



Brunt of Divorce on the Psyche of Children: A Study of Custody by Manju Kapur

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the focus will be on Manju Kapur's novel Custody. This novel mainly focuses on the brunt of divorce on the psyche of children. Kapur pinpoints a perceived necessity of a strong argument against the ongoing onslaught of divorce on the mindsets of budding children. She brings to light the pain, suffering and silence existing in the family aftermath of a divorce. She keenly discusses the psychological ups and downs in the mind of the children leading to a traumatic condition imperceptible either to the father or mother. She, singlehandedly, unarmed, as a soldier of her thought process, challenges the entire society and puts forth certain questions and leaves the answers to the readers' judgement or perception

KEYWORDS : Divorce, family, society, psychological trauma

Onslaught of Tradition and Modernity

"There is no such thing as a "broken family." Family is family, and is not determined by marriage certificates, divorce papers, and adoption documents. Families are made in the heart. The only time family becomes null is when those ties in the heart are cut. If you cut those ties, those people are not your family. If you make those ties, those people are your family [...]" 1

C. Joy Bell

Lot alterations are undergoing in the present family structure. In the past, the rate of divorce was low. That was because of the existence of the feudal values in our society. One important research about our society is that its culture is highly influenced by the semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions. If a family is highly traditional, they follow feudal principles in their daily life vice versa if a family is highly modern they follow the neo-ideas brought into our society in the name of foreign culture. Both traditional and modern cultures are dangerous in leading a peaceful life in our society.

Few vote for traditional values and then never accept divorce and re-marriages. But the other half of the society is interested in following both traditional and modern rules according to their utility. So our society has developed from a selfless to selfish society and all these rules got framed according to the need of the hour especially by the men to safeguard their dominance.

As Darwin said, "one general law [...] let the strongest live when the weakest die." 2 This quote perfectly matches the present-day traditional rules of the upper class or caste men. Each rule has been perfectly formulated to match the needs of the dominant classes or castes. And those are not meant to be followed by them, but they are meant to be followed by the middle and lower classes or castes. The middle-class and poor are unable to stick to one set of traditions being enforced on them. The onslaught of tradition and globalisation are creating confusion in the mind of human being and this chaos is found in a crystal clear manner in our present-day society.

Dealing with Complexities of a Family Life: The Story of Custody

Nowadays getting separated and taking divorce between the husband and wife has become a common issue in our society. After judging the pros and cons of the husband and wife, certain times one may not be in a position to blame any of the parent. When things are happy, children blossom out of their happiness, but when things are unhappy; children are culled for their happiness. These conditions leave a bad impression and a kind of trauma annexes on the minds of the children.

One sort of such pathetic condition can be seen in the child characters of the Manju Kapur's novel *Custody*. The novel opens with the entrance of a beautiful couple Raman and Shagun. Raman is "[...] a

corporate man with a strong belief in hard work [...]" (Kapur, 2) and Shagun "[...] a pretty daughter-in-law [...]" (Kapur, 23). "Raman and Shagun's marriage had been arranged along standard lines, she the beauty, he the one with brilliant prospects" (Kapur, 14). Shagun's ambitions were different before marriage. Her complete life changes after marriage; she became a proud mother of a son and a daughter.

In the inner heart, Shagun never liked this monotonous life. After the entrance of Ashok Khanna, the boss of Raman, there was a spontaneous change in the mindset of Shagun. Ashok is an Indian man brought up under the influence of foreign free thinking culture. At first, when he saw Shagun, he fell in love with her charming appearance. And Shagun too falls in love with Raman's boss.

New Vistas in the Life of Shagun

Raman spent most of his time working for his multinational company day and night. Shagun was forced to spend her time in the four-walled atmosphere along with her children. Shagun feels herself as a beautiful woman, she gets many offers to do modelling, but her marriage becomes a Lakshmana Rekha to her. Like Sita, Shagun too crosses the Lakshmana Rekha.

New Vistas start in the life of Shagun after her illegitimate relationship with Ashok. Ashok gives a lot of freedom to Shagun; he makes her express all her views. Shagun's husband Raman is also an equally loving husband. But "Shagun – the cheating spouse/the spouse with the looks is at best a one – dimensional character. She is a negative – ish character, the one who stepped out on her husband and her marriage. To make matters worse it's her husband's boss that she steps out with. Shagun came across as a brash spoilt and selfish person [...]" 3

Raman's mother always doubted the daughter in law, "how stunningly beautiful she is, realised a frightened Mrs.Kaushik, can such a woman really be a homemaker? (Kapur, 22) But the son always tried to make his mother feel everything as normal. Shagun stayed in a separate house after marriage, which the mother-in-law never liked. Raman's mother always thought that Shagun created a wall between their mother and son relationship. "[...] A pretty daughter-in-law, the son dancing attendance on her, an angry disappointed mother, such a situation would lead to daily tension [...]" (Kapur, 23). Raman's mother's unhappiness reaches the core by seeing the affectionate family of Nandan. The Misery in her heart can be understood through these lines:

"The happy togetherness in her brother-in-law's family showed Raman's mother how much she was missing and she took this knowledge badly, blaming her daughter-in-law for the loneliness she felt" (Kapur, 25).

