



Cultural Contradiction And Feministic Struggle In Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the user's text and rephrase it academically. *In Custody* ManjuKapur, delves into the lives of individuals residing in metropolitan cities, shedding light on their experiences as they grapple with the consequences of modernity. The forces of globalization, privatization, and economic liberalization instigate the phenomenon. The main characters in *Custody* exhibit a natural inclination towards worldly pursuits. The narrative revolves around the character of Raman, a burgeoning marketing executive, and his relationships with his wife, Shagun and another woman named Ishita. The discourse finally addresses the themes of exploitation, bias, isolation, distress, victimhood, and manipulation. Every character possesses a distinct collection of concepts and ideologies, which reflect the "modern virtues" that we have embraced and incorporated into our lives. The emergence of the "new woman" in India is a tangible phenomenon characterized by a transformation in women's conceptualization and societal role within the contemporary setting. She embodies a fusion of Western elements and her indigenous heritage. The individual in question exhibits a hybrid nature, demonstrating the ability to maintain equilibrium across various domains of her life despite encountering a range of disruptions. This study centres on the rise of newly empowered female characters in ManjuKapur's novel *Custody* as they strive to carve out their distinct roles within society and their familial contexts. The "new woman" concept has emerged as a hybrid phenomenon, representing a significant shift towards emancipation and the assertion of individuality within the context of traditional cultural norms.

Keyword: New Woman, Feministic Struggle, Psychological issues

A Middle class life and their story

The middle-class society of India. Indeed, the fictional universe crafted by ManjuKapur is characterized by the predominance of female characters, while the male characters are relegated to a subordinate position

1. "Kapur elicits the lives of wealthy, urban,

middle class Indians with their unsettling secrets, dysfunctional relationships, their hankering for liberation and serenity" (Manimekalai and Vimals 1996)

They solely exist in the capacity of providing support and assuming subordinate duties. The perception of men as inconsequential is evident due to the prevailing focus on women. Women are portrayed as being superior to their male counterparts. When women are shown to have worse standings, efforts are made to rectify this disparity and achieve parity with males. To clarify, the female characters in ManjuKapur's literary works possess significant influence and control. She assumes the role of a manipulator whose astute tactics extend beyond the understanding of males. She has the potential to experience failure or betrayal, yet she can transcend her desires and outperform her male counterparts. 2 "In her work, Kapur depicts two significant instances that have led to marital conflict: infidelity and infertility" (Singh 2652)

Background of feministic movements

In this context, the portrayal of women in ManjuKapur's work represents a distinct and contemporary archetype of femininity. During the 1960s, the feminist movement gained momentum, leading to the emergence of the New Woman, who exhibited notable distinctions from her conventional predecessor. This newly emerged individual may exhibit self-awareness, assertiveness, and assertiveness. However, she may also be susceptible to emotional manipulation or deception.. "The novelist describes with painstaking sincerity the wife's sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the frequent shifting of the children, like commodities, from one home to the other"(Kavitha 131)

In pursuing a new identity, she demonstrates agency in navigating her surroundings according to her preferences. She assumes the central role and has relinquished her previous position as the subordinate. The individual appears to possess knowledge regarding her intended objective: to emancipate herself from the oppressive restrictions and cultural norms enforced upon her by a patriarchal social order. The individual in question understands her entitlements and has initiated a conflict. The struggle is inherently complex and enduring due to its opposition to fundamental human characteristics such as ego, greed, ambition, and selfishness. Historically, women have been perceived as a privilege granted by men, and they have mostly acquiesced to this societal construct without resistance. Women were always expected to be the 'angel in the house' for ages, they were not considered as counterpart in the patriarchal Indian society. However, contemporary women have increasingly exhibited a rebellious disposition towards the inequitable character of this mindset, hence stimulating other modes of thought. Women are battling everyday to establish an identity for themselves rather than being an dependent. Kapur has painted a vivid picture of Indian women in a middle class set up. In her literary works, ManjuKapur endeavours to portray a significant transformation in the societal status of her female characters, highlighting their autonomy. Women are unwilling to rely on their dads, spouses, kids, or male counterparts for sustenance. In contrast, individuals demand fortitude to confront life's vicissitudes. Individuals with these characteristics exhibit a high level of assertiveness and practicality in their actions and possess considerable physical strength. The individuals in question can be classified as exemplifying the archetype of the New Woman, who adeptly resolves her challenges autonomously. ManjuKapur is widely regarded as a prominent figure in portraying the New Indian Woman in her novels, owing to her commitment to presenting accurate representations of women. "Custody provides an insight into modern Indian women's psyche. It revolves around two core reasons for divorce, adultery and infertility. Kapur examines how a woman asserts as an individual and finds the association of marriage as the limitations to her liberty" (Sharma 1)

