

The Emotional and Psychological Discord in Modern Families: A Reflexion in Manju Kapur's "Custody"

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Abstract: In today's scenario, the children and adults are facing psychological trauma and stress in their daily lives. This psychological issue is portrayed and presented in creative writings as well. Is there really a 'psychological discord' in modern families due to an estrangement in familial bonds? An exhaustive survey of literature indicates that as the breach between relationships like parent and child, married couples and between siblings widens, a family is deprived of peace and happiness. Taking this into account, the present paper attempts to reveal and analyse the psychological trauma, disturbance, emotional imbalance, and parental alienation experienced by the characters and their children in Manju Kapur's 'Custody'. This paper highlights the bitter and serious psychological consequences of discord in matrimony – emotional imbalance in children and adults – an aftermath of divorce and custody rights.

Keywords: Parental Alienation, Psychological Trauma, Dreams, Oedipus Complex, Parental Alienation Syndrome, Psychoanalysis.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Manju Kapur has established herself among the prominent contemporary Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Chandra, Suketu Mehta, Arvind Adiga and Arundhati Roy. In her writings, she speaks for the middle-class society and has earned several comparisons with "Jane Austen" for her sharp-eyed, finely turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations.

Manju Kapur has taught English Literature under the name of Manjul Kapur Dalmia in Miranda House College, Delhi University for twenty-five years. She began her writing career at the age of forty-two. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* was published in 1998 which won her the Common Wealth Writer's Prize in 1999 – the best book in Europe and South Asia. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was published in 2002. This novel was shortlisted for the Encore Award. The third novel *Home* was published in 2006, and was shortlisted for the Hutch-Crossword Prize. The fourth novel *The Immigrant* was published in 2008 and was shortlisted for the Indian Plaza Golden Quill Award and the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2010. Her fifth novel *Custody* was published in 2011 and has motivated two television serials *Ye Hai Mohabbatein* and *Pranayam*.

Manju Kapur has also written articles like *Father*, *The Birth of a Baby*, *After Amba*, *My Hair* and also stories like *In the Backwater*, *Chocolate*, *The Necklace Roses* and *The Man Who Loved Beautiful Thing*. She has also edited *Shaping the World: Women Writers onThemselves* in 2014.

II. BACKGROUND:

The novel *Custody* is set in the back drop of upper middle-class Delhi of the 90's where foreign investment was entering India through globalization, privatization and liberalization economic policies that were adopted by the Government in 1987. It also portrays the stress and anxiety caused in Indian traditional families because of these policies and ideas conflicting with Indian culture.

Raman is a Marketing Executive with a brilliant prospect in a multinational company and Shagun is his alluring wife. Along with their two adorable children – Arjun who resembles his mother and Roohi who has taken after her father– the couple seems to have a perfect life. But when Raman's new boss – the older urbane Ashok Khanna – enters the picture, Shagun decides her marriage is over, husband and wife become locked in a bitter battle over the custody of their children. While the children's custody is thrown into question, the childless Ishita is drawn towards Raman because of the chance of familial fulfilment and marries him for the second time. Whereas Shagun marries Ashok Khanna for second time and settles abroad. Arjun's custody is given to Shagun whereas Roohi's custody is given to Raman. There starts an ugly battle of custody of Roohi between Shagun and Raman.

Custody can be interpreted in psychoanalytical perspective. There is a lot of psychological trauma and emotional imbalance experienced by all the characters in the novel. Shagun has inner conflict between her Unconscious and her Conscious mind; Raman falls ill when he comes to know from Lovely Detective Agency about Shagun's extra-marital affair with his new boss Ashok Khanna; and the children Arjun and Roohi face difficulty in coping up with the new environment and parents that cause emotional imbalance in them.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Arifa Akbar (2011) says that Manju Kapur's novels have time and again come out with socially deplorable romance and fractured marriages and *Custody* is no exception to it.

Mithu Banerji (2011) comments that *Custody* is not just a novel but it portrays the real global torment of contemporary marriages with its load of Individualism.