[...] Not every couple were Rohini and Nandan, so willing to adjust"

(Kapur, 23). After marrying Nandan, Rohini feels her mother-in-law's house as a temple. "[...] Rohini declare that she thought she was living in a palace, her new home was so grand, leading her mother-in-law to quickly circle her head with a green chilli and put it in the fire to counter the effect of evil eye" (Kapur, 25).

Devastation of Every Single Being's Life in a Family

Shagun's mother notices a glow in her daughter's face in the absence of her son-in-law. She again and again questions her daughter but gets no answer. After knowing the daughter's illicit relationship, he feels very disturbed. She conveys her agony to the daughter, and warns her to fear the wrath of the society. She enunciates to her daughter: "Shagun, I couldn't sleep all night. What will happen to you? To the children? And Raman? His family is everything to him" (Kapur, 40). In return Shagun gives a stunning answer, "Mama, stop going on it is hard enough as it is. Am I to stay married to Raman because you love him so much?" (40). Raman develops a chest pain, after knowing about the extramarital affair of Shagun and she does not change her mind by seeing his condition. Instead she leaves her husband and goes to Ashok. Later on she gets divorce from Raman and marries Ashok.

Every human being has their own ideas, wishes and motifs in their life. In marriage, usually two different persons amalgamate to live a life. Both come from different familial backgrounds and culture, but a common aspect that they are going to be future father and mother should always exist in the minds of the parents. If any one person tends to lead an independent life, they are forced to sacrifice the general happiness which exists being a family and mostly the children are the silent sufferers in this game that exists between the father and the mother.

Raman becomes very unhappy after knowing the gap between him and Shagun. He tries to patch the relationship between them. "Raman did not know what to think. When things were not right between Shagun and himself it felt as though the centre of his world was hal-low. Yet the demands of his work forced him to be away long hours, thinning the connection between them" (Kapur, 31). But Shagun was completely under the influence of Ashok and she was enjoying the freedom that Ashok was providing her. Actually Ashok made Shagun believe that his life is incomplete without her, "[...] he wanted to hear more about her: what did she do with herself, how did spend her day?" (Kapur, 14)

Raman tries to behave in a normal way in order to change his wife and make her understand that a great value is inherent in their twelve years of relationship. But Shagun fills poison in her heart towards Raman, "Every day she practised thinking badly of her spouse. Her lover encouraged this by providing a basis for comparison. This dissatisfaction that accrues in most marriages is not allowed dissipation; instead, she clung to reasons to justify her unfaithfulness" (Kapur, 2).

Shagun aspired for freedom and she left her children aside. "Children from divorced families don't follow the same rules as regular children – they grow up and have seen insecurity and strife too early in life." 4 Arjun was little elder to understand the situations but Roohi was a very small girl. Both the children suffer psychologically due to the pressures in the marriage of the parents. The entire traumatic condition after divorce between Shagun and Raman can be brought in a vivid manner:

"Arjun and Roohi – the pawns in the great divorce drama. Arjun is ten when his parents split up and is affected deeply by the change in his family life. He stops going to school, because everyone in his school knows about the impending divorce. His grades begin to slip and he really misses his father, whom he is being kept away from. Eventually, Arjun is sent – off to boarding school, Ashok's alma mater in fact after Ashok uses his connections to get Arjun a seat. This marks the end of Arjun's relationship with his father and was heartbreaking [...] Roohi, young at the time of her parent's divorce, grows up not remembering a time when her family was whole. Roohi is raised by Raman and his new wife Ishita and grows to love Ishita as one would a real mother." 4

Conclusion

Manju Kapur brings a happy ending with a lot of rupture in the life of Shagun and Raman. Shagun marries Ashok in the name of Love and

Raman marries Ishita for the sake of the daughter. Arjun is given to Shagun and Roohi to Raman in the custody battle. The essence is that turmoils amidst the husband and wife leave inerasable impressions on the psyche of the children. Husband and wife should never forget their children before taking any extreme step. Individual freedom is definitely an issue to be considered. In the same way likes and dislikes of every individual should also be taken into consideration but breaking the family relationship for peculiar reasons at the cost of their children's life is utter foolishness.

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