The Setting

The setting of novel *Custody* predominantly takes place in the mid-1990s within the prosperous upper-middle-class neighbourhoods of Delhi. This backdrop is characterized by the initial influx of foreign investment in India during that period. Raman and Shagun, a couple with two children, are upper-middle-class members and enjoy the financial advantages and associated lifestyle resulting from Raman's employment at the Brand, a firm primarily producing soft beverages. Ashok, the superior of Raman in the workplace, enters the scene. Shagun experiences developing a close and personal relationship with Ashok, leading her to grapple with the challenge of delineating her duties as a spouse, parent, and romantic partner. "When Shagun leaves her husband Raman for another man, a bitter legal battle ensues." (Kapur1). Argues that infidelity is a reason for an affair "infidelity is a prototypical relationship transgression in most societies, and represents a significant risk factor for sexually transmitted disease, violence, and relationship dissolution" (Spitzberg 1)

Upon the request for divorce from his spouse, Raman experiences a profound emotional response characterized by fury and self-pity as he witnesses the disintegration of his once-idealized existence. In a separate district inside the metropolis, characterized by a more conservative social structure, Ishita, a youthful individual who has undergone a divorce, endeavours to attain contentment through her pursuit of independence and engagement in philanthropic endeavours. "Ishita's early history had been marked by illness." (Kapur ,51) because she was affected by TB. The protagonist is strongly attracted to Raman, a divorced individual, and is enticed by the prospect of achieving a sense of familial satisfaction. This desire has persisted within her. Within the narrative of fractured marriages, the four adults in this story exhibit a combination of demands and emotional outbursts. At the same time, the children maintain a subdued presence until the latter portion of the novel. At this juncture, the adverse consequences of the custody battle become apparent, as the individuals involved experience significant psychological distress and their existence becomes divided between two maternal figures, two residences, and two nations. Kapur's story sheds light on the ambiguities that arise in the post-marital phase of life. The author meticulously portrays the wife's profound confinement, the husband's apprehension over solitude, and the repeated relocation of the children, analogous to the exchange of goods between their residences. "At the end of it all Raman recognised neither himself nor Shagun. His love for his wife was lost in a maze of lies that infected even him." (Kapur, 124)

Concept of New Woman

The term "new woman" was initially established by Henry James with the intention of characterizing American expatriates residing in Europe. This feminist notion has been warmly celebrated by the women's community as the commencement of a new journey. Sarah Grand embraced the concept of 'New Woman', which emerged in the nineteenth century, to express the desire of women going forward. These new women pushed themselves to redefine their status in a male-dominated society. This emergence allowed women to break out of their shells of being both economically and emotionally dependent on their spouses or male relatives. Women who possessed wealth and a heightened level of emotional awareness demonstrated a sense of autonomy and were accustomed to making decisions and taking action independently. Priyanka and Randhawa states "New Women included social reformers, novelists, female students and professional women. The depiction of "New Woman" has become a reality in modern and postmodern literature." (Priyanka and Randhawa 1)

