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RETRIEVING WOMEN SUFFERING THROUGH MANJU KAPUR'S *CUSTODY*

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur has undoubtedly proved as a feminist writer. She had dealt with women suffering under their own domains. Manju Kapur's women are different from the women of other writers. Though they have similar predicaments, the protagonists of Manju Kapur have crossed the boundary lines to prove themselves. One struggles to liberate herself from the clutches of family traditions, the other tries to breathe in fresh air from the suffocated marriage systems, another one proves as a successful entrepreneur challenging the joint family system and the fourth one sets foot on an alien land excelling in academics at par to foreigners amidst her family tensions. Her fifth novel Custody was opened for the public in 2011 has continued its own charm of woman's individual freedom in the conventional family systems.

Key Words: male and female sensibility, patriarchal cultures or male domination etc.

Manju Kapur's novels refer to various implications in human life. The fifth novel deals with a sensitive relation between the parents and the children. In India, marriage is considered as a sacred affair. It's not simply interconnection of a male and female, but includes the members of their respective families. If the marriage breaks up, the people who suffer wouldn't be the couple alone but the elders and the children who have connections genetically to them. A marriage is made up of high emotions and expectations between the couple. Each of them enters the relation hoping for illusionary dreams which often fail in reality. This naturally brings out the obligations between the wife and husband thus making their lives distressful. There can be many reasons like financial crisis, misunderstandings between the partners, domination of patriarchal cultures or male domination.

The novel *Custody* is a good example of the post marital troubles in educated families. The Kaushik's and the Rajora's are the two families in Delhi who suffered from the traumas of their married children for various reasons. Raman Kaushik was the only son of the younger brother of Kaushik's who lived in Swarag Nivas. Raman Kaushik was a bright student trained in the Prestigious IIT and IIM institutions. It was crystal clear that he shouldn't marry an ordinary girl like Rohini as Nandan, his cousin did. He was totally captivated by the beauty of Shagun an outgoing graduate student. He couldn't think of anything else other than her beauty. He simply dismissed his mother's apprehensions, "Uff Ma, she is still in college what do you want? That she spends all her time in the kitchen?" (21). How could Raman be so blind? Can't an engineer and marketing expert imagine the future? Maybe he forgot that the charm of beauty lies in mental ability but not physical looks. Physical appearances can be deceptive sometimes. Raman's married life was away from his parents as Shagun was not of the type to adjust with her in-laws. Their married life continued with her moodiness but was blessed with two lovely kids Arjun and Roohi. Arjun shared his mother's beauty as well as attitude. Roohi was her father's pet sharing most of his resemblances. Raman's dancing attendance on his wife made his mother to caution him. When the first child was expected within a year of their marriage, he blames himself feeling it was too early for twenty-two year old Shagun to become a mother. His mother pacifies him by saying, "Beta, it is good to have

children early. By the time they settle down you are still young and free enough to enjoy.”(14). But Raman couldn't agree to the fact that he himself was born when his mother was just nineteen. Besides being a husband, a man has many promises to fulfill. The brilliant product of the IIM institution has become a successful Marketing head in the India Think Tank. His hard work paved him to step into the International Brand as the marketing executive of Mang-oh drink. As Raman Kaushik shifted from a national company to an International company, his wife also shifted her love from local to international.

Sometimes money alone cannot make things. Though Shagun had a lavish life, she always suffered from her husband's travelling job. She became restless of being alone with her two kids. How could Shagun deny the fact that money cannot be easily made? Raman moved heaven and earth to give them a comfortable life. Shagun's beauty made him to be so cautious to see that she was always happy. In spite of his hard work he tried to make his family feel happy whenever he had a chance to do so. “He was the most committed father he knew, on holidays and weekends devoting himself to his son, giving his wife the break she needed”. (17) What else does a man can do to satisfy his family? Actually he was the person who needed soothing words from his wife, but as a good husband he tries to make her happy feeling her tiredness during his absence. How many men can understand their partners in such a way? Unfortunately Raman was rewarded with a severe cardiac arrest for his caring duties.

