

Tribhuvan University

Assertion of Motherhood in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled,

“Assertion of Motherhood in Manju Kapur’s *Custody*”

is my own original work carried out as a Master’s student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from others in the thesis’s design and conception in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged.

All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis.

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Letter of Approval

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Assertion of Motherhood in Manju Kapur’s *Custody*” submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Rakesh Bhatt, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

This research explores issues like divorce, broken marriage and remarriage in upper middle class of urban Indian families in Manju Kapur's *Custody*. The suffering of women after their divorce, some focus battle for the custody of the children is shown in this research. To prove this idea the researcher brings the theory of postmodern feminist. The major theoretical tenet of Judith Butler, Simon De Behavior, Julia Kristeva are used to probe the research. The core finding of this research is that Ishita and Shagun manipulate both their kids for the sake of custody and for their welfare. Ishita needs Roohi as she can never bear a child of her own. Shagun, being the biological mother of Arjun and Roohi, claims their custody. The novel reveals the unimagined uncertainties of marriage. The parents bargain with each other for their children for the sake of divorce. This novel gives an insight to go deeper into the heart of children who are torn between the crude and shrewd battle of their custody. In this battle of egos, Kapur has successfully presented the sufferings of innocent children, the complexities of life and different structures of values in her novel.

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Assertion of Motherhood in Manju Kapur's *Custody*

Introduction of the Study

This research focuses on Manju Kapur's novel *Custody* which is related with the issues like divorce, broken marriage and remarriage in upper middle class of urban Indian families. In particular, it explores the role of women in patriarchal society, where women are treated as other subjects or not as human beings. The central female character Ishita, a young Indian girl is divorced due to her infertility. Less sympathy from her mother in laws, rejection instead of love is portrayed in this novel. In the novel elements like isolation, loss of individual identity and sense of alienation are portrayed. Ishita's child is plagued with social stigma, emotional exploitation and psychological pressure. Though central character Ishita, exposes the emptiness of marital life where she goes through severe mental torture from her family.

Observing the female protagonist characters like Ishita and Sagun this research tries to find out where they find the sense of suffocation, divorce and aftermath consequences of divorce coming from broken family. Adultery, extramarital love and sex freedom are instruments of the resistance to the patriarchal myth and values, which are used by patriarchal society to suppress the women. Since, the focus of the study is to examine postmodern issues like broken marriage, alienation, depression, misery, gloominess, sense of failure, quest of liberty and domination through language. Through the critical analysis of the female character Ishita, who is divorced because of her infertility, this research attempts to dramatize the consequences of divorce, alienation, identity crisis and uncertainties of matrimony.

In Kapur's *Custody*, the women protagonist regarded as mother who begot children. In this novel motherhood is an intuition of patriarchy that insures the control of women by their imprisonment in domesticity. The women who cannot begot

children are divorced. The women protagonist Ishita in this novel cannot fulfill the role of mother due to her infertility. She gets divorced due to the patriarchal society.

Literature Review

By observing the research as an institution of motherhood in patriarchy, where the women have to undergo through the stage of misery, alienation, identity crisis, suffering and tortures. Because of infertility women are divorced and exiled from family. Finally, it compels them to go for motherhood and institutionalize it. Different critics have reviewed the text in different ways. Arifa Akbar in *The Independent* writes about *Custody* in his way comments:

A marriage preceded or fractured by a heady, socially unacceptable romance has emerged time and again in Manju Kapur's fiction.

Custody: here, the subject is matrimony at its most intolerable followed by the emotional fall-out of a break-up on one wealthy extended Delhi family. The affair sparks the book's furious momentum as it follows them through separation, divorce, re-marriage (Shagan to Ashok; Raman to the infertile) and a crescendo of custody battle in all its legal chicanery and psychological ugliness. (12)

In this above lines Arifa Akbar delineates on battle for custody of the children. According to him, marriage creates unacceptable romance which comes time and again. The marriage ultimately reaches in the separation, divorce, re-marriage and psychological ugliness. He says that this novel is about not easily accepted by society which is about romance. This novel is also about the separation, divorce, and re-marriage. Another critic Mithu Benerji in *The Guardian* claims:

Kapur's book reveals the unimagined uncertainties of matrimony. The wife's sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the

constant shifting of the children, like commodities, from one home to the other, are evoked with painstaking sincerity. Although Marriage is well-trodden territory for Kapur, here her possession of the subject is complete. In the accumulation of detail, and her tone of emotional restraint, Custody becomes something more than just a social commentary, but a novel that is true to the universal angst of modern marriage, with its burden of Individualism. (22)

In the above abstract Mithu Benerji focuses suffering of women. This shows that the condition of women was sense of suffocation, the husband's fear of loneliness and the constant shifting of the children.