The emergence of socio-political and economic factors led to an increased consciousness among women, prompting their engagement in novel roles within the realms of social, political, and economic spheres. The narrative commences at a juncture wherein Raman and Shagun exhibit a lack of shared attributes and a dearth of prospects for a potentially auspicious future that may ensure a state of contentment. The union between the two individuals had been orchestrated in accordance with conventional practices, with the woman possessing exceptional physical attractiveness and the man exhibiting promising future potential. The practicality exhibited by Raman jeopardizes the stability of the marriage. He dedicates extensive periods of time within his workplace, diligently fulfilling his responsibilities for a thriving corporation engaged in the production of carbonated beverages. The nation has initiated its trajectory towards globalization, with emerging Indian firms expanding their business operations both domestically and internationally. Raman is shown as a character who embodies the stereotype of a diligent individual, as he demonstrates unwavering determination and practical skills in his pursuit of professional advancement within his workplace. In the story's opening, Raman assumes the conventional responsibilities of a father and husband, serving as the familial figurehead who ventures outside the home to engage in laborious endeavours for financial sustenance. Consequently, upon his return, he assumes a position of reliance, necessitating care from his family. However, it becomes apparent that Raman exhibits a lack of concern for the well-being of his wife and children. The individual's familial circumstances appear to have been overshadowed by ambiguity as a result of his professional endeavors. Shagun comes to the realization that the prospects for a fulfilling married life are lacking. Consequently, the marital union becomes fraught with unresolved inquiries. A fulfilling marital life encompasses efforts from both partners, such as understanding each other's needs, respecting their space, and planning for the future. Many marital unions have some form of shortage for love and interest after years, which may impact the overall harmony of the marital relationship. Every day, both individuals begin their lives with a lack of interest, accompanied by certain grievances that are not intended to be acknowledged, indicating the presence of underlying issues that may lead to the breakdown of their marital bond. At the outset of the narrative, it becomes evident that the marital union lacks any semblance of enthusiasm. A subtle sense of guilt is there in their thoughts. Raman appears to have embraced the forthcoming separation as an inevitable outcome, a predetermined circumstance that he does not desire to avoid. The nature of Raman's occupation may require a significant amount of his focus, resulting in a diminished interest in his spouse. Both individuals have mutual expectations for one another to take the initiative and comprehend their own challenges, yet both ultimately fall short in doing so. Consequently, the breach continues to expand. The protagonist experiences a yearning to fully appreciate the most significant period of her life, which manifests itself in a conflict with Raman. This conflict arises when Raman insists that she should prioritize her dedication to their son. Raman's expectations are just like any other husbands in Indian households; women must be solely responsible for raising children and performing familial needs. On the other hand Shagun has a different perspective on life. Her feminist ideology compels her to assert her autonomy and make decisions based solely on her own desires, without taking into account any other factors. She explicitly communicates this sentiment to Raman, prompting him to recognize the profound solitude and monotony that she must face. She explicitly communicates this sentiment to Raman, prompting him to recognize the profound loneliness and monotony that she must experience. The type of environment she was exposed to by her mother instilled within her an innate aversion from the outset. She experienced a lack of fulfilment in achieving her desired aspirations in life. The spirit exhibited by her, along with numerous other women, was distinct. She was unable to exert autonomy over the trajectory of her life.

The determinants of her choices were influenced mainly by her parents, family, and cultural norms. The individual expressed a desire to pursue a career in modelling; however, her mother held a firm stance against this profession due to concerns regarding potential exposure to inappropriate behaviour near her cherished daughter. The protagonist's mother proposed that she might pursue any desired career after marriage. However, circumstances led to an early pregnancy. The assertions made by one's spouse, relatives, and acquaintances might present challenges in justifying one's professional choice, mainly when financial considerations are not a limiting factor. Shagun's mother becomes aware of the negative repercussions of her defiance of familial conventions in her pursuit of an independent lifestyle. Even though she cautions her

