

Psychological Sufferings of Characters in Manju Kapur's *Custody* due to Discard in Nuptial Bond

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur is a 20th century Indian novelist. She did her M.A degree in 1972 in Dalhousie University and working as a lecturer in Delhi University. She has written five novels. *Custody* is a fifth and last novel written by Manju Kapur. The novel focuses on the psychological suffering of children due to their parent's divorce. They are in a dilemma whether to live with father or mother. The novel utters the miserable marriage between Raman and Shagun and Ishita and Suryakantha. Novel's name itself symbolizes that the main theme is about the custody of the children. In this novel Kapur portrays both negative and positive qualities of women through Shagun and Ishita. Psychological analysis always focuses on internal feelings of mind. Functioning of psyche is given more importance in all characters. Everyone's mind has feelings like love, hate and angst which unconsciously come out of them at one particular situation.

Keywords: Dilemma, Miserable, Custody, Negative and Positive qualities, Internal feelings, Unconscious.

Custody by Manju Kapur deals with the sufferings of broken marriage that affects the psyche of the children. Functioning of psyche is given more importance in all characters. According to Sigmund Freud repressed wishes plays main role in unconscious mind. Freud in his *The Unconscious* says "In psychoanalytic practice we are accustomed to speak of unconscious love, hate, anger etc." (126). A sense of love flourishes between Shagun and Ashok in the beginning of the novel. Shagun's guilt makes her to think that everyone is watching her immoral behaviour what Freud calls in his *The Ego and the Id* "Unconscious consciousness of guilt"(10).

Every character in this novel has love for other which later changes to hate for some reason; this best suits the idea of Sigmund Freud in his *The Ego and the Id* "Clinical observations shows not only that love is with unexpected regularity accompanied by the hate and not only that in human relationships hate is frequently forerunner of love but also that in a number of circumstances hate changes into love and love into hate" (22). Raman and Shagun love each other in the beginning of their married life which later disappears in Shagun. Raman didn't help her in household activities and taking care of children. "Shagun enters into an illicit affair with Ashok and leaves Raman for her new love, then arises the issue of custody of children" (Deepa R 74).

Shagun's hatred is supported by her lover and the main reason for her hatred is Raman's lack of love and mechanical life. He is a corporate worker. He himself hated his job because he can't spend time with his family "He had passed many lonely nights, sacrificing family life for the sake of his job" (C 5). Lack of his presence creates a sense of hatred in mind of Shagun. Raman cannot manage between family and his work. "He is divided between two poles- between his public and private life. He is always in a dilemma which ways to select and which way is proper for him. He is aware of the feelings of his wife who also suffers from alienation and loneliness in the house" (Singh 117).

Raman considers his wife ambition as his own and tries to satisfy it through his boss Ashok. He does not expect that the chance of model will separate her from him completely. Mrs. Sabharwal conveys that women's entering into a job as a model will move her to lechery "When he first knew Shagun. She had wanted to be a model, but her mother was strongly opposed to the career that would allow all kinds of lechery near her lovely daughter" (C 11). This seems to be correct in the case of Shagun. Raman wants to provide Arjun with the sense of individuation. He believes that only one child can be brought in a happy and independent manner. "The father is needed by the growing ego to gain freedom from the nurturing containment offered by the mother and to instill the rigor of functioning and performance demanded for adaptation to the world" (Stein 204).

Raman's idea again fails due to second pregnancy of Shagun. He longs for daughter but he is afraid whether he can play a role of father positively. This reminds Jung's concept of Anima "Jung's concept of anima and animus sees a man as having even more inspiring feminine nature than a woman" (Kast 115). This concept suits Raman because generally a woman will always be afraid whether she can take care of two children but Shagun is very strong in having a second child because they have enough money to take care of the children. Ashok's cheap mentality is seen when he separates Shagun from her husband. Manju Kapur presents how biological father differs in love from step father. Ashok is interested only in physical pleasure. Shagun too fails as a mother in knowing about the importance of father in the life of children. In turn Raman always seems to be very loyal for Ashok in his business and lovable towards Shagun in family.