Although marriage is well-trodden territory her possession of the subject is complete. It talks about that women are under and domination of their husband or male's fear and torture. They are suffering so many kinds of pains. Similarly, Umachandran in *The Times of India* states:

Custody, here the focus is on the break-up of a marriage and the long-term effects on all the people involved. It's a book about marriage and divorce with children at the heart of it. The women aren't particularly spectacular, ambitious or successful, but what Kapur brings out with sensitivity and perception is the conflict that arises when "traditional Indian values" That women are reared on come in contact with other worlds. (17)

In these above lines Umachandra focuses on consequences of broken marriage.

Marriage focuses the break-up of a marriage and the long-term effects on all the people and divorce with children at the heart of it.

The women are not particularly spectacular, ambitious or successful. This results the negative effect on people and divorce with children. They are suppressed by their own husband. The major responsibility is that she is trapped in motherhood soon after her marriage. Mithu Banerjee writes in a review of *Custody*:

Although marriage is well-trodden territory for Kapur, here her possession of the subject is complete. In the accumulation of detail, and her tone of emotional restraint, *Custody* becomes something more than just a social commentary, but a novel that is true to the universal angst of modern marriage, with its burden of individualism. (4)

India of the 1990s was entering the world economy on a more ambitious footing, and in which the idea of family duty had been overridden by individualism. As Shagun says in her criticism of the older world, which was part of the Indian disease, Ashok was always going on about stultifying tradition.

Going through these critics view, many of them have raised the issues of suffering of women after divorce, some focus battle for the custody of the children. But any of them didn't examining the factors on motherhood. Although this research makes significant use of concept developed by postmodern feminist writer but it doesn't offer a comprehensive analysis of postmodern literary theory. Since the major objective of the study is to demonstrate the character Ishita's suffering due to the manipulation and domination of patriarchal society in Kapur's *Custody*.

This thesis depicts role of women in domestic Indian society and their aspiration for independence and it looks into the problems of women explored with a view to discover and support women's struggle for independence in the patriarchal society. It is presenting the issues like female emancipation, their physical aspiration and their efforts in repositioning themselves in the present social environment in the

novel *Custody*. It is constructed around the women's quest for self-identity, self-fulfillment and self-realization. This research also examines how the novel explores the difficulties in the family life of middle class Indian women with their aspirations and desire for a life outside.

Female Domination in *Custody*

This novel portrays the conflict between the parents for the possession of their children and the ways in which modern Indian women aspire for independence. It clearly narrates the sorrows and assures of two women characters, Shagun and Ishita, and their various efforts to achieve fulfillment. Shagun the protagonist of the novel is bold enough to choose a good lifestyle in order to create her own space in the world, fearing no one. She is a middle class woman, the wife of Raman, a corporate advertiser. Feeling bored, alienated and attracted towards modernity, Shagun the mother of two children, develops an extra marital affair with Ashok Khanna. Since her teens, Shagun had an infinite number of boys and she was looking forward to the freedom marriage would provide.

To demonstrate the performative operations of interpellation, Judith Butler cites a cartoon strip. In this strip, an infant is assigned its place in the sex-gender system with the exclamation that it's a lesbian. This illustration of Butler is cited below:

Far from an essentialist joke, the queer appropriation of the performative mimes and exposes both the binding power of the heterosexualizing law and its expropriability. Readers will return to expropriability and citation shortly. Here the point to note is that, since sexual and gendered differences are performatively installed by and in

discourse, it would be possible to designate or confer identity on the excluded gender. (117)

The body is not visibly black. The baby, Clare, is only ousted when her white husband encounters her among a group of black people. Butler uses passing to confirm her point that race and sexuality are embedded and implicated. She discerns an overlapping of the mute homosexuality between the two women protagonists. Moreover, just as heterosexuality requires homosexuality in order to constitute its coherence. Whiteness requires blackness to offset itself. It confirms its racial boundaries.

