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SUPERFLUITY AND BEREAVEMENT OF SHAGUN IN MANJU
KAPUR'S "CUSTODY"



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Manju Kapur is eminent writer of 20th century. *Custody* (2011), her fifth novel is exceptional by proliferation and monetary alleviation. It is a story of custody of children and the Indian judicial system. Kapur encapsulates the lives of opulent, metropolitan middle – class Indians with their perturbing confidential matters, deteriorated relationships, their hankering for wealth, self-determination and tranquillity. Kapur evaluate the destitution of modern life as the story encircle around Raman and Shagun who are couple along with fascinating Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss and Ishitha, divorcee who suffers with infertility.

The novel presents the plight of wedlock, which is unimaginable. Custody consist the plot of metropolitan upper middle class family lives, which notwithstanding being wealthy are bankrupt in values and significance. Kapur utilizes the establishment of marriage in the Custody, explains the story of two wretched families by divorce. A sequence of altercation follows along with disagreements, intense conversation reveal the wicked side of divorce. It explains how the main protagonist, Shagun looses healthy family life, husband and children by her superfluity. In spite of all hers trials she gets nothing except bereavement.

KEYWORDS

Suffocation, superfluity, separation, divorce, remarriage, possessiveness, custody, bereavement.

INTRODUCTION :

Custody begins with the battle of main characters, Raman who is working as marketing executive at a global drinks company. His wife Shagun is with her astonishing personality. They had two children, Arjun, the boy with eight years resembles his mother and Roohi, who is with 2 years, resembles her father. The novel starts with the love scene involving a couple, the protagonist Shagun with Ashok, who is boss in her husband's office. In the words of Kapur, "The couple lay among stained sheets and rumped quilts, eyes closed, legs twisted together like the knotted branches of low growing tree" (Kapur 1, 2011). In it Kapur explains that morals and ethical values have no place in love making. The battle rises between husband and wife with the enter of Raman's boss Ashok. This battle becomes central figure in the story. *Custody* is the enthralling story of how family love can shatter into an infatuation to hold children, body and soul. *Custody* is a social commentary with the theme of wreck in the modern marriage by superfluity and individualism. The story has heart wrenching moments which lead the family into separation. The happy family which consist of a good husband, who earns high salary, having beautiful and dutiful wife who helps him and accompanies in his office parties. There is another main character Ishitha, whose marriage life becomes failure by her infertility, who becomes later Raman's wife. Shagun's infidelity has greater impact on her total family members. Between the battles of two couple the children becomes victims. *Custody* is anecdote of female misery, hardship as well as their contentment, their way to attain their desires and hankering. The novel shows the multiple events and incidents with detachment, annulment, and remarriages of the two couple.

Custody is a story of collapsed family, and the couple battles for their children. All this follows by shagun' affair with her husband's fascinating boss, Ashk Khanna. It leads husband and wife go through separation, divorce, remarriage and elevation of custody of the two children, Arjun and Roohi, becomes the hostage between the battles of their parents. She does not accept her fate as dutiful housewife. Before marriage she wants to become a model. Whenever she meets Ashok Khanna that dreams again raise in her mind. She could not agree her suffocation. She wants to do something which can keep her in luxury life. Raman and Shagun can have bright future, because both are made for each other. In the words of Kapur, "marriage had been arranged along standard lines, she the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects" (Kapur 14, 2011). Being a practical and hard working, Raman has to spend much time on office business. In the words of Kapur, "Yet the demands of his work forced him to away long hours, thinning the connection between them" (Kapur 31, 2011). It makes Shagun gets into suffocation. Lack of spending time with his wife leads Shagun' dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction that occurs in most marriages was not allowed dissipation; instead, she clung to reasons to justify her unfaithfulness. Complaints become routine in their family life. Though there is unexceptional guilt in their mind in the beginning we find enthusiasm in the family. Raman thought of his wife and the distance he feels between them. He tries to avoid the distance, though in his hectic schedule he spares some time for his family. In the words of Kapur, "on holidays and weekends devoting himself to his son, giving his wife the break she needed" (Kapur 18, 2011). Raman loves and very loyal to his wife. He always thinks about her. Before leaving for Bareilly, he phoned to his mother -in- law about his wife. Here we can have glance that he is a very care taker of Shagun. In the words of Kapur, "one precaution he did take, though. Before he left he phoned his mother- in- law please look after her, she is in a delicate condition, still somewhat upset, and I am worried" (Kapur 18, 2011). Raman gives everything whatever she needs. In the words of Kapur, "Through her twenties she had presumed herself content,

