Apart from two protagonists, we find life like images of middle aged women- Mrs. Sabharwal and Mrs. Kaushik. Shagun meets us in the very beginning of the novel, making love with her husband's boss in the lanes of Delhi. From her first appearance in the novel, one can assume the kind of liberty she enjoys although being a married woman and mother of two children. The angst of the urban middle class women is portrayed in a meticulous manner by Kapur. Through Shagun, Kapur tries to depict the problems faced by urban middle class married women. She is a free minded and liberated woman. She loves to follow her heart. She can do anything to fulfil her desire for materialistic pleasure. Maneesha Govender rightly calls her, 'worldly wife'. She is brought up by her mother, Mrs. Sabharwal. Being an only child of her parents, she enjoys a lots of freedom while growing up. Kapur comments.

"She graduated from Jesus and Mary College and put away her books with relief. She hadn't really liked studying though she had done reasonably well. She was looking forward to the freedom marriage would provide" (Custody. 27)

She is a typical middle class woman who wants to have freedom through the rout of marriage. She even puts her study aside for getting married During her college, she falls in love with Raman. When Raman's family comes to see her. Mrs Kaushik, Raman's mother says, "Even after you many, I do not see this women in the kitchen (ustody 22 They ge married Shagun wants to meet films stars and to attend high-class paties Ther life is going very smoothly. She is a beauty while he is

a brain. When Arjun and right year old shagan becomes pregnant again. Finally, Shagun gives birth to a baby. She is named Books Kapur comments, "Right from the beginning it was clear that Baby Rood was a carbon copy of her father." (Custody, 18) Raman and Shagun argues about Roohi's looks. At one party Shagun meets Ashok Kahana, boss of Raman Form their first meeting, they feel attracted toward each other. She feels that she should move on in her life. She in a New Woman of Manju Kapur She is fully comfortable in venturing out of her marital role. They starts meeting regularly. The first target of the strained relationship becomes their youngest child Roohi.

To meet Ashok regularly, she even suggests Raman putting one and half year Roohi to play school. Although Raman

disapproves of the idea, Shagun remains unconvinced of his idea. And finally Roohi joins the toddler's. The distance between her and Raman starts widening day by day. Although she has a handsome, highly paid husband and two loving children still she is attracted to Ashok Khanna. All her energy is now being spent of keeping her relationship a secret. She has to be vigilant all the time and to find new excuses regularly. Slowly and slowly, she begins to justify her absence from home. Her life is divided in to two parts - inner and outer. The appearance of Shagun now worries Raman. Her skin is glowing like anything Raman feels disheartened on seeing her like this. Raman is continuously rejected by her in bed. Raman works hard to give his wife and children a comfortable living. She has all that a woman of her status craves for And yet she is not satisfied. One day she tells her husband that she wants something else un life. From that point onwards he begins to suspect her activities. One day Raman tells her about the distance that causes him unhappiness. Shagu mockingly says, "Distance?" she laughed as she drew her hand away. "it is you who ke travelling. How can you talk about my distance? (Custody, 49) Raman gets heart attached learning about her relation with Ashok Khanna After that there is not remained much for Shagun in her home. Mr. Sabharwal, her mother warns her about the consequences of this relationship. But she overhears her advices. At one night she leaves her home without letting anyone know. At one point Shogun who cannot wait for the court to declare the result for the case regarding divorce, calls Raman and proposes divorce by mutual consent Shagun offers him to take the children and give her divorce As he rejects her offer she starts is mailing

him by not sending Roohi to him, citing medical reasons. Eventually he gives divorce to her The custody of Arjun is given to Shagun by court. Now she uses her son as pawns of the game to get the custody of Roohi also. Thus the long battle for custody begins. The court has now become the battle field for both Shagun and Raman to fight.

