



# Childhood Trauma Stemming from Parental Conflicts in *Custody* by Manju Kapur

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## Abstract

The paper explores the impact of parent's attitude on their offspring. It shows that the selfish and indifferent ways of parents can have detrimental effects on kids. The word 'Parenting' has changed in the modern context and it doesn't involve responsible endearment anymore. Children suffer a great deal of loneliness and distress in this judgmental society. Such issues in parenting and their effects on children will be discussed in this article by analyzing the bestselling novel *Custody* by Manju Kapur, who masterfully portrays how people become consumed in the process of discovering their self-identity. This article delves into the observable transformations in children when they realize that the familial bond has been fractured and the mental strain they endure as they navigate two different families in the battle for custody.

**Keywords:** Parenting, Loneliness, Self-identity

## Introduction

Indian fiction in English vividly portrays societal and domestic life, ranging from bustling big cities to quaint villages across India. Indian English fiction serves as a window into the diverse experiences and occurrences throughout the nation's various regions. These narratives are born from life's experiences and are a direct reflection of society's observations. Women fiction writers like Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran

Desai have masterfully depicted this society in a realistic and relatable manner. Notably, Manju Kapur has brought a fresh perspective to the portrayal of contemporary society.

Manju Kapur, born in 1948 in Amritsar is an Indian novelist. *Difficult Daughter*, published in 1988 won the Commonwealth Prize for the best first novel. This novel was called 'fluent and witty'. She spent eight years to write the book. Later she published *A Married Women* in 2002 and *Home* in 2006. She is married to Gun Nidhi Dalmia and has three children and grandchildren.

*Custody* published in 2011 which revolves around broken marriage system and its effects on children. She presents man-woman and husband-wife relationship in this novel and the intermingling of emotion and passion. This novel was adapted as daily soap operas in various Indian languages including Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Marathi. It was aired under the title *Kalyanam Mudhal Kadhal Varai* in Tamil, *Mon Niye Kachakachi* in Bengali and *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein* in Hindi.

### **A glimpse of *Custody***

*Custody* delves into the intricate battle of divorce and its far-reaching consequences within Indian society, where marital relationships are traditionally expected to endure forever. The turmoil in this family began when Shagun, the beautiful wife of Raman, found love outside of her marriage. This upper-middle-class family was thriving until Shagun became entangled with Raman's boss, Ashok, in an extramarital affair. Raman's suspicions about the affair took a severe toll on him, both physically and mentally. The dispute over child custody emerged when Shagun sought a divorce through mutual consent. On the other hand, Ishita, a young woman, faced divorce due to her inability to conceive.

Throughout the divorce proceedings, the children, Arjun and Roohi, bore the brunt of the turmoil. The older sibling, Arjun, could comprehend the domestic changes but lived under constant worry about society's judgment upon him and his family. The youngest, Roohi, struggled to grasp the complexities of having two mothers, two fathers, two countries, and ultimately, two families. After years of struggle, custody of Roohi was granted to Raman and Ishita, while Arjun, now older and capable of deciding his legal guardian, attended a boarding school.

### **Traumatic perplexity in relationships**

The two children endured a great deal of turmoil, and their entire world seemed to have been upended. They struggled to navigate the disintegration of their old relationships while grappling with the challenges of adapting to new ones. Arjun, though old enough to comprehend the domestic upheaval within his family, was unable to fully grasp the reasons behind it. He also harbored fears about how his friends and their families would perceive his unconventional family situation. Witnessing his mother with another man, who was not his father,

left him bewildered and anxious about potentially losing his mother's attention. Throughout the custody dispute, the gap between Arjun and Raman seemed to widen, and at times, Arjun regarded his father as a stranger. As the novel states, 'Arjun did not recognize this unfamiliar man' (Kapur 192).

On the other hand, the little girl, Roohi, fails to realize the complexities of the situation as she was too young for it. She constantly wept in the absence of either parent, suffering from psychological distress and even bedwetting due to her fear of losing her parents. She faced profound confusion when it came to the term "mother," as she had two women in that role. Manipulated by her mother, she was forced into a situation where she had to choose between her biological mother and her stepmother. Traveling between countries during holidays to visit her mother proved to be a challenging ordeal for a toddler, often resulting in sickness, whether from the journey or homesickness. Nightmares haunted her, adding to her trauma. As she grew up under the custody of her father, Raman, and stepmother, Ishita, she developed no maternal affection for her biological mother, Shagun. When they encountered each other in court during a custody hearing, they were like strangers.

### **Traumatic Experiences**

Arjun, who attended a boarding school, spent his holidays with his mother, while Roohi primarily stayed with her father. This led to weakening of their sibling bond. They rarely had the opportunity to spend quality time together, leading to frequent arguments about their true mother. Consequently, their relationship deteriorated during this challenging period.

Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss, and the man involved with Shagun, didn't hold much affection for young Roohi. He struggled to form connection with her and grasp her perspective. Ashok didn't make an effort to build a bond with Roohi or spend quality time with her. In contrast, Ishita was constantly worried that Arjun might influence Roohi against her in favor of their biological mother. This fear prevented Roohi nearing her own brother whenever he visited. Arjun was clearly not ready to accept anyone in the role of his mother, making it difficult for him to communicate with Roohi. Consequently, both the Indian and American households lost the harmonious atmosphere they once had, and tension filled the air.

The animosity that the step-parents felt toward their partners' previous relationships was evident in their treatment of their stepchildren. This negativity had a profound impact on the children's minds and caused them psychological distress. Ashok Khanna, in particular, was concerned about the attention Roohi received from her mother, as it seemed to diminish slightly due to their changed circumstances. He failed to understand that an infant requires constant care and attention from its mother.

## Conclusion

The indifferent attitudes and decisions made by parents, resulting in their children becoming victims of their thoughtless actions is discussed in the novel. These thoughtless choices have stripped away happiness and peace from the lives of the children. Adults should embrace their responsibilities and act as responsible adults, but instead, they often behave like children in search of their own individuality, leading to marital discord. As the novel articulates, 'Adults should behave like adults, not like children they were fighting over. Really, why did people have babies if they were going to subject them to the messes of their own desire?' (Kapur 386). These decisions profoundly impact children's normal lives, their lifestyles, health, education, and, ultimately, their childhood. It is the children who should shoulder the responsibility of their parents' parental missteps.

Studies suggest that parental conflicts begin to affect children as early as six months of age. These children could have led fulfilling lives if not for the influence of their parents. These parents subject their children to numerous court proceedings that disrupt their normal lives. The concept of 'parenting' has evolved over time, with modern parents sometimes treating their kids as products to be traded. Such parenting failures consistently sow discord in the minds and lives of the children.

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