Raman's love for Shagun makes him to realize difference in her activities. He thinks Shagun as a precious gift for him "The extraordinary thing in his life was his wife and his love for her, as strong as a steel, as pliant as a spider's web. He hoped she would never find out the extent to which she could wound him" (C 44). He believes that his wife has love for him and she won't hurt him in any situation but all such belief fails when he suspects his wife having an affair with someone. "Like poison it seeped through his heart, paralyzing him, making him see his wife through its dark and vicious colours"(C 45). His agony rises when she rejects him in her bed. This shows the fragile nature of Raman who always needs his wife in satisfying his wishes and to show love on him "Shagun also began to reject her husband at night also. This made Raman out of the control and he began to retrospect his future concerning to marriage and children" (Singh 122).

Another part of the novel focuses on sufferings of Ishita. Her parent unemotional life style results in failure in taking care of her which ends in causing her tuberculosis that later affects her nuptial life. "Ishita's early history had been marked by illness. Both parents worked and they found it hard to manage even with this one child, dividing her care with the part time maid and a neighbourhood woman who ran a crèche to supplement her income" (C 49). Manju Kapur beautifully portrays how an unemotional life creates problem in the family. Ishita's individuality fails when she accepts her fiancée's mother idea of needless employment

for daughter-in-law. According to her a daughter-in-law should have a capability to take care of her family. "The ideological constructs of patriarchy, the husband sustained the family economically and represented it in a public sphere while a woman has to take care of the private realms of the home" (Deepa R 76). This idea seems to be failure because it is Ishita who decides to reject her job and her mother-in-law asks her to work in house. This has nothing to do with patriarchal set up.

Suryakantha and his family members love Ishita in the beginning of their marriage. Slowly problems raises in her life due to delay in pregnancy. She seems to be very loyal to her husband when she exposes her illness in her childhood days. She believes that nothing should be hidden from husband and wife relationship. "I am not like you snapped Ishita back. 'what kind of lies do you want me to go on living? If I can't trust my husband, it is no marriage'" (C 59). Manju Kapur brings philosophy of marriage through the words of Ishita. Her delaying in pregnancy starts to raise hatred from everyone. Surya Kantha's silence kills her and his opinion regarding expressing truth to his mother creates fear in her. "It is only when she fails to conceive, following a series of fertility treatments financed by her husband's family (including IVF but not the more expensive opinion of frozen embryos) that the couple marriage falls apart-largely" (Clements 21).

Ishita's mother-in-law's cruel nature goes to the extent of insulting Ishita as incapable of bearing child. She abuses her as a shameless woman who still lives with her husband after knowing her barren condition "Ishita has an arranged marriage but as soon as her husband and in-laws discover that she cannot conceive, despite the innumerable painful and tedious medical treatments, she is filled with the sense of shame and insignificance and the family abandons her" (Azhar 42). Ishita's self-respect makes her to leave the home. She believes that her husband would understand the situation but he fails to do so. Throughout their life Surya Kantha remains silent and shows no sense of loyalty for Ishita. He considers his mother as more important which makes him deaf when his mother shout at her harshly. This shows man's immaturity in taking decision in his life and woman serves as an enemy for another woman.

Raman's suspicion goes to the peak of contacting the detective agency to check the behaviour of his wife "Raman began to suspect the character of his wife and for the conformation he hired the detective agency to give him the detail for her activities- what she did, what she wanted, where did she go?, etc" (Singh 122). Though she has hatred towards her husband, she thinks about her children life without their father but later such idea vanishes because Ashok corrupts her mind. Ashok always focuses on having physical intimacy with her, when she asks him about the marriage, he convinces her by saying that his work always sends him abroad. She also accepts his words but her sense of longing for love from man makes her to feel unhappy which is seen through "My life is a nightmare. It's hard to be a wife when your heart is somewhere else. If only I were not a mother, how easy it would be. To leave him, to live with you, just be happy" (C 83). She longs for love to whom she can't get it whole heartedly but she rejects the pure love of Raman.

