

Quest for relationship remedies in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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Abstract

Through novels, society can be viewed, which can give an insight into its culture. Wakefulness of a new generation, utterly different in opinions and mindsets from that of the preceding one, is the trademark of the Indian English novels that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. Manju Kapur is one among the present day writers like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, and Jhumpa Lahiri have been crowned with literary glory by winning many awards. The tribulations of the family and marital relationships occur, on the one hand, out of the lack of ability of the married ones to deal with the unexpected state of affairs and on the other, out of the inability of the married women to beget children for the continuance of the ancestry of the forefathers of the family.

Keywords: alienated, divorce, custody, egoism, predicament and quest for remedies

1. Introduction

Manju Kapur's fifth novel *Custody* (2011) brings to light such troubles in the familial relationships of two married couples. It first portrays how these tribulations lead the married ones to get alienated in the course of divorce and formulate them pursue their own way of life for the contentment of theirs and others. It then spotlights on the pungent reality of the attitudes of the insensitive and alienated parents towards their children as well as on the subsequent indescribable afflictions of their children left to live like orphans in spite of their parents being alive. It also pinpoints the politics of possessiveness among the separated parents with regard to their children who are left inexperienced about their future till their custody is taken care of enduringly either by their own father or mother or by their step-father or step-mother. These things are ornamented through the break-up of two marriages, one between Raman and Shagun and other between Ishita and Suryakant and through the challenge between Raman and Shagun in the court of law about the custody of their two children.

Shagun's quest for marital relationship remedies

Shagun well settled into married life with Raman, a fast growing marketing executive at a global drinks company. Raman is very happy to go ahead a relaxed married life with his extremely beautiful juvenile wife Shagun. Their happy nuptial life moves efficiently for the first eight years without any hindrance in their relationship. As an indication of their marital harmony, they have got two lovable children, one boy and one girl. The first one is their eight-year-old son Arjun and the second one is their two-year-old daughter Roohi. As husband and wife, they feel delighted to find their son looking just like his father and their daughter similar to her mother. Likewise, they have everything in their life and they appear to be the most blessed couple on earth. Raman is also very much contented with his conventional responsibility as a husband, as a father and as a breadwinner and he affords his family with all sophisticated facilities for their comfortable and luxurious life.

Raman's profession keeps him away from his family for so many days at a stretch. His devotion to his work seems to say

that his job and his company are more important than his wife and children. He has no acquaintance with the school in which his two children are studying and their likes and dislikes in their way of living. Rarely does he become conscious the worth of his wife to him and her delicate feelings and desires in life. He is of the estimation that his wife's duty is to take care of his children and the domestic needs and his responsibility is to endow with them money to look after the family and the house. He also thinks that his wife's delighted; position and respect stretch out only in her being a loving wife and an affectionate mother. He thinks that everything in his family goes as per his expectations.

Shagun's meeting of her husband's boss Ashok Khanna plants the seeds of hassled 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 fortune of her children. She is very nosy to know more about Ashok Khanna from her own husband. She 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. (10)

His wife's unexpected oddity about his boss makes him feel that something is fishy in her query. Since her meeting his boss, there is a complete change in her attitude and behaviour. Most of the time, she finds herself away from her home and children under some excuse or other. Being apprehensive of her behaviour, Raman begins to make sure whether his wife is at home or not by asking his servants over the phone at odd hours. He has the feeling that he is going to lose her forever. He expresses this feeling by discussion to her in a different way:

I sense some distance between us, and that makes me unhappy.' 'Distance?' she laughs as she draws her hand away from him. She replies saying that 'It is you who keep travelling and remain distant to me for days together. How can you talk about my distance?' (49).

Raman begins to entertain the thought that she may be in love with his boss. He wants to know whether she has only friendly relationship or love relationship with his boss. Hence, he engages a private detective in finding out the motive for his wife's interest in his boss. As a conventional and faithful husband, he should not deduce his wife's behaviour. Even if his distrust is true, he should not employ a private detective to find out the exactness. He should set things himself right to prolong his marital relationship with his wife as normal. But he is not very open and honest in his relationship with her. To his shock, he comes to know from the photograph confirmations of his detective that his wife is really in love with his boss:

Out-of-focus photographs show his Shagun leaving a place with a number 27 painted next to the gate. It also shows his wife getting into a taxi and Ashok bending over her, and lightly kissing her in an open doorway. Shagun is seen wearing different clothes on every different day. (88)

After having seen the covert but wicked act of his wife Shagun with Ashok Khanna in these photographs, Raman feels mortified and his name and honour stained.