knowing she had much to be thankful for, healthy children, comfort, money" (Kapur 35, 2011). Raman understands everyone and every situation which disgust to whom. Whenever she blames he simply tries to change situation. He thinks that his travelling might disgust her wife. In the words of Kapur, "May be it was the baby she hadn't wanted, maybe it was all the travelling he had to do, had always had to do" (Kapur 9, 2011).

Shagun's desires and search of new identity leads her to go through her direction without concerning anyone. She wants to lead her life in her own direction without any other consideration. She even says Raman, how she is suffering with suffocation, and she wants something else in her life. Shagun always blames her husband that she has been wasted her time as a house wife, though she has got everything and love from him. In the words of Kapur, "she blamed Raman for her predicament, thinking of the years she had been satisfied with his lovemaking, tender, attentive, pedestrian, as so much wasted time" (Kapur 35, 2011). She starts to see her life in the other way of liberty, which can leads her into a different luxury life. She cannot satisfy to be a common housewife. Raman asserts her to be good mother and should devote to her son. But she refuses to be like that. In the words of Kapur, "I'll be thirty, Arjun is just becoming independent, I don't want to start all over again. Always tied to a child" (Kapur 18, 2011). She starts to see her life in the other way of liberty, which can leads her into a different luxury life. She cannot satisfy to be a common housewife. Shagun has extreme desire to do something new in her life than the roles wife and motherhood. She feels bore in routine life. She had two lovely children and everything she wanted. In every vacation Raman takes them to tour to other countries. How many women had what she did? In the words of Kapur, "I want something else in my life, can't you understand that? We always meet the same people, talk about the same ole things over and over. It's boring" (Kapur 47, 2011).

When she encounters with Ashok, she thinks that fate itself allows her to be with Ashok. Now she maintains a secret life with Ashok, which is forbidden to a housewife. In the words of Kapur, "a curtain was drawn between her normal, life and another secret one" (Kapur 27, 2011). With Ashok she can have a modern world, which she wants to had, and can have luxury life. Which she cannot get from Raman. So she breaks the modern marriage for her lover. No matter whether it is arranged or love marriage, soon the marital bliss comes to end in both the marriages, by their individuality, self centred personality. In India most of the people prefers arranged marriages, and those consider as fortune destiny. "Marriages are destined in heaven". The feminist Simon de Beauvoir also opines almost similarly in the following statement, "Marriage is a destiny traditionally offered to women by society". By this marriage man and woman gets recognition, and are expected to be good and peace. In olden days the woman has to compromise in each and everything with her husband and in-laws family. But now a day's woman has their choice according to their individualism by judicial system. Here Shagun also thinks she can be independent from traditional values of the family, she can live however she like by being with Ashok. Now a days people are very much interest to do anything at any cost for their independence. Here Shagun also feels her sexual interaction with another man while divorcing with Raman can make her independent. Kate Millet asserts, "Woman is still denied sexual freedom and the biological control over her body through the cult of virginity, double standard, the prescription against abortion, and in many place because contraception is psychically and physically unavailable to her" (Kate Millet 2000). She rebels against her matrimonial life and relished her freedom. Though the feeling of guilt afflict her but her gumptious to enjoy her luxurious life with her lover.