Shagun went to the extent of thinking her children as a burden. This shows she fails in her motherly love "Custody raises the issue of motherhood. The biological and stepmother. Motherhood is seen as an institution that resists or limits the freedom of a woman" (Deepa R 75). Ashok seems to be morale less because he always loves money and physical intimacy. He gains money from Raman and pleasure from Shagun. Shagun deceives herself by believing him "Freud and Lacan argued that people have an almost infinite capacity to

deceive themselves. This is especially true when they are making judgment about themselves or when they are contemplating their own desire and their own image” (Hill 18)

Raman realizes that something lacks in their relationship but it is late for him to analyse his mistake. Shagun’s pretention as a good person creates anger on Raman which makes him to question her directly. He utters that he cannot tolerate the treachery of her. “I trusted you. If there was something wrong, why didn’t you tell me? I was working so hard-for whom do I work but my family?-and you-“(C 88). His pain shows his extreme belief on his wife and she reciprocates him only treachery. When Raman learns about Ashok’s transfer, he feels very happy and requests God to provide him more punishments.

Raman’s trauma results in a cardiac arrest for him. Mrs. Kaushik on knowing the reality screeches at Shagun for driving Raman to the extent of killing him. Children love towards their father is seen through their scream regarding their father’s cardiac arrest “Roohi’s tears, Arjuns fear, papa is going to die, Shagun’s anger, control your mother, she is frightening the children. Things became so bad that Raman has to beg his parents to go away” (C 102). Raman sweet nature is seen through thinking his wife as a good woman and he only has some mistakes to be rectified. He understands his mistakes but she disagree his pardon which shows her sorceress attitude. Raman cries in the night for being separated from his wife and children. He files the custody case for children. He is helped by Nandan, a distant relative for Raman. He feels very dejected while he returns without seeing children.

Hopelessness filled Ishita and Raman because they undergo same suffering. He is deceived by Shagun and she by Surya Kantha. They both underwent physical and psychological sufferings. Raman undertook physical suffering when he is admitted in hospital and suffers psychologically due to his separation from wife and children. Ishita feels physical sufferings when she undergoes painful medical treatment regarding insertion of eggs in uterus and suffers psychologically when she is separated from her husband. This suits what Freud says in his *The Ego and the Id*

Psycho-Physiology has fully discussed the manner in which a person’s own body attains its special position among other objects in the world of perception. Pain seems to play a part in the process and the way which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illness is perhaps a model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our body. (11)

Children suffer a lot when they miss their father. Arjun didn’t speak to anyone. He considers Ashok as an alien who separates him from father. “The world is very chaotic place for infants, where meaning is not fixed. In the whole animal kingdom, human infants are the most, disorganized and most helpless, for the longest period” (Hill 71). Arjun feels helpless in studies after being separated from his father. He feels dejected in food and studies. Whenever he asks about father, Shagun consoles his son by portraying his father as a sadist man and murderer. He considers Ashok as a demon who separates him from the love of his mother. This best suits Lacan’s concept “The symbolic father is not the same as the biological father whose sperm helped create the subject... The symbolic father is any agency that separated the young subject from its mother” (Homer 60). For Arjun, Ashok is a symbolic father because he separates him from his mother. He suffers a lot due to lack of mother and father’s affection.

Ishita's past fills her with pain because Surya Kantha divorces her. He stops loving her when his mother asks him to do so. This shows his dependent nature on father and mother to decide his life. He is like puppet in the hands of his parents. Her hopelessness makes to compare herself with dismantled bird "Ishita further depressed, open the door and left. Why were her parents always investing the smaller action with so much significance? It weighed her down, she with her broken wings, who longed to fly" (C 127). Ishita joins as a social worker and enjoys her life by serving for the poor children by providing education for them and slowly overcomes the pain of separation from her ex-husband "Some women find motherhood as debilitating and insensitive while for some others it as gratifying and happy vocation" (Deepa R 75).

