



Parental Conflicts leading to Childhood Trauma in Custody by Manju Kapur

Keerthana J^{1*}, Dr. M. John Suganya²

Department of English

^{1*,2} PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore.

^{1*} keerthanajeyachandren@gmail.com

² suganyajohn@gmail.com +91 9994924381

Abstract

This paper explores how the attitude of parents has changed through the times and generations, and its effects on their children. These effects on children are because of the indifferent and selfish decisions of their parents who tend to go in search of their individuality and a sense of self satisfaction in this modern world casting aside their own children. The word parenting has changed in the modern context and it doesn't involve a responsible endearment anymore and the children suffer a great deal of loneliness and suffering in this judgmental society. Such problems in parenting and its effect on children are to be discussed in this article by analyzing the bestselling novel *Custody* by Manju Kapur, who exclusively excels in representing how people get carried away in the process of discovering their self-identity. This article deals with the visible changes that can be noticed in the kids when they realized the familial bond was broken and the mental pressure, they had faced to adjust into two different families in the battle for their custody.

Keywords

Parenting, Childhood trauma, Mental distress, Marital disharmony, Individuality.

Introduction

Indian fiction in English portrays the societal and domestic life starting from big cities to small villages of India. Further Indian English fiction has made us to realize various happenings around the nation across different regions. These Indian fictions are the result of the experiences of life and are solely the product of the observation of the society. Women fictional writers like Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai depicted this society in a more realistic and relatable way. Notably, Manju Kapur has given a brand-new dimension in the depiction of Contemporary Society.

Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist who won Commonwealth writer's price, focuses on the depiction of the middle-class Indian families. Her narration plays a vital role in creating an effect on the readers. Her other novels including *Difficult daughters*, *Home* and *The Immigrant* have received global recognition for its natural depiction of simple life. Her themes mostly rely on the complex process of finding one's self identity, usually by women in this patriarchal society. Manju Kapur's characters are always seemed to rebel against the conventional social norms and try to breach them. This novel *Custody* deals with the parent's battle over the custody of their children and the children's confused state of mind in adapting themselves to two polar opposite families with different conventions.

A glimpse of *Custody*

Custody deals with the battle of divorce and its consequences in the Indian society where the marital relationship is supposed to last forever. These problems arose in the family when, Shagun, the beautiful wife of Raman, found the love of her life outside wedlock. This upper middle-class family was doing well until Shagun fell for Raman's boss Ashok and had an extra marital affair with him. When Raman suspected this affair, it had a hard effect on him, both physically and mentally. Later the dispute for the custody of the children arose when Shagun demanded a divorce out of mutual consent. On the other side, Ishita, a young woman was divorced because of her inability to give birth to a child.

Throughout the process of divorce, the children, Arjun and Roohi were the people who had to suffer the most. The eldest boy could understand the domestic changes that took place and was constantly worried about the society's eye on him and his family. The youngest couldn't comprehend the fact of two mothers, two fathers, two countries and ultimately two families. After years of struggle, the custody of the girl was given to Raman and Ishita whereas the boy was in boarding school and was older enough to decide his legal guardian on his own.

Traumatic perplexity in relationship

The two children went through a lot and their entire world seemed to be changed. The children can be seen struggling between the disintegration of the old relationships they had and struggle in adapting to the new relationships. Arjun was old enough to understand the domestic changes happening in his family but he was not old enough to comprehend the reason behind it. He was also afraid of what his friends and their family might think about his current familial situation. This situation was weird for him to see his mother with some other man who is not his father and he was worried that he might steal all the attention of his mother. During the whole custody issue, the distance between Arjun and Raman seemed to increase day by day on the shift between his parents and Arjun saw a stranger in his dad at times. "Arjun did not recognize this unfamiliar man" (Kapur 192).

The little girl Roohi was too small to understand the happenings and she constantly wept on the absence of either parent. The girl suffered psychologically and she began to wet her bed in the fear of losing her parents. That poor kid had confusions when it came to the term mother as she had two. That four-year-old was put in a situation where she had to choose between her biological mother and her step mother by her mother's manipulation of her brother. Travelling between countries during holidays to visit her mother was not so easy for a toddler and she had always fallen sick either by the journey or because of homesickness. The child went through horrible nightmares which further traumatized her. Later as she grew up in the custody of her father Raman and step Mother Ishita, she did not have any motherly feelings for her biological mother Shagun and she was more like a stranger to her when they met each other in the court during the hearing of her custody. With reference to psychological effects caused by Marital separation and the stigma around it in Sudha Murty's Mahasweta by Rahul Gautham D and M John Suganya, this article explores Parental Conflicts leading to Childhood Trauma in *Custody* by Manju Kapur.

Traumatic experiences

Arjun being in boarding school and with his mother during holidays and Roohi with her father the whole time, the bond between the siblings seemed to be non-existent. The brother and sister didn't even get to see each other's face adequately. When they meet, all they do is bicker about who the real mom is. Thus, throughout the whole process, the relationship between the siblings was slowly dying.

Ashok Khanna always felt little Roohi annoying and he could never really connect him with her or understand her. In fact, Ashok never took any steps to create a bond with Roohi nor spent time with her. On the other hand, Ishita was always worried that Arjun might manipulate Roohi against her in favor of their biological mother. Thus, she was always worried about Roohi whenever he visited them and always tried to keep Roohi away from her own brother. Arjun was clearly not ready to see someone in the place of his mother and he was

not even ready to talk to her properly. Thus, the family in India and the one in America never had the atmosphere it used to have and the air was constantly filled with awkwardness.

The hate their step-parents had towards their partner's previous partner can be seen reflected in their actions towards their step children. This had a great negative influence in the minds of the children and affected them psychologically which led to mental distress. In the case of Ashok Khanna, he was also concerned with the amount of attention Roohi got from her mother as the time they spent had a slight fall. He didn't understand that the infant needed constant care from its mother.

Conclusion

This paper tries to bring out the parents' indifferent attitude and decisions and their children falling victim for their thoughtless actions. These thoughtless actions had blown away the happiness and peace from the children's life. The adults should behave as adults and know their responsibilities but in contrast they are behaving like children in search of their individuality which leads to marital disharmony. "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 affect the normal life of the children, their lifestyle, health, education and ultimately their childhood. The children are the ones who pay the price of their parents' parental misstep.

A study says that parents' fights start to affect children from six months. These children would have had a great life if it wasn't their parents' influence. These parents put their children through numerous court proceedings which disturb their normal life. The word 'parenting' changed through time and these modern parents are ready to trade off their kids like commodities. These parenting fails always brings disharmony in the minds and the lives of the children.

References

Kapur, Manju. *Custody*. Penguin Random house India, 2011, New Delhi.

<http://www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIRFG06009>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manju_Kapur.

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/how-parental-conflict-hurts-kids>.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343064952_Manju_Kapur's_Custody_A_Search_for_New_Space.