Manju Kapur believes that the consequences of the events are more important than the event itself. Shagun and Ashok depart for New York Raman's mother blames her son for his patience. After sometime Shagun feels lonely after Ashok leaves for office. She always masses Arjun and Roohi. She notices the fragility in her second marriage also. In a letter to her mother Shagun repents about leaving Raman and children for Ashok. She wants her children hack so that she can makes up for her mistakes. Shagun in the pursuit of materialistic pleasure defies her mother also. It is Mrs. Sabharwal who first recognizes something wrong with her daughter's married life. Shagun also does not like her mother as she manages good relation with Raman In this way the mother-daughter dichotomy is depicted through their relation. Ishita Rajora is the second protagonist of the novel. When she is born, Kapur says:

"The child was a beauty, she said, and so sweet-tempered. her future home would rejoice. This pleased Mrs. Rajora, even though she that Ishita was sweet rather than preeti. and that without a dowry her qualities, both outer and inner, had to be sole attraction." (Custody, 52) Ishita's infancy is marked by illness. She is only four when she is diagnosed with Th She is on TB drugs for consecutive nine months. It makes her vulnerable to the waves of cold. cough and fever. Her parents take her



to different doctors, hakims and vaidas for her curing. Eventually she grows stronger. Ishita is not interested in early marriage. She has just finished her B.A. and wants to follow B.Ed. as it is a useful degree. She thinks that B.Ed. is a degree that would always be useful. If she got a job in a government school, she would have security, a steady income, as well as the lighter hours that future matrimony demanded. Ishita has begun to apply for teaching posts when Suryakanta's marriage proposal is received. Their family is a conservative merchant one. Their caste is same. The boy is twenty five year old, shy and inarticulate. They say that they want a homely housewife for their son. They also don't want dowry as they have enough money. Suryakanta was their only son, and grandchildren were expected within a year. In a traditional and conservative country like India it is always a mother, daughter or daughter-in-law who has to suffer in the hands of the patriarchs of the society. But at the end everything goes perfectly well and they get married in summer. But it is after eighteen months of their marriage that family members start talking about her pregnancy. Her mother-in-law takes her to meet many gynecologists, hakima, vaidas and so on. It is found in test that Ishita has TB in her childhood and that is why she is having trouble in conceiving. Her mother-in-law feels cheated and wants to talk with her mother. But after her re-marriage with Raman, she takes care of Roohi very much. She is very kind and soft spoken towards Roohi. Roohi finds in Ishita a perfect mother. Ishita's character is bit different from other characters of Manju Kapur, as she scarcely revolts. She is a typical marriage material for many men due to her calm, tender, soft, loving, and caring nature.

Mrs. Sabharwal is a mother of Shagun. As her husband passes away early, Shagun is brought up by her. She gives Shagun ample opportunities to study. She is a conventional woman. She enjoys good relation with her son-in-law Raman. Shagun doesn't like her mother's closeness with Raman. She always takes the side of Raman whenever there is an argument between them. Mrs. Sabharwal, Shagun's mother, got along excellently with Raman. For twelve years he had been more son than son-in-law. She tells Shagun about Raman's family's good qualities whenever Shagun worries about her in-laws' family. It is Mrs. Sabharwal who first recognizes something wrong between her daughter and Ashok Khanna. But she keeps silence instead she should talk with her daughter and ask her to leave Ashok. Now people can say what they want as she remains silent. She has nurtured Shagun by her own hands. She wants to be a perfect mother for her daughter. At a time when she needs somebody to help her, no one comes forward, so now she is behaving as she feels right. When Raman complains to her about Shagun's changed behaviour, she goes to Shagun and pursues her to think about her relation with Ashok.

In this way, the images of women are reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Her women want their own sky to fly high. They want to achieve their goal at any cost. Each and every novel of Manju Kapur is set in the backdrop of an important historical event. Manju Kapur's fifth novel *Custody* was inspired by globalisation and economic liberalisation. With the initial surge of foreign investment which stormed in India, it was a period of economic and financial boom. The deluge was welcomed by investment bankers, bureaucrats, industrialists whether big or



small, along with Government officials. The protagonists quite naturally have materialistic pursuits. The novels of Kapur are like fresh pages depicting the winds of change and her protagonists are strong images of change. Custody depicts her revolt at the age-old traditions without being partial to anybody. She has brought out two aspects of feminist perspectives in her novel - infidelity and infertility in the form of her two female protagonists. Shagun and Ishita respectively. It is also a tale of child custody and the Indian legal system. Kapur captures the lives of wealthy, urban middle-class Indians with their unsettling secrets dysfunctional relationships, their yearning for wealth, freedom and peace.