when she expresses her feminine assertions. At present, the portrayal of a well-educated and professional woman grappling with conflicting ideas of traditional femininity and empowered femininity is also evident. Shagun's engagement in sexual violation might be interpreted as a manifestation of female sexual self-assertion, which aligns with a contemporary feminist perspective that recognizes women as desiring individuals with an intense yearning for sexual expression, satisfaction, and fulfilment. Shagun, motivated by her desires, decides to pursue a divorce from her husband Raman, therefore commencing a new chapter in her life alongside Ashok. Shagun desires to prioritize her well-being and pleasure over making sacrifices. The individual aspires to achieve professional fulfilment and establish her presence throughout society. Raman embarks upon a new phase in his life as he encounters an unfortunate divorcee introduced to him by his parents. The failure of Raman's marriage is not an isolated occurrence. The termination of Ishita's marriage also carries significant ramifications that ultimately result in her misfortune. The dissolution of her marriage ensued due to her inability to conceive offspring. "For the first time Ishita felt annoyed with her husband"(Kapur ,62).

Feministic Struggle

ManjuKapur's writing offers diverse views through which the world might be comprehended. The author's exceptional and imaginative literary works, including novels, poetry, and narratives, have significantly contributed to the refinement of society, serving as a source of inspiration for aspiring novelists. The female heroines featured in her stories exhibit a strong sense of self-reliance. "Married to this tough, strong and determined woman who was fighting for her life"(Kirkpatrick ,11).

One notable characteristic observed among most female individuals in question is their role as protagonists, which is closely associated with their pursuit of higher education to attain a position of superiority in their lives. ManjuKapur's female heroines' distinguishing characteristic is their perspectives on the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Manju Kapoor's work has been characterized by a discernible focus on addressing and alleviating social issues faced by women, thereby setting it apart and making it distinctive. The individual in question is named Manju. The individual's work has garnered significant recognition for its ability to enhance and empower individuals' lives with a sense of freedom. Individuals encounter many challenges, difficulties, and adversities. They possess a considerable amount of self-confidence and motivation. The correlation between the portrayal of female figures and their roles as protagonists is evident in the analysis of their respective works, highlighting the distinctions emphasized by the artist's remarkable creations.

Psychological issues

The concept of custody illustrates the profound stress and anxiety experienced within Indian traditional families as a result of the influence of globalization and liberalization, both of which have significant implications for Indian culture. This study centres on the offspring of Raman and Shagun. In the context of the contentious legal proceedings surrounding custody and divorce, the children involved are subjected to a commodification process, wherein they are regularly relocated between two residences, two parental figures, and two nations. Due to the familial alienation instigated by Shagun, Roohi, her daughter, experiences a mild nervous disease and exhibits signs of social withdrawal. "Right from the beginning it was clear that Baby Roohi was a carbon copy of her father"(Kapur 18). The academic performance of Arjun, her son, likewise experiences a decline. The individual in question is an eight-year-old male child who has inherited both the physical attributes and behavioural traits of Shagun. These traits include a propensity for selfishness, cruelty, and indifference towards others, all exhibited solely for personal gratification. The user did not provide any text to rewrite.

The youngsters experience psychological trauma that is not explicitly disclosed. Roohi's well-being is significantly impacted due to unstable relationships within her household and the absence of a consistent maternal figure. The individual is experiencing a condition of confusion and cannot accurately identify her mother's name (biological or stepmother) during her school interview. In contrast, Arjun is facing challenges due to the replacement of his father's post by Ashok Khanna. The joyful childhood experiences for these children have been marred by the presence of fractured family recollections, ultimately leading to the development of emotional difficulties in adulthood.

Both Arjun and Roohi are also experiencing parental alienation. "Arjun swung between snuggling against his mother when they were alone to studied" (Kapur ,109)The individuals experience a sense of social isolation due to the divorce and familial challenges they face. The occurrence of Shagun's extramarital relationship with Ashok Khanna, the subsequent quick remarriage between Shagun and Ashok, and the union of Raman and IshitaRajora have contributed to the phenomenon of parental alienation among the children. The evident disconnection between Raman and Shagun before their divorce is manifested by their apathetic behaviour inside the household

Raman is compelled to engage in deception when his children inquire about their mother's whereabouts. According to his statement, Shagun has departed to assume the responsibility of caring for their grandma.