Dr. Pew Maji (2013) suggests that women characters in the novel exemplify themselves by no longer confining themselves within the four walls of family and traditional values. They are bold enough to fight for their identity and freedom; they break down the conventional perspectives, norms and oppression of the patriarchal society.

Asha Saharan (2014) remarks that Shagun's extra-marital affair is not just a sexual urge or an intentional conversion but an emblematic representation of her liberty and individuality against rigid norms of institutions like marriage. Similarly, Ishita externalizes her infertility problem and she achieves motherhood through accepting Roohi as her daughter and as a result she empowers herself as a caring step-mother. Saharan states Kapur has interpreted that women exert physical or sexual experiences when her body gets corrupt its effect is seen on psyche of the person.

Dr. Gajendra Dutt Sharma (2014) interpolates that *Custody* has brought awareness to married couples to have a balance in their personal and official lives i.e. romance and logic since when the balance is lost the marriage ends up in the legal chicanery of Divorce and Guardianship of the children. He also comments that the common myth of seeing marriage and family as an institution for economic and emotional security is reversed into a space where there is lot of constraints, oppression, violence, possessiveness and disintegration in the modern perspective.

Jitander Singh (2015) comments in his paper entitled Demystifying Mother and Daughter in Manju Kapur novel *Custody* that categorization between women as Daughter and Mother is just a way to keep them apart from their similar experience being shared. All mothers would be a daughter and vice-versa. Mother and Daughters usually have a closer social, psychic or emotional identification more than between a mother and the son.

D. Anushiya Devi (2016) comments upon the expectations of modern married women for space, liberation and happiness both inside and outside their homes. This is exhibited by the character Shagun who annuls her marital bond when she doesn't experience happiness in her marital life.

V. Chanthiramathi and M. Rashmi (2016) interpret Manju Kapur as a sharp eye observer of social, moral and cultural changes that are occurring in the modern society. They also suggest that everything is in a state of flux in this modern world and so it is impossible to expect people living in this contemporary age to adhere strongly to a set of doctrines and dogmas of the past. This transformation is portrayed by the character Shagun who goes for extra-marital affair, divorce and custody cases.

Nilam H. Gajjar and Dr. Hitesh D. Raviya (2016) observe that Shagun's extra-marital affair becomes a weapon against the patriarchal myths and values. This novel displays the global anxiety of modern married lives in Indian society. Manju Kapur's characters revolt against the social, cultural and ethical stereotypical roles which leads to conflict in order to construct their individual space.

Simmi Gurwara (2016) remarks that women are made to sacrifice their career growth when it comes to the question of men i.e. husbands. But modern women demand equal rights and space for themselves in marriage bonds. If this demand is fulfilled, the marriage flourishes cordially and this holds true for all relationships and marriage is no exception to it.

IV. PSYCHOANALYSIS:

Psychoanalysis is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as:

A therapeutic method originated by Sigmund Freud for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious element in the patient's mind and bringing the repressed fears and conflict into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. Also: a system of psychological theory associated with this method.

Psychoanalysis Theory was developed by a neurologist practicing in Vienna, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud began his studies on psychoanalysis in collaboration with Dr. Josef Breuer in the study of Anna O case. Anna was subjected to both

physical and psychological disturbances, such as not being able to drink water out of fear. Breuer and Freud both found that hypnosis was a great help in discovering more about Anna and her treatment. The research and ideas behind the study of Anna was highly referenced in Freud's lectures on the origin and development of psychoanalysis. These observations led Freud to theorize that the problems faced by hysterical patients could be associated to painful childhood experiences that could not be recalled. The influence of these lost memories shaped the feelings, thoughts and behaviour of patients. These studies contributed to the development of Psychoanalysis Theory for interpretation of literary texts.

Freud's major ideas include Unconscious; Repression; Sublimation; The Tripartite Psyche – Id, Super-Ego, Ego; Oedipus Complex; Dream Work and Freudian Slips. By applying Psychoanalysis Theory and a few major concepts of Freud, the novel *Custody* is analysed to draw insight and inference about the problems which are creeping slowly in the present society, which if not removed from its crux will spoil the heritage, culture and richness that is prevalent in the society and nation.

