

VOICING FOR SPACE: MANJU KAPUR'S *CUSTODY*

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Abstract

Widely acclaimed as the Jane Austen of India, Manju Kapur has a very skilled pen in portraying the psychological and social world of modern woman. Manju Kapur's fifth novel *Custody* reflects the contemporary Indian female scenario through the protagonist. Set in the environment of globalization and financial liberalization the novel reflects the view, how materialistic world affects the psychological world. She also concern about the issues like infidelity and infertility and its effects on the life. The present paper focus on the exasperation of the protagonists in the process of self attainment in the novel *Custody*. It is the modest attempt to have a look on struggle, frustration, and alienation of the modern women in the search of self attainment. The paper will try to explore that how the language of silence translates into language of revolt. It will assess the protagonist Shagun's distressed psychological state in the process of self attainment. The novel *Custody* is the modest attempt to put forth the modern women in the contemporary society. Manju Kapur has explored aspirations and changed tendency of the world of modern woman.

Key Words: Self attainment, Distressed, Modern Woman.

FULL PAPER

Widely acclaimed as the Jane Austen of India, Manju Kapur has a very skilled pen in portraying the psychological and social world of modern woman. The retired professor the of English at Miranda House in Delhi University, Manju Kapur belongs to such tradition of women novelist whose prime canvas of writing is women issues. She has aptly described the real woman of the post modern era, in all her published five novels and became the

sensational figure in the literary world. The internal and external world of a woman and conflict in the process of being and becoming can be stated as the main thread of her writing. Manju Kapur's protagonist struggles, fights not only against socially odds but also face the psychological dilemma. Almost in all her published novels, Manju Kapur has sketched the new face of woman on the canvas of traditional patriarchal Indian society. She has depicted the struggle and suffering of woman in the process of self attainment. Though there are many modern women novelist who have focused struggle of woman but Manju Kapur has taken a step ahead from them. In her novels self attainment of the character prevails than social ethics and morals.

Manju Kapur has tried to break the image of Indian woman as submissive or 'the other' in male dominated society in. Her women protagonists denies being mere rubber dolls and tries to become independent, active, self centered and wants to create own identity and place in the male dominated society. Though she gets suffered in the process she never quits. Kapur focuses on the man-woman relationships, female aspirations, longing, gender discrimination, conflict between psychological and social satisfaction, and so on. The present paper focus on the exasperation of the protagonists in the process of self attainment in the novel *Custody*. It is the modest attempt to have a look on struggle, frustration, and alienation of the modern women in the search of self attainment. Kapur's female characters show that how the language of silence translates into language of revolt. She assess the protagonist Shagun's distressed psychological state in the process of self attainment. Manju Kapur's fifth novel *Custody* reflects the contemporary Indian female scenario through the protagonist. Set in the environment of globalization and financial liberalization the novel reflects the view, how materialistic world affects the psychological world. She also concern about the issues like infidelity and infertility and its effects on the life. The novel is retrogress of how sweet family become battle field, how materialism worsen the spiritual world. *Custody* depicts the world of four major characters Raman, Shagun, Ashok Khanna and Ishita. Raman, a marketing executive at a global drinks company and his wife Shagun, a beautiful lady with sparkling greenish eyes and their two adorable kids Arjun and Roohi. They all enjoyed an extreme happiness in their life till Ashok Khanna, Raman's young and dashing, handsome boss entered in their life. Ashok also fascinated by Shagun's feminine charm and decides to have her at any cost. Here Manju Kapur has satirized the typical mentality of men towards women,

who considers women as mere sex object. In this regards V.Geetha's comment about the social attitude of men towards women is important to be consider. She comments: Women's bodies were often routinely viewed as object of male desire and lust, a fact that was particularly evident in media images of women. Women's groups pointed to the range of sexual crimes that were directed at women-child abuse, incest, marital rapeto argue that their social existence was invariable sexualized and therefore not seen as worthy of equality or justice. The family and larger kin group, they noted actively aided this sexualization of women's bodies by valorizing against women, they insisted, which secured the patriarchs powers, both at level of family and society (Geetha 191).¹ The protagonist Shagun was leading a perfect and happy married life with lovable husband Raman and two lovely kids Arjun and Roohi until Ashok Khanna, Raman's young dynamic boss entered in her life. She gets attracted towards him and fined herself unable to cope with her family duties and her new love. She feels suffocated with her married life and asks her husband to divorce.