Raman Kaushik was a simple-minded man who cared for his profession and family. As he cared for his parents, he gave equal importance to Shagun's mother, Ms. Sabharwal. She always felt she had a son in the form of son-in-law who took care of her, though her daughter treated the affection in a wrong way. The struggles she faced after her husband's death were no longer haunting her as Raman gave her a secured life as a son, succeeding after his father. He gave her an assurance that “She was not losing a daughter but gaining a son”. What more than this a person needs in life? If everything goes on well everyone can lead a peaceful life away from challenges. So Raman had his own altercations to meet both in his professional life as well as married life. As he was an IIT and IIM returned he could easily overcome the stumbling blocks in business, but he had to struggle a lot to maintain the family relations. Business includes targets and figures which can be altered easily but family includes minds and emotions which are rather difficult to deal with. When two partners enter into a marriage contract they have only aspirations about their future and it becomes hard for them to deal with them.

Raman dedicated his life to his family, especially his wife and children. Though he knew his mother was rather interested to have a joint family as the elder Kaushik's, he knew it would not be possible. He didn't want either his wife or his mother to suffer, “He knew his mother expected respect, deference and love from her daughter-in-law plus an undisputed supremacy in her little grandson's heart, all of which she was never going to get”. (23) Somanth Kaushik, the elder brother of Raman's father helped him to acquire a flat in Swargh Nivas so that both the brothers could stay together with their families. The elder brother was fortunate enough to have a son and daughter-in-law like Nandan and Rohini who always acted upon the wishes of their elders. Shivnath Kaushik was eager to fulfill the dreams of his brother but he understood the attitudes of the younger ones and allowed them to move apart. He said slowly to his son, “But perhaps you are right. It is not good to start your marriage caught between wife and mother. All we want is your happiness.” (22,23). Is Shagun not lucky enough to have such a father-in-law? Could she repay the gratitude? It was only Raman who could understand the equations and formulas in life as he was used to in his IIT.

An earth quake leaves the traces of flotsam and jetsam. It takes years to retain the past opulence or sometimes it may be not at all possible. The same earth quake has occurred in Raman's family in the form of his boss, Ashok Khanna, whose influence wrecked the entire family. He was captivated by the beauty of Shagun, forgot the moral values to trap her. He tried to attract her attention by making her to act in the ads. Shagun, who was also interested in Raman's boss started to hate her husband to lead a life of her choice

with Ashok Khanna. Her anxiety couldn't be controlled to know about the Harvard Business School returned boss. Raman couldn't suspect her but was surprised as she had never shown any keen interest in the company matters. Ashok Khanna, the interloper and successful Brand Head had injected the poisonous capsule of hatred towards her life with her husband.. "She decided she must have been unhappier than she realized. She had been brought up to marry, to be wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She had never questioned this destiny, it was the one pursued by everyone she knew".(26).

Ashok Khanna, a winning sales executive as said by Brand could easily create demand of his own in Shagun's life as he was an expert in creating demand for the people to consume Brand products. The formula which is applied in business cannot be applied to life. Life is full of affections, emotions, understandings and attachments. His bossism can be tolerated in the office not at home, that too in personal matters. The leadership qualities he acquired from his education at various elite institutions were smart enough to apply in business, but not in his personal life. How could Shagun believe such a womanizer? Is it the difference between their drawings of 50 lakhs to 51 lakhs made her to leave her husband? As far as it was concerned her complaint about Raman was he was always travelling. Was it not the same with Ashok Khanna?

There is always a debate between which marriage is more perfect, is it arranged marriage or love marriage? In both the instances one thing is quite sure, that is love between the pair. Two different people, who come from different backgrounds and brought ups enter into a relation. The first step is they have to know about each other before they engage themselves into the matrimony. The choice is given to the couple more than the parents to analyze the attitudes of their opposite partners. In India parents give much importance to arranged marriages than love marriages. But the chances are more for failures in either of the marriages if the bondage between them is not strong. There can be various economic and social reasons for failures. The excruciating thing is that people feel they are technically advanced in their thinking in the modern sophisticated age, but unfortunately the rate of divorce is increasing all over the world. The main sufferers in the broken marriage system will be the children whose custody becomes an unsolved problem.

