

Manju Kapur's 'Custody': Coherent Study Of Marital Conflict & Divorce

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Abstract

In Indian literature, marriage has long been a central motif. Marriage has remained a significant concern in people's lives. To make a marriage work, two people from different backgrounds must live in love and peace. With rising concerns about the security of marriage and marital life, some authors have turned their attention to this topic. Many well-known authors have written extensively on the subject of marriage, whether it is about bigamy, divorce, or adultery. This matrimonial issue has been addressed in literary works by Chitra Banerjee, Sudha Nair, Chetan Bhagat, Shobha De, Sara Desai, and Bharti Mukherjee. Manju Kapur, a well-known author, has also depicted marriage life in her books. Custody, Difficult Daughters, and The Immigrant are some of her most famous novels. The novel 'Custody,' later adapted into a television drama serial in India, 'Ye Hai Mohabbatein,' depicted modern-day marital and family conflicts. Custody follows two critical narratives of separate husband-wife relationships that eventually culminate in a shattered marriage at a specific time. Custody not only represents the psychological stress that married people suffer but also describes the mental stress that children of divorced parents face.

Keywords: Marriage, Divorce, Love, Parenting, Infidelity.

Introduction

Indian literature has always set the standard for vividly addressing literary and societal themes. Indian writings have shaped culture and broken-down taboos in India, whether through the protagonist or the storyline. While discussing all of this, a well-known work, 'Custody' by Manju Kapur, discusses marriage difficulties and separation from parents. It depicts the consequences of broken marriages with two plots running parallel to each other, and they finally intersect and settle down as we progress through the narrative.

Malavika Rajkotia, a senior lawyer in India's Supreme Court, notes in her book, "Most couples are so traumatized by the scale of ceremony that it's no surprise that many divorce petitions start with problems from the wedding day – 'she/he was badly behaved and threw a tantrum that day' is a common refrain" (Rajkotia 21).

In her work, Kapur depicts two significant instances that have led to marital conflict: infidelity and infertility. In the first scenario, Raman's wife, Shagun, engages in an extramarital affair with Raman's boss Ashok at work. Such a circumstance in this novel raises troubling

questions about modern society's alarming rise in extramarital affairs. With a lot of uncertainty and being the parents of two children, both the husband and wife go through an upheaval, which causes worry for their children in this work. In the second example, Kapur discusses Ishita's shattered marriage due to her inability to bear children. Her husband divorced her due to her infertility. After all, divorce brought on by infertility is a significant concern today. Some people commonly marry in order to have offspring who will continue their family line. A woman is considered unfit for marriage if she cannot have children. Kapur writes, "Two and a half lakhs were to be handed to Ishita on the first signing of a mutual consent divorce. Two and half more would be given six months later when the final proceedings were over. The interim six months was a period meant for reconciliation process. What process, though Ishita dearly, what process? There was never a chance" (Kapur 72).

In India, settling a divorce with money is a terrible social practice. How can we make money to compensate for the people who are broken? Money is not the best way to find balance. Furthermore, when people attempt to compensate with money, can they rely on the appropriate criterion for the amount of money that the husband provides to the wife? In the case of the divorce of Raman and Shagun, Shagun was not in favour of any financial settlement. She said, "Don't make it harder. I have left you best part of the marriage. Surely my freedom is not too much to ask in exchange?" (Kapur 109)

In the case of the children, in another account of a marital conflict, Shagun herself made the decision to separate from her husband, but since she was a homemaker and involved with Raman's boss, she was unable to negotiate a financial settlement with Raman. This division between husband and wife is shown in both storylines as the structure of interpersonal relationships in Indian society and the distinction between divorce among couples with children and nulliparous couples. It all starts with anomalies that occurred shortly after their marriage; Shagun married Raman, although she didn't like her union from the beginning. She wanted a self-sufficient life and admired the women who worked for modelling agencies. Her innermost desires are nurtured when Raman's boss, Ashok Khanna, gives her a chance to work in an advertisement for their business, fulfilling her childhood dream.

"He thought of this opportunity as a gift, knowing the excitement it would provide. When he first knew Shagun, she had wanted to be a model, but her mother was strongly opposed to a career that would allow all kinds of lechery near her lovely daughter. 'Do what you like after you marry,' she had said, but after marriage there had been a child" (Kapur 11).

Kapur also throws light on the other characters involved in this upheaval. Due to Shagun's marital conflict, nobody has suffered more than Shagun's mother, Mrs. Sabharwal. She regards Raman as the kindest and most caring son-in-law. Having gone through the agony of separation, she could not choose the best side for herself. She attempts to persuade her daughter to reconsider her decision and occasionally tries to defend her daughter Shagun during phone talks with Raman. She tried numerous times to convince Shagun.

"You know, counselling is not such a bad idea,' went on Mrs Sabharwal carefully. 'After all, it is a question of your whole future, along with that of your children" (Kapur 94).

Shagun was well aware of her mother's true motivations for persuading her. Raman had been very good to her mother and had shown her much love and care. Shagun once referred to their relationship as "love birds."

“Shagun sometimes said you two are like lovebirds, making the mother uncomfortable at her daughter’s understanding of the tenderness between them” (Kapur 24).

When it came to Raman's parents, they were proud of his academic achievements. They were looking for a relationship where the bride would be lovely and caring to Raman. Marriage problems usually begin when people expect the bride or groom to do somewhat impossible things. These actions gradually weaken the rope of a good relationship, which eventually wears out. The same thing happened in Raman's marriage. Shagun's expectations were entirely at odds with her reality.

