



Marital Discord In Manju Kapur's Custody

H. Jamesha Mohideen, Dr. M.H. Mohamed Rafiq

Jamal Mohamed College Trichy. Research Scholar PG & Research Department of English
Associate Professor of English PG & Research Department of English Jamal Mohamed College Trichy.
Corresponding Author: H. Jamesha Mohideen,

ABSTRACT: Manju Kapur is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world. Kapur's fictions stresses on the woman's need for self fulfilment, autonomy, self realization, individuality and self-actualization. In her portrayal of woman characters, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Most of all, Kapur manages to blend the personal with the external. Kapur's latest novel Custody(2011) gains significance for one thing that is Shagun, the mother of two children demands divorce by mutual consent and custody for children from her husband, a highly qualified and affectionate man, who is focused to his career only for the material comforts and secured future of his wife and children. It is the man not the woman who undergoes the pangs of separation. The novel takes home the point, how the sophisticated women break the marital relationship simply for their self gratification and realization of sexual freedom.

Received 13 November , 2018; Accepted 27 November, 2018 © The Author(S) 2018. Published With Open Access At Www.Questjournals.Org

I. MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN MANJU KAPUR'S CUSTODY

Since the time immemorial, the history of mankind has been replete with the paradoxes in socio-cultural and religious spheres. At times, the status of women is brought under a discomfiting scrutiny and as a result, 'Feminism' has acquired the currency as one of the most controversial, volatile and hotly debated terms in socio-political and literary circles. To be brief, 'Feminism' is the name given to a political movement that gathered momentum in 1960's , giving a call for liberation of women from certain forms of gender-based that deprived women of the opportunities for self promotion and equality with men simply because they were women. But the awareness that women are unjustly discriminated against, and their inferior status has been deliberately constructed can be traced much earlier. This phenomenon of the 20th century is a crystallization of all forms of social, political and psychological awareness that patriarchal society with its various structures and organizations is essentially hostile to women's freedom and interested in keeping them subjugated in order to perpetuate the patriarchal power and authority. The history reveals that superior attitude of men is the root cause of female dissatisfaction. Women have suffered in silence and are still suffering in silence, waiting patiently for the day to come when they will be treated with respect and love in the true sense. It is the high time when women asserted their human rights and actually got what they have been wrongly denied so far. In this regard marry Wollstonecraft in a classic work A Vindication of Rights of Women observes:

I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and happiness consists, I wish to persuade women to Endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body..., (and) to show how elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being regardless of the distinction of sex. (1985 164)

In other words 'Feminism' can be stated as an expression of resentment at unjust treatment meted out women. In the 20th century women's writing moved towards a medium of modernism in which Womenist and Feminist statements were combined with political messages. In contrast to the persistent orient list construction of the Indian woman as a passive victim, women writers from the Indian subcontinent have written prolifically and movingly of women negotiating and restricting the multiple patriarchies that determine and shape their lives in diverse post-colonial situations. Women writers of today seek to posit the independent existence of women, focusing mainly on the question of identity crisis for women in a patriarchal society. Exploring a wide range of female experiences that question the recurring face of patriarchy, the recent women writers depict both the diversity of women and diversity within each woman.

This 'new woman' is one who refuse to be stifled under oppressive restrictions and demands for her rightful place, recognition and respect for making her existence a meaningful one. Among the writers who have portrayed 'new woman', who is inclined to take the 'road not taken', and walking on their own road, Manju Kapur, undoubtedly arrests attention. Manju Kapur's novels written in the 90's show that the era of change is round the corner. Just like her other novels, Custody also portray women who want their individual worth realized and attempts to break through the sufferings that traditional society offers them.

Kapur's Custody takes deep and satisfying look at the sense of displacement often felt by women in the traditional institution of marriage and family. The novel delineates the bolt steps taken by Shagun, a pretty woman, a perfect blend of West and East, married for eleven years to Raman, a marketing executive with brilliant prospects at a multinational company and mother of two children, a toddler daughter and a boy of eight years old. Her thirst for self realization and self fulfillment had ended up with an extramarital relationship with her husband's superior and the company's wonder man, Ashok Khanna, who is reputed for his ability to get the best out of people. In the beginning she never thought of breaking the marital relationship. She was very much upset when her extra marital relationship got exposed. She expresses her anguish:

Why were things moving so fast? When she started her affair she had thought a lover would add to her experience, making up for all things she had missed having married straight out of college. She had heard of other women who took lovers. Their whole lives didn't change (Custody 82).

She only wanted to continue her role in the family as well as with her lover. But it is her lover who encourages the divorce and assures that his love for her is constant and he is ready to do anything for her and her children. And finally she also realized that her heart and mind is no longer with her husband. She confirms: "it is hard to be the 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". (83-84)

And finally she decided that her marriage was over as Raman has lost all his faith and love for her as he had known and confirmed her infidelity and extra marital affair through a detective agency. As her affair is no more a secret, she decides but to leave the husband and remain with the lover. Once decided, there is no looking back; she took all the bold measures to make a husband accept divorce on mutual consent. She finally ends up with legal battle with just claiming and winning the visiting rights on her children, leaving the custody of the children to her husband.

In the meantime, she also successfully develops a good relationship between her son Arjun and her new husband Ashok. She happily rejoices that Ashok had accepted her son Arjun as his own –Ashok taking interest in the studies of Arjun and doing everything for getting him admitted in his own alma mater DPA, which had molded his own life and his leadership qualities. This DPA association also helps in promoting a cordial relationship between them and Arjun's acceptance of Ashok in his life.

Ishita, the other woman in the novel is also portrayed to be a dynamic woman. Having lost her married life due to her inability to give birth; she rehabilitates herself to meaningful by involving herself in the service of the poor children of the nearby slum. She disapproves the marriage initiatives taken by her mother Mrs.Rajora. But finally finds the marital and familial harmony with Raman and his daughter Roohi. She put her all mind and soul to win the heart of Roohi. She rejoices in Roohi's acceptance of her as her own mother. She leads the legal battle against Shagun, the biological mother of Roohi and finally wins the custody of Roohi for herself. Her matured and dynamic mind prepares her to forget the past and accept a new beginning. She tells herself repeatedly: "wipe the past from your memory, focus on the present, you are lucky enough to have the chance of a new beginning." (303)

To sum up, both Shagun and Ishita display the dynamics of the 21st century women. They prove themselves in their own way in realizing their own selves and rejoice a life of self fulfillment. They also prove that they can break the cultural and social inhibitions and successfully too. Manju Kapur is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world. In her portrayal of women characters, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche and most of all she is aware of the fact that feminist consciousness is a state of mind and it has nothing to destroy the social harmony.

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Marital Discord In Manju Kapur's Custody " (Quest Journals) Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science 6.12 (2018): 21-22