Extra marital affair with her lover Ashok gives her a very pleasant experience and shows her a

way to be self-sustaining, self-assured, powerful, independent and ingenious as she chases sexuality equality and self-independence. Griffin has pointed out, "to be a lover, there are more chances to face the reality and the true inner self. Perhaps, being a lover is not accepted by the society, so this kind of person needs to do self-reflections and self-doubt than common people" (Griffin 2001:340). Shagun elucidates her desire, possibility and sexuality as she identifies and accepts herself. She now believes in Ashok who soothes her with his cunning words. In the words of Kapur, "Diana followed her heart and you must follow your. We have only one life and everybody wants to live it the best way they can" (Kapur 85, 2011). His words help her to exercise her body and self-reliance enthusiastically which leads to a reconstituted and self-reformation. In the words of Kapur, "A lover would add to her experience, make up for all the things she has missed having married straight out of college" (Kapur 86, 2011). She overcomes the patriarchal morals to enjoy the new relationship with Ashok. Shagun's act of molestation commemorates female sexual impetuosity incorporated in a new feminist expectation that woman is a desiring subject with an enormous longing for sexual utterance, satisfaction and fulfilment. Whenever Ashok asserts from now his home is hers and he is her husband, she feels extreme joy which she never had in her life and feels now she is a fulfilled woman. In the words of Kapur, "She sank down next to him; she knew she would have a happiness she never had before. If she were to die tomorrow, it would be as a fulfilled woman" (Kapur 113, 2011). Shagun follows her heart and strives for divorce from Raman and she wants to begin a new life with Ashok.

Shagun is also entranced by Ashok's loving words and exceptional grace and leaves behind the essential restraint of marriage and defies its sacredness through sexual offence. Though she dares to deny everyone, she has some guilt in her heart she worries about being caught: In the words of Kapur, "Guilt sees acquisition everywhere in the glance of a servant, her the fretful cry of a child, the stranger staring on the street, a driver's insolent tone...it was her conscience that made her so uneasy" (Kapur 1, 2011). Ashok feels that he had never experienced the ecstasy which he gets with Shagun. So at any cost he wants to get her. He knows that he is the destroyer of Shagun's family, but he gets happy and feels conqueror by capturing her. Relish of love makes Shagun insurgent for freedom which is forbidden to her as a housewife. She fights for individualism which she wants from long time. But she does not understand that for her freedom she has to lose her children and a happy married life. She provokes to come out of the preventive territory of the pleasant family life. Shagun thinks that her defiant perspective exasperates as a result of the oppression and suppression of the patriarchy since her childhood. She never wants to allow her fate in her life and never compromise to anything. As a post-colonial writer Manju Kapur depicts the protagonist as rebellion against society for her freedom breaking old age traditional values.

The battle exasperates when Shagun does sneer to Raman's parents. Raman could not bear the situation of Shagun, he rages that quite natural because a man cannot bare woman domination against him. He asserts that a woman's happiness should lie in the responsibility as housewife and motherhood, and she should be loyal to her in-laws family. Raman always thinks that, he satisfies everything whatever she needs but she thinks that he cannot understand the desires and longings of her which are beyond the matrimonial relations. He begins to conjecture her, and pursue by a private detective agency. He thinks that his life is violated. He questioned his wife why she cheated him by doing wrong. In the words of Kapur, "If there something wrong, why didn't tell me? I was working so hard for whom do I work but my family? – You-?" (Kapur 92, 2011). For the first time in his life he cried than ever in his life. In the words of Kapur, "alone in the room, he gradually grew calmer. He had cried more in this one

evening than he had in his entire life" (Kapur 92, 2011). He remains in the office alone, feeling betrayed by his wife and his boss at the same time. In the word of Kapur, "No protest, however strong could get back the security he had lost. He remains bent over his desk simulating work, as the office slowly emptied" (Kapur, 88, 2011). The dereliction between Raman and Shagun even abyss rather widely. Instead of feeling guilty, she gets irritate by Raman's following.

