
SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

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Abstract

Manju Kapur's Novel Custody relates the story of two different women who are a mere sufferer of the traditional values in the family. The Story revolves around two couples Raman and shagun who are divorced and fights for their children's custody. It deals with the life of two different women Shagun, who wants to lead a modern life without any restriction and Ishita, who longs for love and support but rather because of her infertility she is let down by her own family. Both the women's life are similar that they are being pulled back by their family values rather than accepting their own decision. Shagun represents the modern woman in the society where she leaves her family for the sake of her affair with Raman's boss Ashok Khanna. Mean while Ishita being a traditional woman follows the values as a typical woman and abides by the laws without any hesitation but later on her life turns upside down because of her infertility. The novels deals with the themes like Searching for love, freedom, Search for identity and suppression of woman. Here the writer deals with the life of two women who are being a victim in the traditional society. At the end, there is a complete change in the life of two women who finds a different way in the society as Shagun moves on her life with Ashok khanna and Raman and Ishita gets the custody of roohi and finds hope in her life.

Keywords: Longing for love, quest for freedom, Identity.

Introduction

Manju Kapur's Novel *Custody* relates the story of two different women who are a mere sufferer of the traditional values in the family. The Story revolves around two couples Raman and shagun who are divorced and fights for their children's custody. It deals with the life of two different women Shagun, who wants to lead a modern life without any restriction and Ishita, who longs for love and support but rather because of her infertility she is let down by her own family. Both the women's life are similar that they are being pulled back by their family values rather than accepting their own decision. Shagun represents the modern woman in the society where she leaves her family for the sake of her affair with Raman's boss Ashok Khanna. Mean while Ishita being a traditional woman follows the values as a typical woman and abides by the laws without any hesitation but later on her life turns upside down because of her infertility. The novels deals with the themes like Searching for love, freedom, Search for identity and suppression of woman. Here the writer deals with the life of two women who are being a victim in the traditional society. At the end, there is a complete change in the life of two women who finds a different way in the society as Shagun moves on her life with Ashok khanna and Raman and Ishita gets the custody of roohi and finds hope in her life.

Discussion

This paper focuses on the life of two women Shagun and Ishita who are in search of love and freedom in their life. Shagun represents the woman of modern society who denies the family and the society for the sake of her love. She wants to lead her life with her own expectations. Ishita being a typical woman follows the decision of her family and accepts the flaws of her health and breaks down her life. Later on Ishita marries Raman who is a divorce and a father of two children. Ishita takes care of Raman's child Roohi and love her a lot as her own child. The two women Shagun and Ishita longs for love and freedom which brings a change

SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

in their life and in the society. According to Merriam Webster dictionary "Freedom" is defined as the quality or state of being free such as the absence of necessity or constraint in choice.

Manju Kapur's fifth novel Custody creates an impact on the society. The theme of the novel is different from her early novels. It is the story of two couples Raman and Shagun who are divorced and fights for their children custody. Raman and Shagun lived a happy life but then it didn't last any longer because off Shagun's affair with Ashok Khanna. Raman's life was isolated as he couldn't bare his wife's decision in her life which spoilt the life of their kids Arjun and Roohi. Though Raman a Intelligent and a qualified aspirant with IIT and IIM degree Shagun was attracted towards Raman's boss Ashok Khanna. Later on Shagun decides to leave her family for the sake of her love Ashok and she files a Divorce against her husband Raman. The court accepts their mutual Consent and permits them their request of being separated. Shagun took over her son's custody whereas Roohi was sent with her father Raman. The life of Shagun changes totally as she moves on with her love Ashok khanna forgetting about her happily married life with Raman.

On the other side Ishita being a typical Indian woman who is very innocent, simple and a elegant woman who lives with her parents. She is being brought as a typical Indian woman who abides by all the traditional values and customs as her part of her life's routine. She is being married by her parents wish and enters as an new bride in a new home where she is being expected to be a best daughter-in-law in performing her role in bringing up the family's esteem in the society. She acts as the perfect daughter-in-law and a wife in performing her duties well without any demands. She loves her husband as she does everything for him in order to make him feel happy. But then the love from her family members were not same because of her infertility, She is being hated by her in-laws and her husband too ignores her and asks for a divorce. The family forgets all her love that she showed for the family and ignores her. Later on Raman and Ishita are married and they live together with their little daughter Roohi. When Shagun files for Roohi's custody Ishita loses her hope in her life because she gained her happiness back from her daughter Roohi . Later on when Roohi's custody was given to Raman and Ishita , the happiness and the hope of Ishita was being fulfilled.

Mostly Kapur's women character are being portrayed as an educated woman who are being influenced by the modern education which makes them take a further step in the society for their own rights. The westernized education leads them to take a decision which against the society and the traditional values. But the women in the Kapur's novel Custody are totally different from each other's perspective of gaining freedom in the society. Both the women Shagun and Ishita are being a victim in the hands of men in the society as they long for their love and support but then the disappointments of their life takes them to a different path. Both the women longs for love at the same time they long for freedom in deciding their life on their own. Though women being well educated and achieves a good space in the society still they are pulled back by their emotional space. The emotional status of a woman is a big drawback where they have to satisfy both their needs as well as the family's needs in order to balance the family.

