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The Aftermath of Custody in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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The Aftermath of Custody in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

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> Single parent situations drive poverty and often lead to unsupervised kids. Many boys growing up without fathers often feel angry and abandoned. Thus, they seek comfort in all the wrong places.
>
> -Bill O'Reilly

I. Introdaction

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, divorce rates increased dramatically. Due to the nature of divorce, the rules governing child custody became increasingly difficult to determine. It is during at this time that the idea of mothers being favored to gain custody of children in the event of a divorce has been challenged. If the parents were not qualified to guard the children their custody will be given to foster care center.

Kapur addresses the gendered nature of custody in India. Men often refuse to grant divorce easily because women usually have greater claim on the children. The legal process is different and it has certain rules. Custody cases take a long time to come to an end.

Fighting for custody is the main plot in Manju Kapur' s*Custody*, the turmoils faced by the husband and children has been discussed in this chapter. Custody comes after the divorce, Shagun to get divorce from Raman, accepts the custody rights to be handover to Raman .To get the precious jewel like 'children', Raman accepts divorce by mutual consent. Shagun divorced Raman, with conditions applied such as visitation of the children during holidays.

Children were struggled between their Papa and Mama. Arjun, Raman's son has a bitterness towards Raman, he longed to be with Shagun. His parents divorce, made him to feel ashamed and he resists to face the society. "Arjun limped his way to the waiting room. I can't find any physical symptom. Sometimes there is an emotional cause. Is anything troubling him?" (161). He avoids going to school by saying lame excuses. "Roohi's crying fits, Arjun's trauma and sleep overs at friend's houses, Raman coming home, late, this was the norm" (105). When Arjun refused to go to school, his mother Shagun with the help of her lover joins Arjun in a boarding school in Dehradun. The harshfulsituation in home, even drives Arjun to a boarding school happily.

Arjun never shares openly anything to his biological father, he rarely writes letters to him. When Shagun invites Arjun and Roohi to United States, they felt happy. In United States, Shagun haunts Roohi's mind by saying some rubbish stories. After returning from United States, Roohi begins to wet the bed at night, Raman feels a lot about his children. Raman's parents feel pity of him, his parents wants him to marry again for the welfare of his children.

When Ishita a childless divorcee, cares for Roohi, Raman gets anger on Shagun because she made Roohi to beg for affection from other woman. Raman gets closer to Ishita, he thinks Ishita as a healer for his past wounds and she will be a good mother to Roohi. They married secretly, Roohi never objects their marriage. She accepts Ishita as her Mama. On the contrary Arjun shows hatred towards Ishita,

> At that moment Arjun was murmuring to his sister, 'Do you remember Mama?'
>
> She nodded.
> 'Not the auntie living with you in this house. Mama in America.'
> Again she nodded.
> 'She loves you very much. Now don't you forget that. She is your real mother, no matter what anyone says. All right?'
> … Remember he repeated impatiently. He must have the dumbest sister in the world. (312-13)

Arjun even scolds Roohi as a stupid who always whine to get the attention of others. He even poisons Roohi's mind, that Shagun is their mother by showing her photo. "He sat near her and showed her something in his cupped hand. It was a small passport-size photograph of Shagun" (324). Ishitacan not tolerate such manipulations to a little child's ears. She considers Roohi as her own daughter. "Let's go and tell Arjun that, shall we? Perhaps he does not know there are two kinds

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of mothers. The one who gives birth to babies and then forget about them and the other one who looks after the babies for the rest of their lives" (329). Arjun says, do you remember the vacation in United States, what about swimming and the cabin we stayed.

Arjun always talk formally to Ishita, a few words only come out of his mouth. "There was a willing to wound in Arjun that was new to Raman. What had happened to his son?" (319). Roohi's mind was disturbed, she does not even answered any of the questions in her school interview. She is confused between her biological mother and her real mother Ishita. Roohi called Ishita as Mama in the absence of her brother, she is afraid of Arjun. Arjun used to shut the door along with Roohi, he does not allow Roohi to spent time with Ishita.He always pesters Raman to leave them in their Maternal Grandmother's house. Though Raman got custody rights he is afraid of losing his children, because Shagun might kidnap them. Because Shagun has already done that once. The mental trauma of Raman affects him, he often raise his voice against Ishita. At once he feels the pain of single parent when Ishita does not care about Arjun's rank card. Raman shares this news with Shagun. Ishita too knows the pain of divorce. She does not want to lose her precious jewel Roohi.

When Ishita works in Jeevan with slum children she never things of motherhood, but when she loves and cares Roohi, she felt Roohi as an own fruit, from her womb. Ishita too had the fear of losing Roohi to Shagun. Ishita does not want to send Roohi to visit Shagun, ever in her life, because it may confuse and distract the child. Roohi under Arjun's influence asks Ishita, "Are you sure you are my mother" (341). Each one suffers the trauma of the custody. Shagun too feels lonely in United States without her children, she buys each and every things starting from, dresses, toys for Roohi when she goes for shopping. Modern Marriage has a great impact on the life of children. They are afraid to face the society freely. Their mindset becomes disturbed because of their divorced parents. They afraid to imagine the society and how it would see them. How the relatives would pity them and how they might backbite them. The children are restless. They are in a dilemma to whom they have to believe. The children are pushed to a state of depression. Raman badly wants the custodial rights, he states that:

One affair changed into licentiousness from the day they married, her own mother turned into procuress, her uncaring nature in full display as she abandoned her children to co-habit with Ashok Khanna. Exposure to him threatened the minors psychological well-being, she herself was an evil moral influence" (137).

