

# An Outlook of Radical Feminism in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

S. Kumaran, S. Alexander

*Ph.D. Research Scholar (Part-Time), Associate Professor & Head*

Department of English

Government Arts College (Autonomous)

Karur – 5

E-mail: [skumaran15969@gmail.com](mailto:skumaran15969@gmail.com), [alexjense01@gmail.com](mailto:alexjense01@gmail.com)

## Abstract:

Radical Feminism is an ideology which accentuates the patriarchal roots of disparity between men and women, or in particular the social supremacy of women by men. It voices for a considerable change to the structure of contemporary society and it doesn't have a single or unified theoretical or political doctrine, nevertheless it does take a persistent stance regarding men. *Custody* highlights the two significant aspects of feminist outlooks i.e. infidelity and infertility by means of two female protagonists, Shagun and Ishita accordingly. This article delineates the viewpoints of radical feminism in Manju Kapur's *Custody*. Further it discusses the concept of new woman, marital disharmony and sexual liberation and self-contentment. Motherhood is seen as a system of patriarchy that ensures the suppression of women by their custody in married life.

**Keywords:** Radical Feminism, Infidelity, Infertility, New Woman, Patriarchy and Sexual Liberation etc.

Feminism commenced as a social movement in the late eighteenth century to accomplish political equivalence for women. As a critical theory it has begun to examine the male supremacy and subjugation of women's rank in the society. Further it is viewed as the writhe against all forms of patriarchal and sexist belligerence. Feminism, as a social movement immensely nubs on restraining or get rid of gender inequality and upholding women's rights, liberations, interest and issues in the society.

Radical Feminism is an ideology which accentuates the patriarchal roots of disparity between men and women, or in particular the social supremacy of women by men. It ponders patriarchy as separating societal rights, liberations, license and power chiefly along the lines of sex, and as a consequence, suppressing women and upholding men. It voices for a considerable change to the structure of contemporary society and it doesn't have a single or unified theoretical or political doctrine, nevertheless it does take a persistent stance regarding men.

Radical feminists recognize patriarchy or male supremacy as the prime and unanimous cause of women's subjugation via its restriction of women's reproductive capacity, sexuality and the philosophy of femininity. They dissent against the prevailing political and social organization in common because it is integrally tied to male supremacy. Further they incline to be cynical of political action within the existing system and instead give attention on culture change that destabilize male supremacy and related hierarchal structures. Some eminent radical feminists are Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Kate Millet and Juliet Mitchel etc.

The beginning of Indian Writing in English by women writers can hunt down to the last part of the nineteenth century. This advent is a significant breakthrough for feminism in India. Indian women came to know the Western culture, ideas, philosophy, literature and movements that were alluring and fascinating. They got a chance to exhibit their Indianness in the newly developed English language. Indian Writers of English have also come out of their cocoons and began to raise voice for the voiceless in their society. In particular feminists attempt to solve the issues of marginalized women. India has shifted from glorious past to degeneration, from spiritual dominance to communal clashes, from imprisonment to liberation etc.

As a post-colonial writer, Manju Kapur considerably subsidized to the evolution of Indian Fiction. Instinctively she senses the position of women in the male dominated society and outlines the crisis of women. Her works not only portray women's hitches but also the social disputes such as freedom movement and partition etc. Her writings, highlights the problems of patriarchy, inter-religious marriage and family bond, and male-female bond, co-existence of past and present. She has narrated her women protagonist as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence, and circumstances. Further her novels delineate the themes like gender bias, man-woman relationship, human desire, revolt and protest. Some of her eminent works are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*.

All the female characters of Manju Kapur are viewed as women striving against all odds. The intensity of feminism are obvious in her writing. This is clearly seen in the struggle of her woman characters, their vulnerability and quest for identity, attitude of liberation, the female psyche and the female biological world. Manju Kapur is regarded as a modern feminist. Her fascinating fifth novel *Custody* (2011) was marked as her enormous achievement. Many critics regard this novel as a feminist novel, however it covers all those facets of married and family life in Indian society which are correspondingly distressing as well as calming for everyone. Further this novel is not only curbed to man-woman relationship or the subjugation of feminine but also it delineates with the life of children of a broken family. The institution of marriage and the hollowness of modern matrimony is portrayed dolefully in this novel.

Manju Kapur's novels are like renewed pages depicting the winds of amendment and her protagonists are convincing representations for change. In her novel *Custody* she highlights the two significant aspects of feminist outlooks i.e. infidelity and infertility by means of her two female protagonists, Shagun and Ishita accordingly. In addition this novel is also the story of custody of children after departure and the Indian legal system. Kapur elicits the lives of wealthy, urban, middle class Indians with their unsettling secrets, dysfunctional relationships, their hankering for liberation and serenity. She tries to draw out substantial novel meanings in the changed facts of cultural conditions in which marital roles, dual concerns and equal opportunities and restrictions of society are viewed from the perspective of feminism.