Shagun is also a typical Indian middle class woman who was once a perfect wife, mother and daughter-in-law of the family. She was a loving mother and a perfect wife who loved her husband and the family and made sure that everything around her was perfect and satisfied.

SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

Shagun is attracted towards the modernized world where she can lead a happy life without any restrictions. She even decides to leave her children and the family for her modernized world which is a big dream come true moment of her life. In *Custody* the life of a woman who sacrifices her life bursts out one day by turning her life into a world of her own by ignoring her past life and responsibilities. Shagun decides to choose her life and gets departed for the sake of her happiness in her life which she missed in her life she lived so far.

Shagun keeps searching for her individuality in her marriage life with Raman meanwhile she is looking for the missing self in her love affair with Ashok Khanna. Shagun prefers Ashok Khanna as he always admires her keeps pleasing her of her beauty. He didn't care what shagun like but kept on showing his love for her without any limits. Shagun always thought of Raman who kept his concentration on business all the time were she loved Ashok khanna for his time he spent with her. He even makes her believe that their future life will be fine. Shagun blindly falls for Ashok khanna as he keeps pleasing her without any expectations and the love she was longing for was gained by him as she followed him everywhere and met him often which made her crazy. The Love and the longing for a support was given by Ashok Khanna which made Shagun forget her own family for the illegal love affair which is to considered as a sin in the traditional society.

As Ashok states: *Traditional vs Modern Values, individual versus Society' this narrow social setup is all you know- that's why you are afraid. But it will be fine, fine. Trust me darling'* (Custody 84)

Shagun's husband Raman is a perfect husband who concentrates on his work for the sake of his family. He doesn't spend any time with his wife or children which they often expected. He was a business minded person who kept his business as his first priority. Shagun felt that the life would give her nothing than the isolation and hatred towards her marital life. Shagun kept making differences between her husband and Ashok khanna. She blamed her husband for being a business minded person who shows no love towards the family. Meanwhile She praised Ashok khanna who was elegant lover who praised her for everything and gave love which was worth it. This made a reasonable change in Shagun's life. Shagun was confused about choosing her life where she was emotionally pulled by responsibilities. She couldn't decide on her life but then secretly she had an affair with Ashok khanna which she enjoyed an independent life.

Shagun decides to put an end to her life she demands divorce from her husband Raman. He couldn't understand what was wrong with her when she had everything in her life. But the extra-marital affair made her choose the freedom as her first priority. Shagun couldn't keep her emotions in control as she couldn't wait longer to put an end to the relationship which gave her only stress and mental illness. The worst part is that Shagun never remained the happy moments with Raman which she pretend to be that way. She adjusts in her living and sacrificed and remained silent for all her pain. Atlast chose a life differently which no one could imagine in the society.

"Don't make this harder. I have left you the best part of the marriage. Surely my freedom is not too much to ask in exchange?" (custody 114)

Shagun after many difficulties boldly takes up a decision but as a typical woman she left her husband for her love, but she didn't ignore her children as she took them with her to her

SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

mother's house. As a mother Shagun kept up her responsibility in taking care of her children. Shagun was sure that she didn't want to make any issue around her children's life that would spoil their future life. She always made sure that her kids are safe but at the same time she couldn't stop meeting Ashok khanna. She could feel the changes in her life which brought her a sense of satisfaction in all her needs.

The character of shagun is considered to be a negative character in the society but it is not true. When we start analyzing her point of view we could see she is disturbed. The pressures and the work load both physically and mentally makes her burst out in which she decides to end her marital life. Shagun was early married and the days of her marital life was not best as Raman kept himself busy in his work than spending time with the family. She made herself pretend to be happy all the time as she has to fulfill her husband's wish. Being a typical Indian woman Shagun kept adjusting and sacrificing things for the sake of the family but then the meeting with Ashok Khanna brought a twist in her marital life. The longing for love and freedom was gained by Ashok Khanna thus Shagun without any doubt she just fell for him without considering the society values and opinions.

Ishita another protagonist of the novel is a victim of her wrong marriage and she doesn't fall in love with another man like Shagun. Through her family values and customs Ishita wants to attain her happiness and freedom in her life. Ishita was married to Suryakanta. Ishita was very sweet and elegant bride who took care of the family. But then in the society a woman has to accept the flaws of man even it is a reasonable to ignore. Ishita's life was not that smooth that she started experiencing the hatred emotions from her family members. Ishita couldn't accept the hatred from her husband who loved her a lot but because of her infertility he started hurting her. Ishita a typical Indian middle class woman had lots of hopes and dreams to be fulfilled by her husband but then all her dreams were vanished in air. The love she showed to the family was nothing than a dust which they never thought of considering her to be fine. She was just thrown of the house for being infertility.