On the day of custody case Shagun frightens Arjun not to speak with his father. He is trained to tell lies that he is living happily in his grandmother's home. This raises question in the mind of Arjun whether he should love his father or not "Shall I be like mummy or daddy? Who do I love/hate more, mummy or daddy?. What do they want from me? How much do I have to share? What do I have to give up or do to get what I need" (Hill 63). He shows no love for his father when he meet him in the court. He accepts his mother's advice and speaks consciously to his father. Shagun seems to be a caring less mother because she plans to send off their children to boarding school for the sake of her happiness. She admits Arjun in DPA but she cannot do that to Roohi because she is very young."Shagun cannot enjoy the pleasures of motherhood by sacrificing her pleasures. She is torn between the love and care she found in her relationship with Ashok and her status as a mother" (Deepa R 76).

Shagun's belief on Raman makes her to hand over the children custody to him in exchange of divorce from him. This shows her attitude of considering children not as her life and only as a property. Raman and Shagun appear for a session in a court and confess they cannot live together. Shagun gives up legal guardianship of children to Raman and attains visitation rights. She doesn't believe that Ashok has concern for her children. Ishita's critical experience in marriage life makes her not to enter in another marriage. Mrs. Kaushik came to her home and tells about Roohi's reserved nature after being separated from her mother. Ishita's motherhood quality makes Roohi to move close to her.

Raman's kind hearted nature makes him to feel sorrow on hearing Ishita's tragic marriage. He considers his life as better because he has children support to overcome his sufferings. Roohi becomes the soul supporter for Ishita's pain and till the end of the novel they seem to be non-separated. It is she who serves as a bridge for Raman and Ishita's relationship. Ishita as a step mother satisfies all the wishes of Roohi in the place of biological mother. Ishita and Raman attract each other because they both represent excess love for each other. They both have a sexual intercourse before their marriage "The would-be homemaker Ishita, too, seeks a non-traditional means to satisfy a woman's traditional desire to raise and care for a child" (Clements 21).

Ishita and Raman register their marriage without informing their parents. They are shocked to see them as a bride and bridegroom. Mrs. Kaushik's anger calms down when she comes to know that Ishita is her new daughter-in-law. Their marriage makes Ishita as a legal mother for Roohi. Arjun cannot accept Ishita's presence in the place of his mother. He also starts to poison the mind of Roohi by saying that Shagun is their real mother and not the auntie who stays in the house. His words create pain in Roohi that makes her to cry. Ishita consoles her by saying that she will be her mother forever "Roohi had not yet learned to lie.

Ishita wiped her hands, put the lid of the pot down, sat on it and took the child in her arms. ‘I love you, my precious. You are the best thing that has happened to me. Now you will remember that, won’t you?’” (C 313).

Kapur brings corrupted nature of educational institution. Educational institutions are not ready to inculcate students with knowledge; instead they focus on getting knowledgeable student by conducting an interview and making selection based on their performance in the interview. So best students get an opportunity to join in good school and better students are deprived from education. This is the problem with Roohi because she cannot answer and utter rhymes properly so she is rejected for admission in schools. Ishita separates Roohi from Arjun because she may be corrupted by the words of him. Ishita didn’t allow her daughter to meet Shagun because she has fear that Roohi will be caught between two mothers and two countries which may results in trauma. Shagun files a custody case for Roohi because she is not allowed to see her daughter. This creates fear in Ishita that she will be separated from her daughter. She always cries and fights with Raman that he in turn consoles her.

On the day of judgement they trained Roohi for answering magistrate’s questions. Roohi also answers that she is interested in living with her mother Ishita. Magistrate offers the custody of Roohi to Ishita and guardianship of Arjun to Shagun. Raman sacrifices his love for Arjun to save the love and life of Ishita and Roohi. He recollects the memories of his son while driving the car “Somewhere in the depths of the lower courts, he was meditating his past and present lives. This was something he had to do alone” (C 396). Through this novel Manju Kapur express the psychological suffering of parents and children due to discard sin nuptial bond. She presents marriage as a symbol of separation of man and woman from their family. She also presents that main problem in family happens due to lack in patience and flexibility. Novelist provides the idea that mechanical life always distances person from family. These novels can further be researched in point of view feminism, Man-Woman relationship, and deconstruction, womanish and archetypal criticism.

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