Shagun reflects that woman now has stimulated to the core and has become a vital part in the society. It demonstrates illicit relationship between Shagun and her husband's boss Ashok Khanna who uses this sexual freedom as an instrument of resistance to patriarchal myths and values. This novel also depicts a female character Shagun who rejoicing her sexuality and appropriates its generative belief through a consciousness of patriarchal principles. Her sexuality is a dome of happiness and outfit in which she is empowered to employ her body for herself. She defies the male subjugated and patriarchal system of observation and control. She convenes Ashok Khanna, a business man who is attracted by her beauty.

Raman and Shagun wedding is set with this standard lines, “. . . she the beauty, he the one with brilliant prospects” (14). The instant pregnancy makes her the center of all attention and as a respectful daughter -in- law she is given birth to the boy baby. This line also shows about Shagun “Her son had inherited her looks and colour, a further source of gratification” (15). However, things get changed when she gives birth to her daughter, that she was not prepared mentally and physically. Besides, “Roohi, her daughter is a carbon copy of her father” (18).

Donna Haraway argues that “in a culture of high technology, the boundaries are no longer clear between human and animal, animal and machine, or human and machine”(136). While not a new observation, Haraway recasts it as a windfall for feminist theory. Hierarchical dualisms such as man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, and white/black are no longer stable in high-tech culture. Haraway argues that taking the cyborg “as a metaphor for socialist feminist theoretical interventions can be useful for feminist theory. It can help feminist theorists imagine a world that is not seen in or confined to hierarchical dualisms. The cyborg resists and eludes final definitions” (127). There are three potential ways to use the cyborg metaphor as an intellectual tool. Haraway illustrates these ways in the following ways:

First, the cyborg as an analytical tool assists in framing and organizing a politically invested cartography of present-day social and cognitive relations. Second, the cyborg functions in a normative mode to offer a more complex and nuanced evaluation of social practices. Third, it as a utopian manifesto for imagining ways to reconstruct subjectivity in the age of advanced technology. (117)

Haraway’s above-mentioned modalities of using cyborg seem pretty unconvincing. Neither feminism nor postmodernism lends itself to clear definition. Both encompass a broad spectrum of theories. Postmodernism defies definition, even description. In its deconstructive form, it is anti-foundational and skeptical of any form of certainty. The various theories which are drawn together under the umbrella of postmodernism all have in common a repudiation of early modernism. Both feminism and postmodernism have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings.

According to Shagun love with Ashok is an experience to fulfill all her unfulfilled desires of her college days. Ishita went to hospital to diagnose her problem of infertility. Ishita shoves from healer to seer, herbalist to hospital restlessly looking for some decision, obsessed with optimism, doubt and desolation. So, the greatest component of her infancy is shattered in the chase to accomplish motherhood. Her infertile issue makes in her marriage with snowed under her anxiety, social disgrace emotional abuse and psychological stress. Ishita feels that her happy life is going to end. This novel states that:

Ishita was the dear daughter-in-law in the past. Now she was treated as undeserving and infertile. In the hospital she feels that, Smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air, smaller than the drops of dew caught between blades of grass in the morning, was Ishita sat in the gynecologist's office with her mother-in-law, watching as the doctor sketched out the messages concealed in her body. (65)

The novel describes the reality that in a conventional society woman faces disgrace due to her infertile body. Suryakanta is ready to give her divorce who was once did not live without her for a second, meanwhile Ishita thrown out from her in-law house. She undergoes with ethereal as she is penalized for her imperfect body.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, the woman is “defined and differentiated with reference to man and with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute she is the Other” (9). Man always thinks that he is in the right, while woman is in the wrong; all the negative qualities are assigned to her. He is afraid of feminine competition. De Beauvoir discusses about the topics like sexual initiation, sexual pleasure for women.

She states that woman is not a free agent in choosing the man of her erotic destiny.

Man is never consistent; he wants his wife to be passionate with him but indifferent to other men as a whole. He wants her to be entirely his.

