

# Marriage: Paradoxical Stand Point in Manju Kapur's Novel "*CUSTODY*"

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**Abstract:** Marriage is a significant socio-religious institution in the Indian society. Kapur's every novel opens with a live discussion on marriage- the topmost significant issue in the life of Kapur's female protagonist. But all these marriages are in some way distinct from each other. Thought of marriage for Shagun and Ishita varies in Kapur's *Custody* Ishita suffers in marriage but with no fault of her. But, there are exceptions like Shagun who spoiled her own happy married life to make her dream come true as a model. Dealing with the theme of marriage, Kapur has keenly noticed and critically analyzed the psyche of women.

**Keywords:** marriage, protagonist, custody, wife, divorce.

## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a significant socio-religious institution in the Indian society. It is the institution responsible for orderliness and harmony in society and also a fundamental basis of all human relationships. . It is regarded that the duty of a wife is always to serve her husband and children and simultaneously performing her domestic responsibility and duties in the Indian scenario. Simon De Beauvoir's say, "Man is defined as a human being and woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male"(Beauvoir :83). The importance of marriage has been acknowledged globally for various reasons such as: it legitimizes the living together of two people of opposite sex through social and legal sanction; it legitimizes child birth in which nurturing children becomes the responsibility of both husband and wife; it accords functional division of labour of all the life's activities; proposes financial security and offers enduring emotional support.

Marriage is a vital and sensible topic in every Indian family as exhibited in the works of Manju Kapur novels. Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women to a large extent in her novels. According to Mithu Banerji, "Kapur's book

reveals the unimagined uncertainties of matrimony. The wife's sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the constant shifting of the children, like commodities, from one home to the other, are evoked with painstaking sincerity" (Banerji:156). One of the main problems for middle-class urban educated women is that of marriage. Kapur has both opted for it and also chased it. Kapur's every novel opens with a live discussion on marriage- the topmost significant issue in the life of Kapur's female protagonist. But all these marriages are in some way distinct from each other. Kapur's novels reflect that the marriage is essentially adjustment, compromise and adaption whether it is arranged or love marriage.

## MARRIAGE IS MANDATORY FOR EVERY FEMALE IN THE INDIAN SOCIETY

Kapur depicts that generally in conventional societies a woman is recognized by her father's or husband's name rather than by her own name and designation. Marriage is regarded as the social insurance and security for a woman against all the social evil. But in some cases this institution of marriage acts like a satan-king of evils for them as reflects in the novel "*Custody*" The novel *Custody*, describes the marital life and marital discord of both the protagonists Shagun and Ishita. Shagun and Raman are happily married and settled with two kids, enjoying a luxurious life. Shagun's dream was to be a model. But marriage, child, the claims of husband, family and friends made her hard to justify her career. Her second pregnancy drifts her dream of a career further away from her. "She feels, there might have empty space in her life, But this is not how she chooses to fill them"(Custody:17). As the time passes, Shagun meets Raman boss Ashok Khanna. He aspires for Shagun and promises to make her dream come true. Shagun falls in love with him. The growing distance

between Raman and his wife Shagun is strongly felt by Shagun's mother who starts suspecting her daughter. She is surprised and shocked when she finds that Raman's boss is involved with Shagun. Shagun's mother tries to save her daughter's marriage. Her mother senses something fishy in her daughter's life and questions her, "What kind of person will take you away from your husband, such a good man?...Shagun, I couldn't sleep all night. What will happen to you? To the children? And Raman? His family is everything for him"(Custody:37). Shagun is annoyed at her mother's insistence. She says, "Mama, stop going on. It is hard enough as it is. Am I to stay married to Raman because you love him so much?"(Custody:38). Raman suffers a cardiac arrest and Shagun's mother advises her, "Beta should anything happen to Raman it will be upon your head...The house rests upon us women. In your children's happiness, your husband's happiness lies your own. Anything else is just temporary" (Custody:99). But it is in vain as Shagun is thinking of nothing else but glamorous world which Ashok has shown her. Here the mother tries to caution her daughter but Shagun is adamant.

Kapur introduces another parallel character Ishita, who although not strikingly beautiful, is wise, kind and generous. Ishita gets married to Surykant and leads a happy life initially by adapting to her new family and in short span becomes everybody's favorite. When Ishita is diagnosed as an infertile, as she does not conceive even after eighteen month of marriage, the happiness in her married life slowly starts fading away. The behavior of her in-laws and other family members changes instantly. Her mother-in-law begins to call her shameless. Ishita's mother-in-law says :

*For us money is not as important as family. But beta, it is essential that Suryakant have a child. As the only son, he has to make sure that the bloodline of his forefathers continues. And now' – she hesitated slightly - 'I need to talk to your mother.* (Custody:66)

In case of any woman, child-bearing and child rearing is important part of her life. She is responsible for continuance of the family tree .If she fails in this then. She loses her value in the family and also in the

society. Ishita who had been married was divorced on the ground of being barren, and who initially imagines (along with her parents) that her life is therefore over, being labeled as rejected good and returned .The concept that marriage which was a sacrament solemnized primarily for the fulfillment of one's duty and for the good and welfare of the family has shifted to the concept that marriage is a social contract which is entered into primarily for the good of the individual and for his or her personal happiness and satisfaction. Married couple drifts apart when they are unable to sort out their problems which results in strain and tension in their relationship. Divorce is the final tragic denouement of the family's disorganization.