The plot of Custody is set in the backdrop of urban upper middle class family of Delhi who despite being affluent are impoverished in values and morals. Kapur explores the hollowness of modern life as the story revolves around Raman and Shagun who are couple along with charismatic Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss and Ishita, a childless divorcee. Kapur uses the institution of marriage in this novel to present the story of four adults and two children. A series of dispute follows along with arguments, heated discussions, exposing the evil side of divorce. Custody starts with the very first scene involving a love scene of a couple but the ironic side of the story is that it is not the love affair of husband and wife as it looks, but the love-making scene of a wife with her husband's boss. Shagun, the beautiful green-eyed wife of Raman had fallen in love with her husband's boss, Ashok Khanna. In a very short time Shagun finds herself struggling to define herself in the role of a wife, mother and a lover all together. Finally, she asks Raman for

divorce at which he is distraught. He reacts violently with his male-ego hurt and wounded like a dishonoured hero. He refuses to solve the matter amicably and the matter turns into a bitter battle in the court.

The book starts with the problems that married couples encounter and experience when there is no love lost between them. Kapur reveals without taking anybody's side the power of the extramarital affair which can break up even a solid marriage. Morals and ethics don't work or to say have no place when it comes to love. Ashok Khanna is a real marketer who has never failed. When he realises he is in love with Shagun, he becomes ruthless to achieve his target. Shagun at any cost. He feels this kind of love he had never experienced before with any body else. He proceeds to capture the mind, body and soul of Shagun and feels happy like a proud conquerer even if it means to destroy one's seems-to-be happy married life. With the taste of love Shagun rebels for freedom which was long denied to her. She fought for the freedom she had long wanted but it was at the cost of her children and a happy married life. She dares to come out of the protective environment of the peaceful family setup Kapur very artistic. The plots and the sub-plots and throws light on the fate of the children in such Manju Kapur presents the tensions and problems that follow as the aftermath of divorce Family structure crumbles and falls apart into pieces with divorce The novel shows what Shagun has to bear as a cost of her freedom. It is a break up of modern marriage with its burden of individualism. The funny thing is, when it comes to the downsides of individualism and the freedom of will, people suddenly tend to turn a blind eye

and look for excuses and justifications Shagun's rebellious attitude aggravated as a result of the oppression and suppression of the patriarchy since her childhood. She doesn't want to be a silent sufferer and submit herself to her fate and compromise any more instead she rebels to get what she wants now Kapur being a postcolonial writer gave her protagonists the same post-colonial touch which they deserved after the breaking down of the age-old traditions and trying to be liberal, progressive or radical It is a novel reeking of authenticity.

Kapur refrains from being partial and judgemental to any of the characters Manju Kapur's ability to present all the minute details with fineness gives the novel an authentic touch She is a keen observer of women psychology and thus has presented both Shagun and Ishita with equal importance. The cruel and rude domestic dispute takes its course on the innocent mind of the children and finally ruins their lives. The two adorable children-young teenager Arjun who looks just like Shagun and three year old Roohi who looks just like Raman are "tom between two mothers, two homes, two countries". The dirt and hatred that lies hidden under the expensive carpet of the upper-middle-class drawing rooms comes out with just one brushing. The concept of family shame and social propriety is kept at the background an Shagun's infidelity is not scandalized. The selfish and ignoring sides of the parents is reveal How the callous parents fail to understand, acknowledge, and respect the views of the child brought out by Manju Kapur in an realistic manner. Shagun's selfishness shocks Raman is a sincere, devoted husband. He is a hard working man trying to map the benefits of boom of the financial market but his hard work costs

him his wife Both the children of Raman and Shagun are separated from each other. In Custody, everybody has to pay a price for what they want. The fact that Husband and wife become strangers to each other is pathetic and fringe to the surface the hollowness which the mostem families experience in this materialist world Dom in the city of Amritsar in post-independence era when the nation was rising up after the centuries of colonial rule, Manju Kapur had seen the growing up of India Along with her growing up it was India growing up with its people men, women, children, families altogether