Thus, she is betrayed from the day he marries her. Bound to one man, with children to tend, woman's life is over. She finds no future other than of her husband's. De Beauvoir says that the bond between man and woman should be based on common love and consent. She also deals with different issues such as unwanted motherhood, the unmarried mother and abortion. She concludes that women should be freed from the bonds of slavery.

Representation of Indian Modern Woman

Custody is not only about infertility but also the issue of divorce, dichotomy of modern society, and relationship between parents and child and aspires for freedom also. It is entirely representation of Indian Modern woman, who tiled new path in the peripheral world. She demonstrates the new woman is rising in modern Indian society. This novel shows that woman should make an effort to realize and detain herself as a human being and not just as an attachment to some male life. *Custody* discloses the deviations; modernity is leading in our society, and the hollowness of modern life. It also exposes the life of Metropolitan cities where people have become the victims of modernity.

Raman gets attracted towards Shagun because of her extraordinary beauty. They fall in love with each other. Subsequently, when Ashok offers her to act as a model in and for the Brand, she agrees hastily, with a hope that it may offer her a chance to be a model and fulfil her dream. Thus Ashok, too much marveled by Shagun's looks, begins executing his plan of wooing her as:

Within a few months of arriving in India he saw the woman he knew he had been destined for. In her colouring, her greenish eyes and her demeanour, she was a perfect blend of East and West. A woman so pretty had to be married; besides, she had the look of someone who never had to compete for male attention. To woo her would thus be that much more difficult: he must first create a need before he could fulfill it. But he was used to creating needs; it was what he did for a living. (4)

Shagun starts the affair with Ashok just to add adventure to her monotonous life, but is dragged more and more into it. He desires to own her from the day he meets her. As soon as he possessed her, this strange hiatus in his life would be over.

The definition of the term 'feminism' differs from person to person.

According to the French models of feminism, it implies sexual expression. If we take into account the British models, all feminists slowly become respectable, or acclaimed into the male world order. If we consider American models, they are more outspoken. In *Feminism in English Fiction: Forms and Variations* feminism defines as:

a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (1)

Shagun had never thought of divorcing Raman or leaving her children to marry Ashok. "When she started her affair she had thought a lover would add to her experience, make up for all the things she had missed having married straight out of college" (82). But Ashok, smart enough to manipulate people in his life as well as in

his job, is determined to marry Shagun and take her with him when posted in New York. Shagun denies “Don’t bother you will finish and go I have to stay for my children” (81). Ashok persuades her:

Things are moving as fast as it is. Ten years ago you couldn’t get a cake, pizza or burger here. There wasn’t even colour TV for fuck’s sake. And now? Everything. What has colour TV got to do with my marriage? “she asked, lips trembling. Ashok was always seeing connections where none were obvious to her. ‘Traditional versus modern values, individual versus society, he elaborated, putting a contrite arm around her. I just want to take you away from here. This narrow social set-up all you know, that’s why you are afraid. But it will be fine, fine. Trust me, darling. (81)

The above lines tenderly mock upon the gender biased people about the birth of a baby boy in India. A son is considered to be the heir of the family, whereas daughter is taken as a burden. Shagun gets a significant status by giving birth to a baby boy “The birth of a boy added to her glory. She had gotten over the duties of heir producing smoothly; there would be no need to have another child” (15). It’s a bitter fact of our Indian society; when a son is born the need for daughter is not felt about, when a daughter is born people keep trying until they are blessed with a son. Hemant insists Astha for keeping on trying till the time they are blessed with a son. Jaidev explains in the article *Problematizing Feminism* as:

Indeed, any sophisticated system today operates not by a direct and visible exploitation of people but by making they retain an illusion of freedom and free choice, by making them willingly give into its

imperatives, and by subtly ensuring that they do not see that they are dupes or victims. (5)

It describes the inconsistency of relations through the incidents narrated in the novel. For getting his kids back, Raman can go to whatever extent, thus he files the lawsuit according to Nandan's instructions. Raman feels brave and buoyant "Let Shagun see he too could fight back, that he was no longer Mr. Nice Guy" (126). Nandan makes it clear that the case may go for a long period, but at least he will have visitation rights after filing the case and he will be able to meet and pass time with his children.