Abbreviations:

C *Custody*

WT *The Winter's Tale*

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA, PARENTAL ALIENATION AND DREAMS:

Custody portrays the stress and anxiety caused in the Indian traditional families because of the intervention of Globalization and Liberalization - ideas affecting the Indian culture. This paper focuses on the two children of Raman and Shagun. In this ugly battle of 'custody' and 'divorce', the children are treated like commodities in constant shift between two homes, two parents and two countries. Due to this estrangement in family caused by Shagun, Roohi her daughter, becomes a victim of slight nervous disorder and she becomes quite withdrawn. Her son Arjun's performance in studies also deteriorates. He is an eight-year-old boy who has inherited Shagun's appearance and her characters like being selfish, cruel and indifferent to everything for his own satisfaction. Whereas, Roohi, two-years younger to Arjun is "right from the beginning it was clear that Baby Roohi was a carbon copy of her father" (C 18) who (father) is very loving, understanding and generous. Raman and Shagun are not aware of the most important factor – the child psychology - the stress upon the children's psyche. The stress upon the children to choose one of the parents is the most difficult and most emotionally devastating trauma to bear with. The parents are unaware of the consequences.

The children undergo psychological trauma which is not revealed directly. Because of the unstable relationships, homes and mothers, Roohi is the first one to get affected. She is in a confused state and unable to tell her mother's name (i.e. biological or step-mother) in her school interview. Whereas Arjun is having a hard time with his father's position replaced by Ashok Khanna. The children's happy childhood days have become full of scars with broken family memories, which eventually would make them adults with troublesome emotions.

Arjun and Roohi also suffer from parental alienation. They feel isolated by the parents because of their divorce and family problems. Shagun's extra-marital affair with Ashok Khanna, the hasty second marriage between Shagun and Ashok and Raman with Ishita Rajora are the reasons for parental alienation of the children. Before the divorce of Raman and Shagun the separation in them is seen clearly by their indifferent activities at home. Arjun spends most of his time in his friend's house and Roohi is taken care of by her father at night and she sucks her thumb desperately. "... Roohi reflected the brokenness of the family in constant loud wails which grated on all their nerves" (C 96). This shows the emotional imbalance in Roohi. She also screams hysterically sometimes affected by nightmares in sleep and crying fits. The maid Ganga in the house comes running to Shagun in the garden and tells her that "Roohi had been screaming hysterically for fifteen minutes, not even sahib (Raman) could quieten her, she had better hurry back" (C 106). The differences between Raman and Shagun can be witnessed clearly by the children. When Raman comes home in the evenings, Shagun moves out of the house. The reason why Roohi is affected by slight nervous disorder is because of her father's (Raman) illness. "Her father's illness had upset the child so much that she begun to have nightmares, she explained to the bemused parents" (C 100).

Raman is forced to lie to his children when they ask for their mother. He says Shagun has gone to take care of their grandmother. Arjun can see through his father's lies. Arjun and Roohi's education also gets affected because of these problems. Roohi's teacher complains to Shagun that Roohi has become quiet and absent-minded in class. Arjun's Maths and English marks go down when he is in the custody of his new legal step father, Ashok Khanna – who is not as caring as his biological father Raman, who can teach him both the subjects. Arjun also forges his mother Shagun's signature in the test papers in which he has scored low marks and hands them over to the teacher.

The moral psyche and children's psychology is at stake because of the divorce issue between Raman and Shagun. In the divorce and custody paper, Raman accuses Shagun and Ashok of "exposure to him threatened theminors' psychological well-being; she herself was an evil moral influence" (C 137). The children, who are exposed to such emotional imbalance in their early childhood, are at the risk of being affected by Psychological disorder called Parental Alienation Syndrome and it has also been proved medically. They develop hatred towards one of the parents especially who are no longer in charge of their custody. The

custodian parent fills the child's mind with negativity and brainwash the child to hate the other. Parental Alienation Syndrome is defined in Duhaime's Law Dictionary as:

The Parental Alienation Syndrome is a childhood disorder that arises almost exclusively in the context of child-custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is in the child campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification. It results from the combination of a programming (brainwashing) parent's indoctrination and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent. When true parental abuse and/or neglect are present, the child's animosity may be justified and so the parental alienation syndrome explanation for the child's hostility is not applicable. (Sheppard)

Aptly Shagun poisons her children's mind constantly by stating that Raman is trying to kill her by taking them away from her, which Roohi takes literally and says to her brother Arjun, "Papa is trying to kill mama" (C 138). Chaim Steiberger in his work "Father? What Father? Parental Alienation and its Effect on Children" says that:

[A] twelve-year study commissioned by the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association of over 1,000 divorces found that 'parental alienation,' the programming of child against the other parent, occurs regularly, sixty percent (60%) of the time, and sporadically another twenty percent. (10)

These data prove that children undergo a lot of stress, anxiety, frustration and psychological trauma due to the parents who are self-centred and who care about their lives alone. Parents become so involved in winning the legal battle that they ignore the fact that in child custody they must be aware of the effects on the people surrounded by them.

Arjun develops hatred towards Ashok Khanna who has replaced his father's place in his life. Arjun suffers from Oedipus Complex, which is repressed in the unconscious until Raman is in the father's position. Freud in his psychoanalysis theory refers Oedipus Complex as

The source of all repressed desire, the emblem of all that is repressed because even love is antagonistic in nature when triangulated between the boy, the mother and the father. The Oedipus Complex enabled Freud to argue that all desire, repression and anxiety are based on the condition of prohibition, or what he termed taboo. The child never overcomes the complex, but merely shuts it away. (Nayar 66)

When Ashok takes the place of Raman this complex comes to the conscious level. Ernest Jones says that Hamlet had meditated and secretly wished to get rid-off his father which is done by his uncle Claudius. Hamlet sees his reflection of this obscure memory so he procrastinates to avenge the murder of his father. He kills his uncle Claudius only when his mother dies by consuming poison. In Arjun's case after the replacement of Ashok as father, the Oedipus Complex is triggered. Arjun tries to draw Shagun's attention by complaining of illness like headache, stomach ache and so he does not want to go to school. He also once thinks of disturbing and diverting the conversation and intimacy between Shagun and Ashok Khanna.

That night as Arjun lay in bed, he could hear his mother and Ashok Uncle talking in the next room. At home, comfort had flowed from the voices of his parents (Shagun and Raman), here (Ashok and Shagun) adult conversation seemed more ominous. He wanted his mother. If he pinched Roohi she would cry and that would bring her, but he knows she didn't like being distracted by her children in the evening. (C 140-141)

Arjun also gets uncomfortable with the closeness between Ashok and Shagun. Arjun considers Ashok as a stranger and not as his legal step-father.

In his father's place there was instead this stranger hovering around Shagun. It made Arjun uncomfortable, the man's fingers running up and down her arm, his hands reaching out to pull her close, the little kisses he dropped on her forehead. She never resisted as she sometimes had with Raman. (C 141)

Arjun is also aware that before Ashok comes home Shagun shows her interest in everything related to him but when Ashok comes home, "the center of attention shifted" (C 141). When Shagun goes to stop Arjun as he moves out of the room, Ashok says to her "Let him be, he is growing up, you have to give him space" (C 141). Because of this interference of Ashok, Arjun develops a hatred for him. Sigmund Freud, termed this attraction towards the mother and trying to eliminate the father and seeing the father as rival which gets suppressed by conscious as 'Oedipus Complex'. "Under the threat of castration, the male child represses his desire for the mother and accepts the rule laid down by the father" (Habib 575). In this theory, the repressed desire in Arjun's conscious mind is triggered by Ashok Khanna. Pramod K. Nayar in his book Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, states:

The unconscious consists of repressed desires, such as love for the mother, which has been prohibited by the law of the father where the child imagines he might be castrated by the father for loving the mother, and whose repression produces the Oedipus Complex, that in turn, leads the male child to change affections to the more powerful father, who he now sees as the symbol of authority. (Nayar 66)

Arjun also is continuously haunted by dreams in his sleep. These dreams are considered by Freud as the expression of a repressed desire, they represent the unconscious desires, "dreams are a language, the language of the unconscious and of repressed desire" (Nayar 67).