It was quite natural for her to focus on the most important aspects of a nation towards morals and ethics. In Custody, parallel to Shagun's story runs Ishita's story who has h deprived of her rights. Kapur through Ishita's life exposes the shallowness of marital life where a woman is stigmatised because of her infertility and the fact that she can't carry forward the family name. She is subjugated to severe mental torture with no one to take her side. Even her husband who had declared his undaunted love for her supported his parents Ishite's mother in-law is the typical mother-in-law of the Indian patriarchal society where a daughter is treated as a daughter and a daughter-in-law as a daughter-in-law. Being a woman she failed to empathize with Ishita's condition. When Ishita's mother-in-law takes a detailed discussion with the doctor to go to the depth of the matter to see the medical cause of failure. Her curiosity is satisfied as it is not her son who is impotent but her daughter-in-law who is infertile. The novelist brings out the callous nature of the mother-in-law who fails to understand and respect he same gender kind. In one type of feminism we can find that the root cause



of all problems the patriarchal system and men's domination to women.

The system also exposes the set up where a woman dominates another. Many writers feminists have poured their expression about women and their various problems. Kapur useful in exposing the fact of how a daughter-in-law is discarded from the household the family for only one reason. Ishita has to bear the cost of her infertility The theme of loneliness in marriage is running throughout the novel in every plot and subplot Mostly women have to bear the burden of loneliness in life. Woman has been reduced to a meek and docile animal today. The home is the crucial site of a woman's oppression According to Marxis feminis Classician is the main base of women's oppression Man, specially men in the capitalist class, benefit economically in the form of address women's work as non-productive and women's unpaid. On this account women's subordination is a function of class oppression maintained (like racism) because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class at divides men against women, privileges working class men relatively within the capitalist system in order to secure their support, and legitimates the capitalist class's refusal to pay for the domestic labor assigned, unpaid, to women.

Some socialist feminists do not think that the oppression of women is based only on the economic system and they suggest that patriarchy and capitalism are combined into one stem Kapur's Ishita is only body neither mind nor soul for her relatives. Female body is just a body and nothing else. Kapur's Custody is a tale of female woes, sufferings as well as their happiness, their way to fulfill their desires and aspirations. The novel takes us through a series of events and incidents

with separation, divorce, remarriages of the four adults and with it follows a series of ugliness with the legal procedure or the custody battle with the emotions of the children at stake. The pain and loneliness of the two children of Shagun is well portrayed Manju Kapur. The story can be termed as a legal drama of the Indian society Kapur omen are bold enough to face the cruel and slow turns of the Indian judiciary and the way it actions.

Manju Kapur's women are no longer confined within the four walls of the family and ional values. They dare to break down the conventional perceptions and dogmas of the patriarchal society or the bonds of incompatible marriage. In their quest for identity the women characters of Kapur are presented by her as real women of flesh and blood who have their own emotions and sentiments. They also yearn to be a part of the intellectual movements of the day, trying to establish their identity. Shagun tried to be honest with her love and life which means to revolt. She revolted against her married life and enjoyed her freedom. Feeling of guilt tormented her but she goes ahead to enjoy her new love life. Ishita on the other hand. Stigmatised of infertility hopes to find a new life in Raman's broken family with nothing but emptiness in her life, she revives her life by marrying Raman and seeks fulfilment in life. She un hesitantly accepts Raman's daughter Roohi as her own child and showers love on the small child. Kapur doesn't hesitate to tell that women like Ishita also exist in today's world who believe in showering love to family and remain happy being the guardian of other's children. One the other hand Shagun's character is projected as an independem woman who dared to stray for her lost identity. Kapur tries to bring both

her protagonists from the marginal position assigned to her. They do not achieve liberation through wider occupations or feministic revolts, but through deviational behaviour pattern depicting a process of psychological and spiritual aspect. Thus, the novel Custody reveals the unimagined uncertainties of matrimony and the sufferings of children during a divorce the wife's sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the constant shifting of children are evoked with painstaking sincerity. Custody becomes more than a social commentary. Practically it pictures the true nature of modern marriages which strive with its burden for individualism. India has just joined the fast paced world and changes are rapidly happening. All sets of Indian society have responsibility to dismantle hegemonic model of the minimal family and to reinforce democratic values that annihilate the culture of science n there is violence that deconstructs democratic values that sensitize the legal machine remote educational programmes to raise awareness.