From the very beginning her mother's words entrenched in her mind. So she decides to marry Raman. Her mother knows the zest of her daughter to be a model. She tells her daughter that if she wants to do anything you can do after marriage. In the words of Kapur, "Do what you like after you marry" (Kapur, 11, 2011). But being a wife, mother, daughter-in-law and bearing many responsibilities she could not get anything what she wants. She has to accept to lead a life of what Shagun' mother-in-law' family and Raman suggest. (Kapur 26, 2011). But she has the zeal of to becoming a model does not lose. Whenever she gets a chance from Ashok she could not stop her mind to follow him. First she attracted to his words and after that physically. Tondon say, "Any woman who has broken away from the tethering of normal domestic life becomes liberal in her attitude to sexual freedom. She realizes there cannot be different standards for man and for woman, sexual freedom is more often approved by emancipated women belonging to the progressive younger group, by woman unhappy in marriage, sexually frustrated, widowed or separated" (Tondon 165). Her mother who has incarnated the delicacy of patriarchy thinking seems her as a sexually erring wife, who must be chastised and brought back into the orbit of conventional social morality. Shagun's mother asserts that Raman as good man. In the words of Kapur, "what kind of person will take you away from your husband, such a good man?" (Kapur 39, 2011). She advices Shagun: "The house rests upon a woman. In your children happiness, your husband happiness lies your own. Anything else is just temporary" (Kapur 103, 2011). Her mother begs her not to ruin her family respect in the society. In the words of Kapur, "You think all wives love their husbands? But they stay married. You are so idealistic. You don't think about the long term What about the society? What about your children?" (Kapur 79, 2011). Her mother indicates Shagun to be loyal to his husband. In the words of Kapur, "Made a thousand resolution; be wife – like, be good, docile, compliant but the mere sight of him sent these decisions out of the window" (Kapur 49, 2011).

Just a few seconds Shagun thinks of being unfaithful to husband, children, and about her mother's words and society, but Ashok's words leads her in immoral way. In the words of Kapur, "Traditional versus modern values, individual versus society – this narrow social set-up is all you know – that's why you are afraid. But it will be all fine, fines. Trust me, darling" (Kapur 84, 2011). Shagun's sexual life with Ashok proves that a women desires and longing for sexual thoughts as satisfaction and fulfilment. Shagun does not care about society and parents; she follows what she thinks she comes across with divorce from Raman. Ashok tells him again and again to follow her heart. In the words of Kapur, "her lover told that women had a right to their own lives?" (Kapur 109, 2011). The institution of our marriage system proves that divorce can allow a woman to have laxity which can satisfy her desires by throwing her husband, children family into misery. Shagun herself start the battle for her children custody. In the words of Kapur, "you know I hated this entire hole – in- corner stuff. If you have to get divorce, fight for the custody, let's start now" (Kapur 94, 2011). By divorce from her husband she wants to end her secret life and wants to start a new life with her lover, Ashok. When both get marriages, step father and step mother also have to come in the battle of custody. From these words we can have idea how much influenced the words of Ashok on Shagun. In the words of Kapur, "It was part of the Indian disease. Ashok was always going on about stultifying tradition. The great Indian family, which rested

on the sacrifices of its women" (Kapur 104, 2011).

Shagun very much influenced by Ashok and attracted by luxury life which can give only by Ashok. It proved from her letters to her mother. She might be thought that if she marries Ashok she can have chance in film industry, and can move to Bombay. But it is not possible with Raman. In the words of Kapur, "on offer she might have a chance once this ad was released?" (Kapur, 12, 2011),"But I must tell you, it will be necessary to relocate to Bombay if you are serious" (Kapur 13, 2011). Shagun thinks that she can give bright future to her children through Ashok. By accepting his suggestion she joins Arjun in DPA. She wants to give good studies to Roohi US. But she fails to understand that happiness does not lie on luxury life, but it has to come from heart which she can get from her loving husband and family. In the words of Kapur, "He knew he was expecting that away from him she would realise the value of years of devotion and a home that was waiting for her. If he were in her place he would have realised these things by now" (Kapur 113, 2011).

According to sacred marriage husband and wife should respect, love, obey, and to serve each other in their needs. In the words of Buhler, "A faithful wife, who desires to dwell (after death) with her husband, must never do anything that might displease him who took her hand, whether he be alive or dead" (Buhler, 156). Raman had heart attack by divorce, Shagun does not care about that and does not come close to him. But this also failed to bring Shagun close to him. Heart attack also mere shred to Shagun. Though he suffers with attack she stays out of the bedroom. It proves how heartless she is. He has to spend with his daughter alone. Even her daughter also upset of her father's illness, but Shagun's mind does not change. In the words of Kapur, "Her father's illness had upset the child so much that she had begun to have nightmares, she explained to the bemused parents" (Kapur, 105, 2011). Sacred marriage takes oaths on but she forgets everything. He wants to expose his torment by rejecting divorce. At any cost he does not want to give divorce, but she use children as instrumental weapons. She abandons him and his home for the sake of her lover. She does not want to lose happiness which she likes to be. She never feels repents to come back home.