In *Custody* Kapur portrays the two distinguished facets of the female counterpart, infidelity and infertility. Infidelity emboldens a woman; on the other hand infertility forbids her. Kapur tries to depict the plights, depressions, alienation and agony of modern women in the quest of self-contentment through the characters of Shagun and Ishita. She reconnoiters the extramarital relationship and employs this sexual liberation as a tool of confrontation to thwart patriarchal values and myths. Further this novel emphasizes the evolution of individual tendency in modern life. Everyone seeks their own happiness without considering the social norms and ethics.

The novel begins with the story of Shagun and Raman, their marriage has happened based on the tradition when her age was not even twenty two. Soon afterwards she gave birth to a baby boy namely Arjun. Everything was going on in a peaceful manner, when her son is almost eight years old she gives birth to a baby girl namely Roohi for which she was not mentally prepared. As the time progresses, Raman is busy with his works and not giving importance to Shagun and his kids. Due to this there were lack of communication and lot of misunderstandings between them. She becomes dejected of her life. She wants to be the role model of her family but after marriage her life was totally changed. She gets tired of looking after her kids and family alone. "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." (*Custody* 11)

Her life immediately changed after the arrival of Ashok Khanna. She falls in love with him. Kapur portrays her as an independent woman, she wants to enjoy her life with self-fulfillment. She voiced against the male supremacy and patriarchal mechanism and subjugation of women in the name of marriage, culture and tradition. Disloyalty of Shagun towards Raman discloses the infidelity and vainness of a modern marriage where one's self is more significant than anything else. Despite Shagun has a lot of abilities in herself to form her career, to live a dynamic life but she is trapped in the institution of marriage and the system of patriarchy. Regardless of all these things, this affair provides her sense of delightful experience and imparts her to be self-reliant, confident, powerful, independent and resourceful as she pursues sexuality, equality and independence.

Another protagonist is Ishita who performs as difference to Shagun and through whom Kapur examines the problem of infertility in women. In the Indian society, Infertility is regarded as a curse and Ishita becomes a prey of this and lost her life. She is the only child of her parents Mr. and Mrs. Rajora. As a traditional Indian parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rajora get her married as soon as they find a suitable proposal. After two years of marriage, it was clear that Ishita had some issues in pregnancy and her in-laws treated her responsible for this consequently Ishita experiences mental anguishes. Kapur by means of Ishita's life reveals the hollowness of marital life where a woman is defamed due to her infertility and the truth that she can't elevate her family name to the next level. As there is no one to take care of her or support her, she was suppressed to intense mental tortures and anguish. Even her mother-in-law failed to understand the plight of Ishita and to empathize her.

Motherhood is seen as a system of patriarchy that ensures the suppression of women by their custody in married life. Kapur portrays how an infertile woman endures negative, individual experiences regarding her infertility. Ishita undergoes a lack of identity and feels that she is not fulfilling her role as a woman. Her mother-in-law does not want to waste more money on her and she contemplates painfully: "Had there been something wrong with Suryakant, they would have moved heaven and earth to get a son's defect corrected. In an ideal world the same resources would have been put at the disposal of a daughter in law. But this was not an ideal world" (*Custody* 68).

In recent times, the issue of female sexuality has provoked intense disputes and arguments in academic circles. The current writers grasp that if the women want to be empowered and liberated they have to coup conventional patriarchal system, culture and involve themselves in arguments and conflict between sex morality of supremacy (patriarchy) and female sexuality. It is not in its restriction and suppression but in privilege and assertion that the new sexual ideology is structured.

Thus entire article vividly pictures the views of radical feminism through the characters of Shagun and Ishita. Though Shagun's decision is violated against the existing Indian conventions, she feels happy and contented as an Independent woman. Both characters are aiming at rediscovering themselves in the society and they want to liberate themselves from the clutches of patriarchy. As a radical feminist, Kapur tries to voice against the system of intense patriarchy through Shagun and Ishita. Divorce is not a barrier for woman to prove herself in the society. It was clearly depicted through Ishita. In the light of radical feminism, this article is a critique of motherhood, marriage, the nuclear family and sexuality, examining how much our culture is built on patriarchal norms.

The entire novel discusses the issues of freedom and identity in terms of the relationship between man and woman. She firmly disagrees the conventional social milieu that obstructs the liberation of women and

intensifies women's subordination. Kapur outlines exactly an Indian attitude that recognizes woman only through her role as a wife. Efficiently, she reveals the reality that in the patriarchal society woman gets love and respect because of her body and if the body fails to perform the traditionally expected role, her marriage may be damaged. In such society marriage is the subjugation of the female in the interest of the continuation of her husband's bloodline and woman is considered as a reproductive machine having no individuality. When Ishita fails to perform the established gender role, she gets rejection. Kapur projects emergence of new woman by means of her protagonists Shagun and Ishita, Shagun who dare to cross the threshold of husband's home revealed as a modern woman and Ishita who rise after her broken marriage emerge as a strong and independent woman in *Custody*.

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