Shagun, who was brought up in a traditional family missed her independence as she was given in a conventional family. Raman inherited the old cultural values of his parents. No doubt, he was a good husband, father, son and son-in-law, but he failed to understand the trauma that his wife was undergoing. He imagines other reasons for the growing distance between them. "May be it was the baby she hadn't really wanted, maybe it was all the travelling he had to do, had always had to." (9). But an intimate relationship was not seen between the couple. There was not much to share between them. Shagun was rather happy near Ashok Khanna expressing all her concerns. Actually, if her problem was only staying alone she could invite her mother, who was also unaccompanied by anyone. When her in-laws came to help her in the absence of Raman, she feels uneasy at their arrival "He fixed it without informing me. I would have made other plans if I had known. Just now I am going out" (31) and even her mother asks her to stay she says, "You know I can't just leave, Mama. There is the children's routine and the household." (35). She suspects Raman had sent his parents to spy her.

Raman's love for his beautiful wife had no boundaries. Though he knew he was not in her heart, he still wants to comprise and make her accept him. He feels, "She was basically a good woman, he knew that, and now he tried to think of a way to draw her closer." (103) how many men can accept their wife in such a situation. To Rama she was like Sita, but he forgot there was a demon called Ravana in the form of Ashok Khanna. He needs to wage a war against Ravana to get back his wife. The war bells were ringing though Raman wants a modus vivendi. How disgraceful the situation would be for a wife to face in front of her husband. Raman wanted to talk to his wife, 'I am approaching you with an open mind,' he said coldly, "but if you need so much time, perhaps there is no point."

"I only need to think," protested the wife

"Are you seeing him?"

"He is not here." (103) The situation was equally painful to Shagun. Now her mind is completely occupied by the thoughts of Ashok Khanna. Though she knew well about Raman's bigheart she could not trust him. She openly puts forward before him her suspicions, "Why do you want to live with me? You will always think of what I have done, certainly your mother will bring it up for the rest of my life." (104). It's not the matter other's questioning her, Does she forget that she had to answer her conscience? It is more difficult than riposting others.

Raman had to face an uphill battle to get his children back. Ashok Khanna's friend Madan Singh was an intelligent lawyer and was on the ball. Raman could win over his children and Shagun was given the visitation rights of her children. As it is commonly known courts are good at dragging the feet, the situation became uncontrollable for Raman. Arjun was send to Dehradun Academy. As it is commonly known courts are good at dragging the feet, the situation became uncontrollable for Raman. Arjun was send to Dehradun Public Academy as he could digest the sudden changes in his family. The biological father couldn't help anything in his son's sufferings.

Arjun's mental agony knew no bounds. As he was elder he could understand the changes in his life. He was ashamed to face his friends and teachers at his school in Delhi as he knew better than his mother about the humiliation they have undergone because of their mother's affair. For "She behaved as though the shift from Raman Kaushik to Ashok Khanna was as natural as changing clothes." (166) Arjun couldn't imagine another man in his father's place. It was highly difficult for him to face the situation. "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." (141). Though Arjun looked like his mother he had inherited his father's supercalifragilisticexpialidocious qualities from his father. He wanted both of his parents. He called his papa at his mother's absence to tell him about his move to a new school.

Arjun's matured behavior could be admired when he thought, "No matter how uncomfortable he was in this unfamiliar house, he was afraid of leaving his mother with that man." (166). Only a boy like Arjun can think in such a way as he had shared his father's blood and attitude. Arjun could clearly differentiate the changes going on in their new and old houses, "When the uncle was in Delhi, his mother and he spent a long time in the drawing room after dinner, both of them drinking. The room smelled of liquor and tobacco. His father hadn't smoked, this man did, and there was the smell of cigarettes everywhere, and his mother didn't object as she used to with guests in their old house." (167) certainly, a boy entering teenage had to struggle a lot as he cannot question his parents in such matters.

No child or parent expects to have such a conversation. Arjun couldn't show his affection on his sister. May be the age difference was one reason or the silent agonies in his family made him to be rude to his sister. Though he knew his mother was wrong he wants his sister to remember only their biological mother as their own mother.

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