#### THE PROTAGONISTS' CONCEPTION OF MARRIAGE PRIOR TO THE MARRIAGE AND THEIR POST MARRIAGE EXPERIENCE

Kapur's novels depict the ways in which family views and pressurization have an impact on female protagonists' psychology. Their conception of marriage prior to the marriage and their experience post marriage are different due to two reasons. Firstly is the mother-daughter relation and secondly is the education. Due these factors the protagonists' fall either in pre-marital affair before marriage or all have extra- marital affair. So, there are endless arguments between educations versus marriage in her novels. Thought of marriage for Shagun and Ishita varies in Kapur's *Custody*. Shagun is born in a middle class urban family as a single parent child. Her dream was to be a successful model and to marry an aristocrat boy so that she can lead a comfortable and luxurious life. But destiny has chosen otherwise for her. Shagun's mother wants her to marry Raman, an honest and a family oriented man. They get married and Shagun becomes a housewife now. They have two children Roohi and Arjun. But somewhere in Shagun's heart she blames her mother for giving her such a life after marriage. Her dream was to become model and have a successful career which remains as a dream only. She is happy with Raman and kids outwardly but not satisfied internally. She always feels some emptiness in her life and finally she breaks her marriage. Ishita's point of view about marriage is that she dreams of a happy married life where she can share, care and love her family members as taught by

her mother and therefore gets married to Suryakant. But when Ishita does not conceive due to sexual infertility, Suryakant divorces her. She suffers in marriage but with no fault of her.

In *Custody*, Shagun meeting her husband's boss Ashok Khanna plants the seeds of strained relationship between her and her husband. By meeting him, she gets a chance to be close to him, to be in love with him and to part ways with her husband without worrying about the future of her children. She is very eager to know more about Ashok Khanna from her own husband and asks him many questions to his great surprise:

*Is it true that he is a marketing genius? Has he managed to produce results so far? Where is his wife? How come he isn't married? Raman looks pleasantly surprised it is because she has never shown any interest in his company matters or in the personal life of his boss. (Custody:10)*

His wife's unexpected oddity about his boss makes him feel that something is fishy in her query. Ashok is also fascinated by Shagun's feminine charm and decides to have her at any cost. Here, 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 considered. 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 rape to argue that their social existence was invariable sexualized and therefore not seen as worthy of equality or justice. (Geetha:191)*

In the novel, one gets an overview of how Shagun's urge, to gain liberation destroys the life of her two children. Her husband's hard struggle and true devotion towards his duties provided him great luxury but with emptiness. On the other hand, Shagun spends her each day in the service of her family with the hope that she will lead a good life with her husband some day but it never happens. This

paves way for her to get attracted towards Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss. It was Mr. Khanna, who gave wings to her dreams so that she can soar high in the sky. This caring love that she received from him compelled Shagun to divorce her husband. Shagun's life got distorted with many orifices in it, "I want something else in my life, can't you understand that? We always meet the same people, talk about the same old things over and over. It's boring" (*Custody:46*). Shagun's mother requests her daughter to stop having relationship with an outside man since she is married and is a mother of two children. But love is blind and she continues with her extra- marital relationship with Mr. Khanna. This results in divorce and destruction of the whole life of their children. It is noticed that Shagun is craving to establish her own identity in this competitive world because of the advent of modernity. This yearning of hers is fatal both for her own self and for her family members as her suppressed desire ruins the whole family.

The novel *Custody* throws a light on the growth of individual tendency in modern world. Everyone wants their own happiness without bothering for the social norms and ethics. The extramarital love seems common in modern life. The novel focuses on the hollowness of the modern marriage institution, sufferings due to impotency and infertility, and importance of individualism rather than socialism. Though Shagun has extramarital affair she never bothers 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, having zest for self- satisfaction and a freedom seeker. Kapur has aptly described Shagun's nature and her love for Ashok, "She sank down next to him; she knew she would have to pay heavy for this happiness but atleast ; dear God ,she would have a happiness she never had before. If she were to die tomorrow, it would be as a fulfilled woman"(Custody:108).The tendency of Shagun is reflected in the above sentence. The novelist has portrayed brilliantly the protagonist Shagun's self-centered nature, over ambitiousness, her tension and frustration during legal battle on the canvas of traditional society in modern age. In the novel, the novelist depicts that after a point, many people agree to marriage without even getting to know their life partner. Once the deed is done, they realise the mistake they have done in terms of the choice of their

life partner. If they meet someone who is in any way a better match than their current spouse, they are immediately attracted to him/her. And what starts as a simple friendship usually ends up in an extra marital affair.

*Custody*, reveals the imagined uncertainties of matrimony and the suffering of children during a divorce proceeding of their parents. In the accretion of detail and tone of emotional resistance, *Custody* becomes more than a social commentary. Practically it pictures the true nature of modern marriage which strives with its burden for individualism. So, the female protagonists of Kapur are the victims of injustice due to male dominated and orthodox society like Ishita. But, there are exceptions like Shagun who spoiled her own happy married life to make her dream come true as a model.

### CONCLUSION

Marriage is one of the most prominent themes in the novels of Manju Kapur. Various shades of relationship get projected, evaluated and experienced in this institution called marriage. In her novels, there are characters who marry because of social pressure, there are some that feel suffocated within the bonds of marriage and eventually break free of it and there are those characters who adjust somehow or the other and make their relationship work. In India the institution of marriage is not just the union of two individuals but it is something more, the union of two families, the relatives and the society in general. As K. L. Sharma opines, "In India, people generally believe that marriage is not between two individuals, but it is in between two families in terms of bonds that it creates between them. It is also a sacrament"(Sharma: 100). Kapur in her novels lays emphasis on the most important issue of marriage and tries to examine and explore the sensitivity of human hearts. Dealing with the theme of marriage, Kapur has keenly noticed and critically analyzed the psyche of women.

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