

# Problem of Divorce and Custody of Children in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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**Abstract:** *Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She teaches English literature at Miranda House College, Delhi University. Her first novel Difficult Daughter was published in 1998. This novel received huge international acclaim. In her novel Custody she has raised the issues of globalization, liberalization and drastically changing mode of society along with the desire of liberty in women, infertility in women and hollowness of modern marriage. In this she explored the effect of divorce on children also, may they are toddlers or adolescents. Her novels Difficult Daughters, A Married Woman, Home, The Immigrant, Custody and The Brothers explore women's struggle in patriarchal setup. Manju Kapur has used different themes such as patriarchal setup, search for identity, infertility and infidelity and struggle for existence etc.*

**Keywords:** Separation, Divorce, Stigma, Feministic movement, Idealistic transcription, Patriarchal setup

Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011) novel which deals with the problems occurring after divorce. Adultery has become an order of the day in the metropolitan cities of India and abroad. In her previous novel *The Immigrant* (2008) too Kapur has taken up this theme of adultery. This novel deals with consequences after the discovery. Two problems namely divorce and Custody of children have become the twin themes of *Custody* (2011). Complications legal and social make divorce a hard nut to crack. Ambition, greed and incompatibility between the couple are the chief among many other social actors which lead to divorce.

Recently a collection of stories by Farrukh Dhondy entitled *Adultery And Other Stories* (2011) has appeared with the theme of adultery. Writers like Nabokov, Conrad and Solzhenitsyn etc. have also taken up this theme. At one place Dhondy writes "Adultery is what adults do", Upala Sen in reviewing the book in *Hindustan Times* writes:

And what he (Dhondy) does in this book is not to restrict the telling to a simplistic tale of pati, patni aur woe. If adultery is like a shadow to an individual, shifty and unshakable, that socio moral theme finds its reflection in the literary form. Every story has an overt, regular narrative and a shadowy adulterous sub narrative. Some very adult tales told with child like ease" (*Hindustan Times*, Lucknow Saturday August, 13, 2011, p.6)

Reference of Farrukh Dhondy's short stories collection has been made to show the parameters of this socio psycho imbroglia, Kapur narrates from the very first page the extra marital relations in the following words:

January 1st, 1998

The couple lay among stained sheets and ruffled quilts, eyes closed, leg twisted together like the knotted branches of a low growing tree. Slowly their breathing became less noisy. Her head grew heavier on his shoulder, his shoulder, his hand across her stomach became limp. They dozed, perhaps for fifteen minutes, but behind their heavy eyelid slay uneasy thoughts. They had things to do, places to go, lies to tell, the woman particularly. (*Custody*, p.1)

Hero of the novel *Raman* is a product of L. I. M. Ahmedabad and has been employed in an internationally acclaimed beverage company 'The Brand'. His wife Shagun is a beautiful woman having uncommon green coloured eyes. She has two children. To be brief the couple has a son and a daughter which make their family complete. But there comes a woe in between Pati and Patni. Thus the novel deals with Pati, Patni Aur Woe.

Ashok Khanna the wonder man of the company the Brand comes to India the chief executive officer of South east Asia. He is to revive the Brand which was banned during the Janta Party regime after 1977. Raman has been given the responsibility by the company to popularize the new drink - Mang - Oh. Ashok Khanna in a party meets Shagun and his longing for Shagun begins. As far as Khanna was concerned a halo was created around him. For example such talks were in the air as he comes from Harvard School of Business or he is the first Indian to be made C. E. O. of the Brand. Shagun falls for his glamorous life and Ashok Khanna for Shagun's green eyes and for her fine body curves. So Ashok Khanna is Woe. From here Shagun chooses a diverse way.

In the novel there is another sub plot in which a couple Ishita and Suryakant also undergo the pangs of separation. Their marriage is an arranged marriage. But the discovery after the marriage that Ishita would not be able to become a mother prepare ground for separation and finally mutually agreed divorce. When we come to analyse factors responsible for the divorce of Shagun with her highly qualified and promising husband Raman we discover that freedom, ambition and the glamour of high society drive away Shagun from her husband.

"Don't make this harder, I have left you the best part of the marriage. Surely my freedom is not too much to ask in exchange" (*Custody* 114). Ashok Khanna sends Arjun the son of Shagun and Raman, to Boarding School at Dehradun. Roohi the daughter is too little to be sent to Boarding. Her fate is undecided.

Whenever wife and husband go for separation and divorce, it is children

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who suffer most Arjun takes the side of his mother and he thinks and decide in her favour However, initially he also does not like going to a Boarding school. The following words indicate the working of a child's mind:

Boarding schools for children whose parents did not love them The child was reflecting his mother's guilt - she had to recognize that (Custody.171)

As for as Shagun is concerned, she could not avoid her part in this sordid drama:

She understood he could never feel for the boy, it was her fault for leaving the child's father she would pay for her sins for the rest of her life (Custody, p 171).

Then Manju Kapur narrates the long and tortuous legal battle for divorce which both the parties face. Ishita after mutually agreed divorce comes in contact with one Mrs Hingarani who runs an NGO which works for the schooling of the boys and girls of the lowest strata of society Hingarani has all appreciation for her work.

But Kapur shows how the two divorcees Raman and Ishita meet and they mutually agree to marry in a simple and unconventional way. One significant thing to notice is the two pairs who stand in binary opposition to each case of Shagun and Raman, it is Shagun who wants divorce to lead a life of freedom, comfort and luxury. Raman is at the receiving end. In the case of Ishita and Suryakant, it is Suryakanta who wants divorce from Ishita. Here. Suryakant wants divorce for social reasons. Ishita cannot beget children, and this is a stigma for a woman in Indian society.

The novelist creates such situations in which Ishita comes close to Raman. Both have lost their other - halves. Both appear dejected and broken, But they gain strength after coming together, Kapur has shown how a divorcee can lead a different life by working for poor and destitutes through an N. G. O. Ishita devotes her time for social service a good and a positive escape Novelist in this context shows how a life disastrous and tragic may take a positive turn and can make a life meaningful. The novel presents on the one hand adultery and debauchery and on the other hand feministic movement. To be fair this feministic movement appears subdued before the limitless liberty of women. Unfortunately, the women writers have equated feministic movement with limitless freedom. Other social economic and legal aspects connected with succession and inheritance remain untouched. Perhaps these aspects appear to female writers listless and they want to make their workspiecey for commercial success.

If we come out of literacy writings particularly in English written in India or about India by women writers we discover that multiple media journalistic presentations are either like documentary films or idealistic transcriptions of the situation of contemporary Indian women. There is no realistic and pragmatic approach which may lead to the betterment in the condition of Indian women. In some TV. serials also women have been presented in a dark shade. The efforts should be to present such situations and encouraging

actions which may bring a positive change in the destiny of Indian women.

## References

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- [2] Sen Upala "Book Review" in Hindustan Times, Lucknow, Aug.13, 2011, p.06