The pregnancy is the big issue in the life of Ishita who keeps praying for her pregannacy. She couldn't hear her mother-in-law constantly complaining about her for being lathergic in becoming a mother which is an important role in womanhood. On the other side Shagun was again blessed with a girl child but Shagun was not happy as her second pregnancy was earlier as she was not ready to accept it. Shagun hated her husband Raman who didn't even help her taking care of the baby or helping her out in things he just thought only about his business. The love which is a major support of the women in a society is still lacking as many women think it as their fate and starts pretending to be happy in the family. But in Ishita's life it was just opposite she couldn't help her out nor had any support from the family members as she was being ignored by them. Ishita longed for love from her husband but then he was same as the other family members which made her feel depressed.

Ishita's marital life with Suryakanta is strained and infertility interrupts the tender and affectionate relationship. The love and affection between them slowly creates a distance between them. Ishita could feel the cold war between her and the whole family. Suryakanta was ready to give her divorce as his parent's wanted him. Suryakanta was once a person who would do anything for his wife's happiness is now just the opposite who could do anything for

SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

his selfish life. Ishita felt that her body was given a value by the family but her opinion or her feelings were not felt by anyone. Ishita felt the loss of hope in her life she could only feel the hatred around her instead of love.

"In bed all she saw was his back. And last night he moved into his parent's bedroom. She felt degraded, a non-person certainly a non woman. He was determined there should be nothing left between them". (Custody 71)

Women are entirely different characters when comparing with one another but the issues they face are the similar ones. Most of the women in the society decide to leave the family in which they lived with lots of hopes and dreams. Shagun and Ishita are forced to face the same reality where Ishita experiences pain and on the other side Shagun who leaves the family because she was filled only with pain. Both the women had responsibilities after responsibilities which gave them pressures other than happiness in their life. In Shagun's life it was her decision to move out of the family with her own plan of life. In the case of Ishita she doesn't want to leave her family where she found her love. The love they wanted was not given and also the respect they expected was not given.

"Ishita also agrees divorce and feels, "I can't go home, I can't stay here" (Custody 73).

Ishita had no choice than to accept for the divorce as the mistake was on her side, she felt like everything around her was mere her disappointments which made her to be stone hearted person. She appeared for many interviews to forget her past but then everything ended up in failures. Ishita couldn't stop thinking about her past life where she had experienced her love life which gave her happiness in her life. Ishita's parents kept on talking about her second marriage but then she didn't want to face the failure again. She wanted to be alone rather than experiencing the love which would never last longer.

"Beta, you know we will help in any way. We want you to be happy, he said somewhat hastily.

'I will be, but not in the way you think'.

'Come, come, you would understand how sick I am of this whole business.' (Custody 188)

Ishita's life totally changes when she marries Raman their life was not as every new married couple as they were forced to live the life they were living. But then Ishita felt that Raman's daughter Roohi has filled the joy in her life by showing love and care towards her. Ishita searched for the love and freedom in her life but nothing happened as she wished for. Ishita's expectations were not fulfilled by her husband. Ishita's life was fulfilled only by her daughter's love and care. Ishita's life gained both freedom and love when she married Raman but then her desire was fulfilled her daughter Roohi.

In the novel Custody the two women Shagun and Ishita are seen as the victims of suppression but they face a different ground and different views. They both come out of their marital life with their own decision of life. In Shagun's life she chose to leave her family for tasting her freedom and live the life she expected. Shagun realizes that it was the best decision of leaving her past life which is filled with unhappiness. Shagun was just a child bearing machine who was had frequent pregnancies. The taste of freedom, liberty and love was not present in her past life rather she was like a doll where Raman instructed her routine works. But now in her present life with Ashok Khanna she was excited and felt herself enjoying her life

SEARCH FOR LOVE AND FREEDOM IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL CUSTODY

without any worries. Ishita is also a sufferer as many typical Indian middle class woman in the patriarchal society. She was ready to accept the sacrifices and all the pains but then because of her infertility she was sent out of her family. Ishita was ready to accept all pains for the sake of her lovable husband who she blindly followed him. The Love they expected and received was not in their own family but then they had to take a step ahead to choose their desire.

Conclusion

In Indian Middle class society a woman is always a victim in the hands of the patriarchal society where they have to be like a doll in the hands of the men. A woman right from her birth till her death she dreams about her future life but then everything changes as they have to abide by the traditional norms. The quest for love, freedom, sacrifices are the roles assigned to every woman in the dominated society. As Shagun and Ishita in the novel *Custody* a woman is learnt to sacrifice her life from her childhood to her death. Both Shagun and Ishita inspite of frustration they no longer adjust rather they burst out as an independent woman who decides their life on their own. Shagun the protagonist boldly ignores her marital life and decides to live the life she wants at the same time Ishita finds her love and freedom with her daughter Roohi. Thus a modern woman no longer waits for anyone's decision instead live their life on their own.

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