“I want something else in my life, can’t you understand that? We always meet the same people, talk about the same things over and over. It’s boring” (Kapur 46).

People make mistakes, whether due to circumstances or any hidden motive. A mistake can happen when a person manipulates the other one, their mind, and provide a false sense of hope for someone’s future. The characters in this novel are in a similar situation. When we talk about Raman, who is an outstanding and diligent individual, his family asks him to marry Shagun without knowing Shagun’s true life aspirations. Raman's parents tried their hardest to find Raman an excellent match, but marriage is a highly complex phase of one's life. One must concentrate on discovering what one genuinely likes and hate.

“Raman spent the next five years in IIT swotting. Then another two years of even greater toil in IIM, Ahmedabad, to finally land a job at IndiaThinkTank with a six-figure annual salary. I will ask Bhabhi to look for a bride, said Mr Kaushik, she has done such a good job with Rohini. Fits in perfectly. Such lovely children too” (Kapur 20).

In the case of Shagun, she expected more than just being a typical housewife. As Mrs. Sabharwal starts enticing her and represents an illusion that even she was unaware of, Shagun marries Raman. In the beginning, Kapur describes how Shagun's mother convinces her. She writes,

“Beta, such a good match,’ the mother couldn’t help repeating, ‘so reliable he is, you will never have to worry about a thing. Your life will be comfortable, secure and safe” (Kapur 26).

In the second scenario of a shattered marriage, Ishita and SK loved and cared for each other until SK expected a kid from his wife, Ishita. Ishita was forced to divorce after failing to meet his expectations. Though the marriages were shattered in both cases, it also demonstrated that life allows people another chance to restart their lives. Raman's loneliness is relieved when he meets Ishita, while Shagun finds love with Ashok Khanna.

“Men need marriage to establish and celebrate male success, but women are brought up to believe in a marriage as their only validation and escape from the protective prison of being ‘respectable’ while single” (Rajkotia 19).

It may seem fine for a while when people find happiness with someone else outside marriage, but the legal and judicial processes for securing a divorce are pretty strict. Divorce after becoming a parent has a significant impact on children's lives. It mentally breaks them, making it difficult to comprehend what is happening around them at a young age. Arjun and Roohi, Raman and Shagun's children, were in a similar situation. Amid his parents' drama, Arjun founds it challenging to breathe. His mother once duped him into avoiding his father Raman.

“The paper slid from her lap to the taxi floor. ‘What is it, Mama?’ She could not answer. The child shook her arm: ‘Mama, Mama, what is it?’ ‘It is a little message from your father. He is trying to kill me.’ The grip on her arm tightened” (Kapur 137).

Apart from that, Arjun was of an age where he disliked Ashok Khanna embracing his mother. When he saw Ashok with his mother, he thought it was weird. Children of divorced parents experience many psychological problems when they are young. During this period, Arjun was not receiving good scores in school. He was generally unwell and expressed his dissatisfaction to her mother. Without his mother, he calls his father anytime he misses him.

Divorce can cause loneliness and anxiety in some people, but these feelings will not stay long if things go well. In the case of Raman and Shagun, when Shagun discovered love outside of marriage with Ashok Khanna, Raman struggled to cope with his loneliness during those difficult times. Apart from that, when it comes to Ishita, even though no one in her marriage suspected her of having an extramarital affair, she was left alone after the divorce because she could not bear children. There was a lonely time for Ishita and Raman too, but when they met and started feeling love for each other, it relieved them from loneliness and stress.

“Modern marriage markets are characterized by high turnover; men and women divorce more but also remarry more than in the past. However, different individuals have different marital histories; they marry, divorce, and remarry at different rates. To explain this variation, it is crucial to understand the two-sided aspect of marriage markets. Marriages form and dissolve based on preferences and expectations of two different individuals who operate in a “marriage market” with many competing agents” (Bruze 12).

Finally, Raman meets Ishita through her parents, who learn about each other's stories. It seemed to have filled the void left in their lives. Raman admired Ishita's dedication to other children and her work in an NGO, while Ishita was drawn to Raman's daughter Roohi. Kapur's method of parallel telling the two narratives puts both marital quarrel instances aboard the same boat simultaneously. Raman and Ishita gradually grow to like each other and look forward to their next meeting. Raman's increased interest in Ishita's life suggests that, despite being abandoned by Shagun, he still harbors feelings for someone.

“Raman too couldn't sleep. He found himself feeling protective for Ishita in a way he never had with Shagun. Even after years of marriage, he had always been the supplicant, worshipping at the altar of her beauty, never ceasing to be grateful that she was his” (Kapur 280).

Kapur showed the consequences of each character in both favourable and unfavourable circumstances. She has demonstrated two storylines in tandem with a spectacular convergence at the divorce point in both. Even though it started beautifully, as the story continued, we gradually heard about their hardships. Ishita's life focuses on working for an NGO, being a devoted stepmother to Roohi, and being a wife to Raman, whereas Shagun's centers around Ashok and Arjun. Finding their love again not only heals the shattered characters but also offers us a context in which to understand that divorces give marriage a second chance. In both cases, through all chaos and turmoil, the novel ends with new pair of, husband and wife. Some spaces will never be filled, like Roohi's absence in Arjun and Shagun's life and Arjun's absence in Raman's life. The novel ends with something like bargaining of love and emotions.

Work Cited

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