Even before her marriage with Raman, Shagun wants to be a model but her mother is quite aware of the ways of the world and such ways will surely spoil her familial and marital relationship later. Hence, she is badly opposed to a career of modelling, informing her, saying, and "Do what you like after you marry" (11). But soon after her marriage, her dream of becoming a model with the consent of her husband cannot take concrete shape because:

After marriage, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. Her husband being affluent; money for her is not a big issue. Claims of husband, child, family and friends have not allowed her dream of modelling career become real. Hence, she has never been able to guide her own life; everything such as marital, familial and societal relationship has been decided by parents, family, cultural customs. (11)

Shagun considers her love for Ashok Khanna as a way out from the authority of unpleasant and harsh marital relationship with her husband. In Ashok Khanna, she finds love equal, extremely pleasing and self-governing, which she finds her husband is deficient. Hence, she is ready to depose Raman from her heart and to coronet Ashok Khanna as the new king of her heart. When she informs him that she is willing to part with him as his wife and begin her life anew with Ashok Khanna as his better half for the rest of her life, Raman is not psychologically ready to compromise to her request; nor is he ready for any kind of peaceful resolution of his familial predicament with her. However, he is ready to give divorce on condition that she should not assert her right to the custody of her children.

Shagun gives up custody of the children to acquire a divorce, but she is allowed access to the children by the court. After the divorce, Shagun consents to stay as a partner in the life of Ashok Khanna provided he acknowledges her order that she should be allowed to meet her children so that she can, at least, keep on her relationship with them. Whenever she looks worried about her children, he guarantees her of his invariable love to her and to her children. The moment she becomes really his life partner, he promises her that "no further sorrow will ever distress her in her relationship with him" (2). She is

very proud of her Ashok and she is very happy with him as his wife. In addition, he had already made an arrangement for their outing so that all could be happy together:

Ashok feels that we need to bond together as a family. We will go somewhere, perhaps Bhutan, and may be Arjun can get a few archery lessons. Ashok will arrange things down to the last detail. He is so used to multitasking; he does it even at. (246)

Ishita's constrict marital relationship and her remedies

Of all the curses of human beings, the curse of a woman remaining desolate until her death is the most insupportable. Any unproductive woman becomes the target of all and sundry, both at home and in the society. She is neither predictable nor treasured nor treated on par with another woman, blessed with children. Palriwala, while writing about women, is of the view:

Marriage is attached with the material, social and symbolic meanings and consequences, which are asymmetrical in terms of their implications for human life. Terms 'selfhood, respect and status' are tied to wifehood and motherhood in more exacting ways than they are to one being a husband or father. A single man or a man without children is seen as unfortunate, but a woman in a similar situation is considered to be inauspicious, and possibly dangerous. (400-401)

Ishita, married to Suryakanta, is expected to beget a son or a daughter for the prolongation of the bloodline of her husband's forefathers. Being cursed with sterility, she cannot live up to the expectations of her husband and in-laws. Even though she is in their mist, she feels orphaned because nobody, including her mother considers her a human being with feelings. She appears very unimportant before them. "She looks smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air and smaller than the drops of dew, caught between the blades of grass in the morning" (65). As per the traditions of the family of her husband, she has to get divorced from her husband lawfully. On the other hand, she finds in her desolate and divorced life some meaning when she happens to meet Raman. Since both are sailing in the same boat with regard to their familial relationship, they become very close to each other and get from each other what each one could not get from their married ones such as unfailing love, understanding and mutual adjustment.

Ishita, without minding her infertility and as a step-mother to Raman's child returns "to the societal status as a married woman, which has been insolently rushed from her by the divorce from her first husband" (303). She also begins to enjoy the status of wifehood and motherhood, which provided her with legitimacy. Her marriage to Raman promotes her to her husband's social position too. Their love relationship does not border on just pretence but it is genuine and the same is expressed in presenting something valuable as a symbol of his true love because "at the jewellery shop, they find their genuine love for each other getting translated into rupees when they feel satisfied with a mid-range one for rupees 30,000...On Ishita's hand true love sparkled" (302). Besides, Ishita's marital relationship with Raman not only permits her but also gives her strength to wrestle for the custody of his children.

The quest for relationship remedies in Manju Kapur's *Custody* depicts that relationship is very important and there is no human life without the relationship. It is a connection between persons, friends, family member and relatives and it is God given. When there is a loving and intimate relationship, all human beings can certainly experience God through such relationships. If people want to preserve cordial relationship among them, they should have positive thoughts in their behaviour towards one another. They should be very respectful in their words and activities towards their fellow beings. The words they use should not injure the thoughts of others. They should not think superior of themselves before others and they should think about others as their equals. Too much of suppositions on their parts will earn more foes than friends. They should always be caring and merciful towards others. They should always provide their serving hands to others in their need. Only those who have these traits will positively preserve the very good relationship.

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