Arjun possesses the ability to discern the falsehoods perpetuated by his father. The concerns mentioned above also impact the schooling of Arjun and Roohi. Roohi's teacher informs Shagun that Roohi has exhibited a noticeable decline in engagement and attentiveness throughout the class. Arjun's academic performance in Mathematics and English declines throughout the period in which he is under the guardianship of his new legal stepfather, Ashok Khanna. This decline can be attributed to the comparatively lesser level of attentiveness and care provided by Ashok, in contrast to Arjun's biological father, Raman, who can effectively instruct him in both disciplines. Arjun falsifies his mother Shagun's signature on his low-scoring test papers and then submits them to his teacher.

The phenomenon of unconscious repressed emotion manifesting in dreams is called Dream Distortion. This term denotes that the visual imagery experienced during dreams is elusive or symbolically representative of the original context, which is subject to censorship by the Ego. The content of the dream may potentially contain socially and morally unacceptable elements, prompting the Ego to intervene and prevent their manifestation even during the state of sleep. To circumvent the constraints imposed by Ego and its tendency to suppress unconscious desires, the latter manifests itself through visual imagery that is either allusive or symbolically representative of the original content. Freud refers to this process as Dream Distortion. Arjun's nightmares vividly symbolize the internal struggle, disarray, and psychological distress experienced by a youngster attending a boarding school due to their parents' divorce.

Conclusion

Consequently, women encounter economic and sociocultural disadvantages within a societal framework that is predominantly controlled by men. The societal structure was characterized by the dominance of the patriarchy. The female individuals exhibited a state of silence and passivity, assuming the role of mere objects akin to rubber dolls, subject to the manipulation and control of others. "Exploring feminism's troubled relations with psychology and psychoanalysis, the rise of new evolutionary theory, the impact of queer theorizing on gender categories, controversies over memory and trauma, and increasing anxieties about men and masculinity" (Mary 121)

The individuals in question had experienced a deprivation of their inherent rights, desires for personal autonomy, and ability to sustain themselves. In her novel *Custody*, Kapur offers a profound examination of various aspects, including the unforeseen difficulties inherent in marriage, as well as the intensifying trajectory of divorce and the ensuing custody struggle, with its multifaceted manifestations in both legal and psychological realms. The novel portrays conflicts arising from the self-centeredness of the major characters, namely Shagun, Raman, Ishita, and Ashok Khanna, who neglect the moral and psychological well-being of their children. The psychological turmoil experienced by the children, Arjun and Roohi, as a result of their parents' divorce and custody battles, is subtly revealed through their characters. The novel *Custody* explores themes of sorrow, striving, childlessness, betrayal, independence, and the emergence of the new woman. Engaging in extramarital affairs has the potential to disrupt a stable marriage, contravening both Indian law and complex interpersonal dynamics. Infertility has always been an emotive subject in every society, and women have consistently been condemned and accused of being infertile or barren. Women were always expected to bear children, and bearing children was considered the primary role of women in Indian society. In certain cases, the husband was obliged to divorce his wife and marry another woman in order to conceive children. The treatment of infertile women by their in-laws in India and the subsequent impact on the evolving landscape of parenting within middle-class Indian households serve as significant themes within the novel. The novel has been analyzed through the lens of social criticism. The narratives presented by the author highlight the role of women as protagonists who possess agency and cognitive abilities. These women strive to maintain their individuality and pursue a life of freedom, actively making decisions to address the various challenges they face. Their primary agenda revolves around fulfilling their inherent needs and necessities, including the pursuit of love, affection, preservation of caste identity, overcoming issues related to infertility, navigating divorce problems, engaging in extramarital affairs in search of love and affection, and seeking affordable freedom. The categorization of women's narratives inside the social system holds significant importance.

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