The changing social situation of India most create families that recognize democratic values on which human dignity, justice and peace can find a comfortable abode. Woman in these novels are striving for an identity for themselves but in a positive manner. They are looking forward to carving a niche for themselves and obtain a social status. Asha too is trying to elevate her position but her means are not fair. Another character from the same novel is Nisha, around whom the novel Home revolves. Nisha, on joining college for English Honours feels happy. It is for the first time that she has come out from the enfolds of her family and so feels

liberated. In her family, talking to an unrelated man was considered a crime. On her hus journey to college, Nisha befriends a young boy and even goes out to have coffee with him. This fills her with a sense of being adventurous, daring and modern. For the first time she had socially interacted with an unrelated man. Educations brings her out in the open, away from the sheltered protection of her family.

Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals, caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant to them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with their family and society through which they plunged into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves. Nisha slowly starts defying all that was traditional. Her boyfriend. Suresh asks her to cut her hair, those very hair that had not been her own, but her family treasure, the essence of traditional beauty, oiled all her life by loving hands. Nisha's thoughts about the way she looked is intensified "It was no longer enough to have fair skin and good features. She needed to stand out.

Could she cut her hair, face the storm this would create?" (Home, 147)

Just a consign and she chops off her lovely madal soks With this she makes her chose clow of having to choose between an outoder and her family mademy and custom indpendence and community She chooses the emer Later when Nole mage is discussed within the lmlly, she tells her lover Suresh, to go to the shop and pats her od and is adamant to put the matter w her change her decision.

She is strong tied to Suresh "All day she remained in the house, a prisoner of bet deed a pe their words" (Home, 2001 Thus the efforts of the family defeat the enthusiasm of mage between her and Suresh takes place and In Manja Kapur's Custody, bha is an average looking girl with sumple getting married and leading a blissful life. She gets married to Suryakanta, a rich family only son. All goes well between the two and Ishita is the centre of attention for everyone in the family but after eighteen months of marriage also, when Ishita is not able to concer begins in their paradise. Ishita is examined by the doctor and that reveals her incapacity to l able to conceive: "After a few minutes the doctor showed her the screen, and pointed her last tubes, sealed irrevocably against both egg and sperm." (Custody. 62) The very family w had doted on her, the very husband whose angel she had been, than their back towards b make her feel like an alien in the same house which had belonged to her until a few da Her presence in the house as well as in the bedroom by her husband goes un acknowledge "The mother began to call her shameless.

The sisters refused to talk to her, the father and SK avoided her. She only saw her husband at the dining table - a place to which she now seldom came. Who can eat if they are treated as an invisible (Custody, 72)Ishita's life had become so pathetic that she has no choice but to leave that house and end her marriage to Suryakanta Although she suffers a major jolt in life yet she does not give up easily.It is not surprising that men are insensitive towards women's individuality sensitivity and feelings. They can only aggravate women's problems in their own way. The indifferent attitude of Suryakanta who had been the

cynosure of her eyes and the commander of her undivided attention takes its toll on Ishita She feels her life is over but soon snaps out of this situation and decides to make an identity for herself. She takes up teaching slum children to do some work for the upliftment of downtrodden children. This broadens her horizon and she realises the futility of cribbing over her condition when there were others with greater problems in life. She also decides to go for further studies and also makes up her mind to adopt a child. She tells her parents