The total family has been in a state of disorder after the divorce. Mrs. Kaushik worried a lot about his son Raman and her grandchildren. She offers a lot of prayers to the deities. Ishita too had the imprints of the of her divorce but she is childless. She hides herself in her apartment. After some days she is ready to face the eagle eyed society. She helps the slum children, corrects their manners and civility. Ishita comes as an angel in the life of Raman and Roohi but Arjun never considers her as his mother. After Ishita has caressed Roohi as her daughter, Roohi tries to conquer her depression state, but when Arjun confuses her about the Mama in United States, she becomes little bit irritated. The custody affects Raman's health, Arjun's education and Roohi's mental balance."Both events had one parent missing and the result was a child who cried and wet her bed at night. He found himself hating Shagun for the damage done to his baby" (292).

Arjun and Roohi are the pawns in the great divorce drama. Arjun misses his father and his greatness began to slip. He is ten during their parent' s divorce, he is upset because of their family setup. Roohi grows with his father and step-mother. Raman says,

> I am not going to give you a damn thing unless custody is decided and that too in my favour. If the children become too old, and the issue irrelevant, I will never free you. Never.
> So take the children and give me a divorce.
> What?
> Take them. (229)

Shagun considers that something has been missing in Raman. She dethrones Raman and coronate Ashok as her new King. When Raman comes to know about Shagun' s decision to marry Ashok, 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, Raman is ready to give divorce on condition that she should not assert her right to the custody of her children.

At first Ashok takes care of Shagun's children as his own . Shagun says, "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). But later Ashok shows his true face, he does not even care about the visitation rights regarding Roohi while they settled in Singapore.

Shagun misunderstands that Ashok loves her alone not her children. She feels as if she is a single parent, because Ashok does not care about the children. Ashok helped Shagun whole heartedly in getting divorce because Ashok wants her. He gets frustrated, whenever Shagun talks about Roohi. Shagun writes about her quarrel with Ashok to her mother in her letters. Shagun writes as:

> Perhaps I was foolish to believe, but he did promise to keep me happy for ever not that I have reproached him with anything. Our life together would not have been possible if I had regretted my

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past still. What happened to that promise? I guess when you are in love. You experience some momentary delusions, then the glow fades and things look ordinary again. Of course, I adore my life here, but sometimes I feel its foundations are fragile. (391)

Ishita feels, "Over the next few days her sense of danger intensified. She saw a sword dangling over the family life she had created so painstakingly. That sword must be cut down, assiduously blunted, so that it never had the power to threaten" (389).When Ishita took away Roohi to her parents home at Swarg Nivas, before the arrival of Arjun, because he might inform Shagun about Roohi's wealth that she is alright, because Raman is going to provide a medical certificate of Roohi, that she is ill and cannot travel abroad. Raman felt that he cannot bring his family under one roof, "Why was not it possible to have everybody he loved under one roof? Thought Raman. If he was another sought of man, perhaps he would have handled such things better" (365).

The custody reaches its peak, when Raman hides Roohi from Shagun. She threatens Raman in the name of Arjun, that Raman may not be able to meet Arjun. Shagun files contempt of court against Raman. The case came for hearing in the court. Ishita has already prepared Roohi to answer the Judge's questions. Roohi answered that Ishita is her mother and she wants to be with her. Roohi's custody has been given to Ishita and Raman, Arjun's to Shagun. The children should decide with whom to live, when they reach the age of eighteen. The brother and sister has been cruelly separated. "Fifteen minutes passed before her cell phone rang. The judge have given Roohi to them and Arjun to Shagun. If the children wanted there would be visiting but not otherwise. She was to go home, he would come in taxi" (395).

Even the Holy Bible pin points about adultery. "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).The Holy bible warns people about committing sins. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexual immoral" (Hebrew 13:4). God even says about divorce through his words "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commit adultery" (Luke 16:18).

Divorce is a life transforming experience, it turns one's life up-side down. The divorce itself does not affect children in a negative way. The effects result more often from the feeling of uncertainty of what is going to happen after the divorce, from the level of conflict between the parents and from how the parenting after the divorce is done. After divorce the children undergoes a lot of traumatic experience. They feel insecure and get rejection from all sides. They torn in between the fight of their parents. They have to adjust themselves in different situations, such as a new step-father and a new step-mother.

When a child's parents get divorce, it leaves an unforgettable scare on them. Living with one parent and the absence of one parent is a heart breaking experience. The after effects of a divorce for children are mostly that they have to move to a different home and sometimes to a different school and that they will not see and be with both their parents at the same time any more. In most of the cases, they will live with their mother and they will see their father much less. The olden memories will never come back. "Marriage is when to people decide to live together forever. Should they change their minds they go to court and get their marriage cancelled. Finished. Divorced. They become strangers, sometimes they never see each other again" (326). The wounds created by divorce never fades away, the pain and scar still remains.

Custody, reveals the disintegration of the family after divorce and the aftermath effects of custody in a middle class family during the modern era. It has a great impact on every single character. Money and fame has been given importance, rather than human emotions. The disintegration of the family leads to the decay of the modern world.

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