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Marginalization and Identity Crisis in the Novel "Custody" By Manju Kapur

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is a great Indian novelist, her novels *Difficult Daughter, Home, Immigrant, Custody, A Married Woman* are the best novels of expressing the middle-class woman's desires, sufferings, longing of living independent life, self-respect, humiliation in family life. This paper is about to examine the novel *Custody* with Marginalization and Identity crises. *Custody's* main Protagonists are Shagun and Ishita, they are reach their identity through divorce. Shagun and Ishita's way of getting self- identity is entirely different from each other. This paper is critically express the consequence of divorce.

Key Words : Marginalization, Identity crisis, Infertility, Family, and Divorce.

Manju Kapur is one of the best Indian woman writer, her novels are mirroring Indian middle class family life and her writings expressing how middle class women in India are suffering based on social norms, culture and tradition. Marginalization is "the process or result of making somebody feel as if they are not important and cannot influence decisions or events; the fact of putting somebody in a position in which they have no power" (Oxford). An Identity crisis is "defined as a period of uncertainty and confusion in a person's life. This crisis occurs when a person's sense of identity becomes insecure and unstable. An identity crisis usually occurs when there's a change in a person's life. But an identity crisis can happen at any time"(Miles). A marginalized person is suffering because of their state of unimportant and powerlessness, these unimportant and powerlessness lead them to identity crises, hence if a person get his self-identity, he will automatically come out from marginalized state. In "Custody" Manju Kapur express how her protagonists are find their self-identity, independence and inner strength of womanhood in two different ways.

Shagun and Ishita are the central characters in this novel "Custody", these two characters are come from Indian middle-class family. Shagun and Ishita are the only daughter of their parents, Ishita is a typical Indian traditional woman "Ishita was sweet rather than pretty," (Kapur 50) and Shagun is a woman with stunning beauty who longing to live independent modern life "how stunningly beautiful she is, realized a frightened Mrs Kaushik, can such woman really be a homemaker?" (Kapur 21) Shagun's mother Mrs Sabharwal wants to product her daughter from unstable modern life style " but her mother was strongly opposed to a career that would allow all kind of lechery near her lovely daughter. 'Do what you like after you marry,'" (Kapur 11) so Mrs Sabharwal choose Raman as a best groom to her daughter for her daughter's safe and secure life "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)

Shagun feels happy with her married life because Raman's economical status satisfies Shagun's material

needs like decent house, car with care of Raman such a worshiping husband. Her state of happiness starts reduce when she gets pregnant early in their married life, and she feels totally disappointed with her second pregnancy and it disturbs her child free life, so her desire of acting and modeling become vanished “but after marriage there had been a child. Then the claims of husband, family and friends made a career hard to justify, especially since money was not an issue.” (Kapur 11) For Raman’s company work he spends his most of the days for tour, he leaves his home for several days due to improving his new project Mang-oh!. Raman’s absences in home make Shagun mad, she starts to accuse him “but as his time away from home increased, Shagun began to protest. ‘but what to do darling? We have to create brand awareness in every corner of the country.’” (Kapur 16) But Raman doesn’t takes it seriously, it leads him into the big tragedy.

Raman’s absence and Ashoke, boss of Raman his curiosity and keen attention make Shagun fall into him “Soon after she met Ashok Khanna she grew certain that he was trying to seduce her. It was when she told her first lie, a lie of omission concerning the cup of coffee, that she became complicit in those efforts. From then on, a curtain was drawn between her normal life and another secret one, more charged than anything she had previously known.” (Kapur 26) Ashoke’s intelligence and luxurious modern life style make her fall in love with him, because of him Shagun reaches her dream of acting and modelling. This lavish modern life style make forget her motherhood, she even ready to admit her one and half years old daughter Roohi in playschool “I know it’s a bit early, but it will be easier for me to meet you if I admit her in playschool.” (Kapur 27) Her dreamy life turn her into a heartless mother “In April Shagun reiterated her desire to put her daughter in kindergarten. She was older now.” (Kapur 41) Because of her mother’s action Roohi affected physically and mentally “So Roohi joined Toddler’s Steps and cried every day for a week as her mother left her at the gate... Roohi’s favourite game became school-school, with dolls who were chastised vigorously for dirtying themselves, for hitting other children, for peeing in class, for ceaseless crying.” (Kapur 42) Arjun, Shagun’s first son also starts to skip his classes due to avoid his friend’s enquiry about his family and his mother.

Shagun asks divorce from Raman, but Raman try to revenge her due to reject divorce, it makes her so violent she kidnaps her own children and make Raman longing to see his children. Raman gives divorce to get his children from Shagun. After her

divorce she feels unfulfilled without her children, so she starts her next move to get custody of her children. In this process of getting custody these two adults are cruelly tossing their kids for their pride. Arjun admits to boarding school and Roohi become so upset, feels torture and wed her bed by nightmare “Roohi reflected the brokenness of the family in constant loud wails which grated on all their nerves. In Shagun’s absence, Raman began taking her to his bed at night, where she would settle down, snuggling into him, sucking desperately on her thumb.”(Kapur 96) Raman’s need of Ishita secures Roohi. Ishita, a divorced woman, she lost her marital life because of her infertility.