"At least it will be nice to choose my fate instead of just waiting for some husband to appear." (Custody, 189) Sometimes situations bring out the best in people. Had Ishita not suffered the pain of partition from her husband due to her inability to conceive, she would have continued leading contented life and would have never searched for an identity for herself. In Manju Kapur else, women do not essentially try to become a part of the elite society but they try to break web of tradition in their own setup. It is never easy to break from the confines of tradition these women face a lot of difficulties in their transitional phase. They are in search of y but get caught in the vicissitudes of life. No revolution has ever taken place without lectionaries struggling to no end. Whenever an uprising takes place.,all efforts are mass the movement. In a similar fashion whenever woman in the novels of Manju Kapur try to tread the path of revolution, they face a lot of difficulties. They face many ups and downs when they step out in search for an identity for themselves. In Manju Kapur's Home, when Nisha's pursuit to marry Suresh does not bring any result, she slowly accepts her fate She requests her family to allow her to





pursue some course but her mother replies "You will do housework, Madam, just like Asha before you. All this time I have been treating you like a princess." (Home, 223) Soon she tells her family that she wants to work. Banwari Lal's family women had never worked but Nisha was adamant so a playschool becomes her workplace for sometime staying at home had virtually become impossible for her. She develops a skin disease because of which she is treated like an untouchable by her younger brother's wife. Home which refers to a place where people live together and are cared for by others assumes different nuances in Kapur's Home. Home is supposed to be a place where people feel relaxed and comfortable but Nisha in her own home finds herself unwanted and undesirous.

The job of a teacher is not her cup of tea and she always looks out for other avenues till she finally gets one in the form of business. The shoddy treatment she receives at her own home leaves her tearful and depressed and she desires to stay more and more occupied with work. So she decides to design salwar-kurtas, an option which was safe and secure besides giving her much desired satisfaction. She requests her father: "Give me a chance to show you what I can do." (Home. 286) From an emotionally shattered girl, Nisha transforms into a business woman very soon. She handles work so well that her family members are spell-bound. She design clothes under her own label Nisha's Creations and makes good money. She proves that given an opportunity, she can scale heights. Two years into business and her line of clothes how well known all over. Eventually after a prolonged period of pain, suffering and desired life When Ishita, in Manju Kapur's Custody, embarks

on a journey to live life on her terms, she is caught in the vicissitudes of life. Her own mother is not supportive of her action and wants to push her daughter into matrimony again, the same dungeon from which Ishita has escaped with great difficulty. She informs her parents about her wishes to adopt and her mother reacts: "Adopt. Who will marry her if she becomes burdened with a child (Custody, 186) Even the adoption process seems to be going against her as the entire procedure takes up a long time and until then she has to bear the pangs of loneliness. She gets some respite when she meets Roohi, the daughter of her neighbour Raman, whose wife had deserted him. Ishita implants her motherly instincts into bonding with the child. Ishita enjoys her stints with Roohi but soon starts feeling precarious about her position:

"She was not sure she wanted to see him if she was just a convenient auntie for his daughter. Someone who would amuse her while she visited. If that was the case, she must watch herself. she was in danger of growing too fond of essentially borrowed goods." (Custody, 283) With the passage of time she realises that even Raman had grown fond of her and Two slowly express their feelings for each other. "That night Ishita couldn't sleep. It had been five years since a man had touched her. This had been her second man. It made her feel worldly and sophisticated." (Custody, 293) Ishita had beaten the world and all those who had felt that she could n motherhood. Roohi gives her the wonderful opportunity to be her mother and Raman but life surely does not turn out to be a cakewalk. Raman's elder son. Arju completely and makes her feel unwanted. Arjun even tries to prevent Roohi from getting close to Ishita Ishita



finds this very difficult to handle as she devotes her heart and soul in taking care of Roohi, much more than her real mother had ever bothered, but Arjun comes and impregnates hostile ideas into the mind of Roohi. Despite all these setbacks, Ishita continues to pursue her feelings for Roohi. She feels threatened by Raman's ex-wife who wishes to acquire the custody of Roohi. Tom between love, emotions, duty and a fierce court case, Ishita faces it all.

"Tears came to Ishita's eyes. Why was it always like this ? This time she didn't have parent-in-law issues. instead, it was children-in-law. The critics, the judges, the manipulators." (Custody, 381)