Raman becomes isolate by getting separation from his wife at least he could not sleep well. There is no way but has to accept divorce, now the battle begins about the custody of the children. Shagun in the absence of her husband she steals her children. Children become mere objects in the hands of parents. In the words of Kapur, "Whosoever willed, took them. They become the most unfortunate ones. The legal fight began but neither of them knew that, "the law was a cut-and-dried business, once you got swamped in outrage, indignation, grief and anger, you are nowhere" (Kapur 121, 2011). Their separation has a great impact on the children. Roohi gets nightmares, because of her mother's brainwash, and Arjun gets against his father by her mother words. As soon as their bondage of marriage bras and remain alone. Now he should fight for his children to have them. In the words of Kapur, "It would be prudent forget her existence as quickly as possible. From he would devote himself to his children" (Kapur 257, 2011). Raman has to suffer to see his son Arjun, he eagerly waits to see him, but become hopeless. In the words of Kapur, "He started the car and drove dully back to office, a heavy weight to his heart. Seeing his son was not going to be as simple as a trip to the school gates" (Kapur 173, 2011).

In Custody Shagun's story runs parallel to Ishita's story who suffers infertility. Where Shagun herself throws her family for the sake of her freedom. In other side Ishitha derived from her in-law family by her infertility, at least she cannot have right to be in the house without producing children. Her mother-in-law satisfies with that her son is not ineffective but her daughter-in-law who is infertile.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels located the origin of women's oppression in the rise of class society. Marx in his *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 had clearly written, "The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that (under communism) the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to women". Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* had asserts, "One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron and in the present between career woman and housewife. Palriwala points out, "Marriage continuous to have material, social and symbolic meanings and consequences which are asymmetrical in terms of their implications for females and males in at least three significant ways. Firstly, selfhood, respectability and status are tied to wifeness and motherhood in more exacting ways than they are to being a husband and / or father. A single man or woman without children is seen as unfortunate, but a woman in a similar situation inauspicious, possibly dangerous" (Palriwala 400-401).

Shagun's maternal drive impregnate into love, care and affection for Roohi. She assuredly speaks out before the Judge in the court. In the words of Kapur, "Ever since my marriage I have put her welfare above everything. I think of her as my flesh and blood. If anybody is like a stepmother it is this lady. To be a mother you need a heart" (Kapur 412, 2011). Parents become irrational as they are fighting for dolls. In the words of Kapur, "Adult should behave like adults, not like the children they were fighting over. Really, why did people have babies if they were going to the mess of their own desires?" (Kapur 404, 2011). Between two wrecked families's children become mere objects in their hands. We can see calamitous effect of the pungent struggle for their custody. The brutal and familial disagreements had bad impression on the innocent mind of the children. The "torn between two mother, two homes, two countries". Shagun's egotism upset Raman who is a heartfelt, faithful husband. In the novel everybody – the children, the father, the wives need to pay the emotional price. Here we need to think that although none of the characters come out wholly shining, you do sympathise with them all! Misery, anxiety, tension does bring out the worst in us- that would apply to any conflict situation. Where children are concerned, ones deepest feelings are at stake, and this provokes all kinds of extreme behaviours.

Kapur presents sexual liberation beyond the matrimonial system in her novel and uses this sexual freedom as a utensil of resistance to foil benevolent myths and values. She portrays the main female protagonist Shagun who celebrates her sexuality and compilation its productive principle through a conscious reversal of patriarchal morals. Her sexuality is a coliseum of pleasure and agency in which she is license to use her body for herself. Her provocation the male dominated and patriarchal implement of scrutiny and control. Tiefer foment: "What women need is not to learn traditional morality according official rules but to put forward women' sexuality that has been contained by the patriarchy system in the past". Shagun' superfluity gives nothing except bereavement. She fights for years for her Roohi, but Roohi, who is her flesh and blood, asserts to the judge that she wants to be with Ishitha. In the words of Kapur, "I said Ishitha as my mother. I want to stay with her" (Kapur 414, 2011).

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