Ishita the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs Rajora, for her parent's wish Ishita marries SuryaKanda, a shy, moody pampered son by his mother. Ishita dropout her desire of becoming teacher and her independent working life for her mother-in-law’s demand of just being good homemaker “Ishita was hesitant. The women of the family didn’t work, daughters-in-law were obviously expected to devote themselves to home. What about her B.Ed., her desire to be independent?... Stubbornness was not prized in daughters-in-law.” (Kapur 51) Ishita’s marital life starts smoothly but after six months of her marriage she has start to chase by enquiry of delaying pregnancy. “The couple were young but it was better to prove that the machinery worked early on in the relationship. Producing grandchildren was a moral obligation.”(Kapur 52)

Ishita’s delaying of get pregnant make her feel vulnerable in her mother-in-law’s house. According to Indian social customs a role of woman’s birth is to be a good caring wife and dutiful daughter-in-law then her prime role is to give heir to her father-in-law family’s blood line “ as the only son, he has to make sure that bloodline of his forefathers continues” (Kapur 66) Woman’s birth is useless without giving heir to her husband, in this society woman is not consider as a soulful living being, she is just consider like a trading goods. “Eighteen months into the marriage the boy’s family began to make noises. ‘They are beginning to ask, why haven’t you conceived? SK says he doesn’t want to be a father yet, but they say he doesn’t know what he is talking about. They behave as though he were a child.’”(Kapur 53) Suryakanta’s family and his mother treating him like a child, so the responsibility of giving heir for that family entirely on Ishita’s head, “ for us the girls qualities were everything” (Kapur 66) she meets many doctors and do many rituals to get pregnant. Her fallopian tubes are affected because of her childhood disease, through treatment she have only fifty percent chance to getting pregnant,

her mother-in-law don't want to waste her money on Ishita's treatment, she only want good fertility machine not to invest on damage goods " Hadn't they valued her for herself" (Kapur 66) So Suryakanda's mother want divorce from Ishita. "kapur brings out the callous nature of the mother-in-law who fails to understand and respect the same gender kind. Male domination is an aspect of feminism. *Custody* treats a woman's domination over another woman." (Shanthi 75)

Suryakanda is a spineless, selfless pampered child of his mother." 'Papa and Mummy will know what to do,' said SK" (Kapur 60) he avoids to see Ishita and he starts to sleep with his mother "he doesn't even touch me anymore. In bed all she saw was his back. And last night, he moved into his parents' bedroom. She felt degraded, a non-person, certainly a non-woman. He was determined there should be nothing left between them." (Kapur 68) Suryakanda's these behaviours deeply wounded Ishita, her mother -in-law scolds her like a shameless creature. The entire family neglect her like she is not existing there "The mother began to call her shameless, the sisters refused to talk to her, the father and SK avoided her. She only saw her husband at the dining table – a place to which she now seldom came. Who can eat if they are treated as invisible?". (Kapur 69) Ishita starts to hate her body and feel like trash waste. Her body fails her due to infertility, her custom of society crushes her like worthless sphere. She totally marginalized by her family and society.

Ishita is like phoenix she recreates herself to make useful to needy people like orphans and poor children. She starts to feel herself strong and meaningful to live. She get her self-identity through her own self not from another person. After she have relationship with Raman she starts to feel lively and his daughter Roohi takes her to the next level of soulful person. Ishita easily attached with Roohi. Ishita understands needs of Roohi, she starts to love her like a mother. She makes her feel comfortable with her company. Ishita's body reject her to bear a child but her soul finds a way to be a soulful mother.

Manju Kapur portrayed a two angle of getting self-identity in custody. One is Ishita starts her life as a typical wife and lost to find self-identity and meaning of life through her husband and his family, because of her infertility she marginalized by her husband and his family. She realized the truth that self-identity cannot get from others so she makes her way to reach her self-satisfaction with her own feet, this lead her to get her denial life of being a lovely wife and soulful mother and these positions help her to come out from marginalized

state in a family structure. But Shagun is not like Ishita, she gets all her basic needs through Raman like decent life, lovely children and worshiping husband, she fails to use these all comfortable life to reach her dream. She just depend another person(Ashoke) who is better than his husband both materially and sexually " a woman in order to realize her autonomy struggles to get sexual agency and the right to choose her sexual partner. She challenges the culturally constructed view of woman whose desires are deemed subservient to that of man. She acclaims female sexual self – affirmation embodied in a new feministic notion that woman is a desiring subject with a strong desire of sexual expression, satisfaction and fulfilment. New identities and politics emerge when deviant act is practiced by individuals. In modern times, woman makes the best use of her opportunity to enjoy her body, her relationship, her individual development, in a way that she never had before." (Saharan 91) to reach her dreamy life "Kapur reveals without taking sides the effect of the extramarital affair which can break un even a solid marriage. Morals and ethics do not work" (Shanthi 74). To reach her dreamy life she is even ready to ruin her family members like her husband, children.

In human life not all people have perfect life partner. Every family members have their own unfulfilled desires and not every couples are made for each other. Intolerable marital life may use divorce to stop ruining their life with false partner, but every husband and wife have flaws if couples try to get divorce for these little things there is no meaning of family and this broken family will destroy the children's future. Broken childhood brings psychologically affected adults these adults create unstable society. Finally divorce is not a solution to all problems.

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