Arjun gets his first dream when he is informed by Shagun that he will be shifted to boarding school named Dehradun Public Academy (DPA), where Ashok was an alumnus. Arjun gets his first dream when he is returning from DPA School after his first visit.

In his dreams there was a large playing field covered with stubbled yellowing grass. A pavilion at one end was filled with boys, they were all looking at him running, but he was alone. He didn't know where he has to run to, just that his life depended on winning. Everybody clapped. He looked around for his father, but he was not visible. (C 187-188)

Arjun again gets dreams the next night but this time in his dream he is running in the mist, the boy who had showed him around DPA School, he could see the boy in his dream and as the boy comes near him he is featureless. And the third time the dream occurs is when he visits Raman and Ishita for a few days,

That night again he dreamt of a large playing field. This time he was running in circles, sweat dripping from his body. All around him were impenetrable hedges, and beyond those were boundary walls, high walls with iron-barred gates, guarded by men in sentry-type kiosks. (C 214)

When these dreams of Arjun are interpreted using Freudian approach, it symbolizes that he has been missing Raman and he is not able to decide which father to choose – Raman or Ashok – biological or legal. The displacement of two father figures in dreams is represented symbolically as the guards, and the boy who had shown him around DPA represents the new inhospitable place where he has to go for studying. The method that Freud employed for interpreting the dream is:

The repressed material itself will never occur directly to the patient but will be expressed allusively, in the form a substitutive association. Hence the analyst must master the art of interpretation, since he must infer the unconscious or repressed material from the patient's allusion or recognize its character from the associations the patient makes. (Habib576)

This unconscious repressed emotion which comes as dream is called Dream Distortion which means – the visual images in dreams are allusive or symbolically represent the original context which is censored by Ego. The original content of the dream may have some socially and morally unaccepted content that will be stopped by Ego even during sleep. To escape the censorship of Ego the unconscious repressed desire disguise itself in visual images which are allusive or symbolically represent the original content. This process is called by Freud as Dream Distortion. In case of Arjun his dreams clearly portray or signify the conflict, chaos, and mental torture that are undergone by the child who is in a boarding school because of his parent's divorce. Dreams are not only "expression of repressed desire" but also pressure releasing valve of the human body. Freud defines "a dream as the disguised fulfilment of repressed wish" (Habib 575) but it also expresses the repressed conflict in the mind.

Arjun is smart enough to understand that he is haunted by dreams only when he is troubled by his parents. He is also sure that no one except him knows that he has been getting dreams as no one can understand what is going on in his new life with Ashok and Shagun.

Dreams act as representing the desire of the mind and this has also been said by William Shakespeare in his play *The Winter's Tale* where King Leontes of Sicilia says, "Affection! Thy intention stabs the center. Thou dost make possible things not so held. Communicat'st with dreams – how can this be?" (WT 208)

Arjun and Roohi, are portrayed as children who have to face the bitter side of divorce and custody case fought by Shagun and Raman. They are made to suffer from psychological trauma and parental alienation. Arjun's Oedipal Complex is triggered; he is also being subjected to dreams that symbolize confusion in his unconscious mind. Parents must be aware of the after-math of divorce upon children who are the future pillars of the nation.

VI. CONCLUSION:

Through her novel *Custody*, Kapur provides an insight into the elements like unimagined uncertainties of matrimony; the crescendo of divorce and custody battle in all its legal and psychological ugliness. The conflicts that are found in this novel are that all the major characters Shagun, Raman, Ishita and Ashok Khanna become self-centred where they forget about the children's future moral and psychological well-being; and the psychological turmoil of the children is revealed indirectly through the characters Arjun and Roohi who are the victims of their parents' divorce and custody cases. The cost of adopting western principles is the production of young individuals like Arjun and Roohi who experience chaos and confusion in their childhood which makes their childhood awful and unpleasant to be remembered and cherished. This paper has brought forth the psychological trauma and alienation experienced by the two children Arjun and Roohi as well as how this trauma is communicated by the children through dreams and their false illness and behaviour.

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