Murali Mohan rightly remarks about the situation of Shagun: One of the main problems for educated woman is marriage .Most of their problems are related to marriage (Mohan 13). Here Manju Kapur has explored the hollowness or uncertainty of marital institution. After twelve years of happy marriage their relation become worsens. They become enemies of each other. They both even forget about their own kids. John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjection of Women* refers to an ideal relationship in marriage: "What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated? faculties, identical in opinion and purposes, between whom exists the best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority over them- so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development...I maintain with the proudest conviction that this, and this only, is the ideal of marriage" (Mill 235).

In Indian culture the marriage is considered as the pious and sacred bond which totally based on the pillar of adjustments and sacrifices which mostly expected by the women. But Shagun wants to sail against the wind to gain her aspirations and self-identity. Shagun wants to lead luxurious and page three lives and for that she becomes ready to leave her husband too. It was her dream since her childhood. Manju Kapur portrayed Shagun as new woman, yet confused about the concept of satisfaction. Though she was with her new lover Ashok

Khanna, she feels a kind of frustration due to absence of her kids. The situation of their children was not different; they were torn between struggle of father and mother. When Raman meets Ishita, a childless divorcee, the situation became more difficult for them. Though Ishita loves a lot to the kids, the children were torn between two mothers, two homes and two countries. Shagun wants to get victory over her ex-husband in all way. When Shagun learns about Ishita and Raman's relation she becomes fractured emotionally. Though she was living with her lover Ashok Khanna, yet she was unable to bear happiness of Raman in her absence. Manju Kapur here comments the mentality of modern woman through character Shagun. She wants everything; luxurious life, happiness, her children. She wants free life on her own norms and for that she was ready to pay whatever cost. First she lost her husband and in battle of custody she lost her daughter Roohi. Shagun is portrayed as an over ambitious woman while Ishita is portrayed as a lovely and down to earth woman. But both the ladies are struggling with the uncertainties of their Life. They become frustrated. Shagun's jealous and ambitious nature make her unhappy and Ishita's constant feeling of losing Roohi as she is not her won kid, makes her depressed. The tension and uncertainties have major role in both of character's life.

In this regards Asha Sharan's observation is noteworthy, she writes, "Infidelity empowers a woman but infertility dis-empowers her"(87). Infidelity reflects and defends women's right to desiring, and the pursuit of the fulfillment of female sexual desire is a metaphor for women's equality politics. Autonomously decided, infidelity permits women to experience their own sexuality as a pleasurable one as they control their gender, their sexuality and their reproductive potential and it challenges the male domination and patriarchal mechanisms of surveillance and control over women bodies. Infertility is culturally and socially constructed in such a way that even though it affects a couple it is the woman who bears the burden. Women's social status, direction in life, economic achievement, well-being and the very meaning of marital life hinges around their ability to give birth and rear children. The novel Custody throws a light on the growth of individual tendency in modern world. Everyone wants own happiness without bothering the social norms and ethics.

The extramarital love seems common in modern life. The novel focuses on the hollowness of modern marriage institution, sufferings due to impotency and infertility, and importance of individualism rather than socialism. Though Shagun has extramarital affair she never bother about it, instead of feeling guilty she boastfully asks for divorce and fights a legal battle for custody of the children. She is portrayed as bold, zest for self satisfaction and freedom seeker.

Manju Kapur has aptly described her nature. She sank down next to him; she knew she would have a happiness she never had before. If she were to die tomorrow, it would be as a fulfilled woman (Kapur 113). The tendency of Shagun is reflected in the above sentence. Manju Kapur has portrayed brilliantly the protagonist Shagun's self centered nature, over ambitiousness, her tension and frustration doing legal battle on the canvas of traditional society in modern age. Almost every character faces suffering at his own way. Raman though has everything suffers from his wife's infidelity, Shagun possess everything but suffers because of her over ambitious nature and Ishita suffers because of her infertility. All the characters are young, educated but fails to lead peaceful life. The happy life seems to be mere an illusion to the characters. To conclude, the novel *Custody* is the modest attempt to put forth the modern women in the contemporary society. Manju Kapur has explored aspirations and changed tendency of the world of modern woman.

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