Monique Wittig talks about the political assumption associated with the percolating principles and practices of feminism. Attention should be paid to these remarks in a sensitive way. Wittig discloses the following remarks:

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. (94)

It has been to find examples or illustrations of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures. By so doing it tends to support highly Western notions of oppression. The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical universality.

When Roohi questions about the court notice, Shagun tells her "It is a little message from your father. He is trying to kill me. Shagun's intention is to give an

unpleasant and bad feedback against Raman. She says “You must never see him, or go to him even if he calls you. He is a bad, bad man” (144). Throughout the novel, the sufferings and exploitation of children, which arise because of their parents’ decisions. An increased rate of depression is noticed in the children, separated from their parents, because of marital problems and divorce. The children of divorced parents suffer more psychological problems than the children whose parents are not dissociated. It is not sure how far these problems precede the divorce and are related to disharmony between the parents or to the conduct of one or both parents that contributed to the conclusion of divorce.

Through Arjun, the writer depicts the side-effects of divorce on the mind and the body of the children. The separation of parents affects Arjun’s life. Arjun starts complaining about his stomach pain, leg pain and refuses to go to school. His performance also falls in school, though he has perpetually been a superb student, but at present he is faring poorly in his academics. Shagun holds Raman responsible for all the suffering of her kids:

Of course it was the recent disturbances that were causing her son stress. If only Raman could see things rationally, there was no reason why they both couldn’t continue as joint careers of their children. They had been so delighted when she came to get them, throwing themselves on her with hugs and kisses. That scene had replayed itself in her heart many times, even though it had been a little spoiled by Arjun’s assumption that she had come to stay. (145)

Raman used to teach Arjun for his class test and examinations. Shagun forgets the timetable of Arjun’s test because of so many incidents happening in her life. Arjun. Arjun’s behavior changes badly, he forges his mother’s signature on his test papers,

pinches Roohi whenever he wants his mother's care. He knows if Roohi cries, his mother will come to their room.

Arjun is jealous of Ashok because he completely possesses Shagun's attention. Arjun's behavior hurts Shagun, she knows the reason but she can't help him with that. Arjun has to learn to live without Raman. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* argues that:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (2)

According to her, women are considered secondary in relation to men from the ancient time. It is not necessity of feminine feature but it is the result of education and social tradition under the control of men. Women's dignity failed but they stand on the same ground of intellectual and professional equality. This has given rise to social evils also.

Some fear that the repudiation of the subject would eliminate feminism as a social-political power. There would be no subject woman and consequently no woman's movement. The concept of gender has long been central to feminist thought. However, its evolution over the past twenty years has resulted in a growing consensus among feminist theorists that gender relations need not correspond to anatomy. Simon Watney is critical of the trend to trace feminist essence within the transcendental site. His view is presented below:

Performance based notion of body is associated with its denial of Universalist and transcultural identities such as gender or woman. It has impacted even further upon the desexualization of gender for those feminist theorists who subscribe to postmodern thought. Gender need not, in fact, be related at all to anatomical sex. (142)

One advantage of such a carefully constructed postmodern feminism is that categories such as the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family would be understood to be historically specific institutional categories. They would take precedence over ahistorical, functionalist categories like reproduction and mothering.

Ashok suggests Shagun to send Arjun to boarding school for a change of environment. Shagun is hurt about everything Ashok says about Arjun “She understood he could never feel for the boy, it was her fault for leaving the child’s father, she would pay for her sins for the rest of her life” (171). She tries in every possible way to convince Arjun to attend his classes, but he is determined not to change his mind. Eventually Shagun considers the option, Ashok has suggested her, and conveys her son about sending him to Dehradun Public Academy boarding school. Arjun shows no interest in any suggestion, related to his studies and school.

Arjun turned his head away. She stared at his back Ashok had said, don’t push, just drop the idea in his head, this is not going to work if he doesn’t want to go. And leave him alone, don’t entertain him, don’t mollycoddle him. Someone else was determining, directing, and deciding. It felt strange but her own method had failed. (172)

The idea looks like a sound one to Arjun of going to a place where no one will know his parents' separation; where he will not suffer to read pity and curiosity in the eyes of people around him and tolerate to avoid friends. But he is also insecure to leave

his mother in Delhi with Ashok. He was afraid of leaving his mother with that man. Though Shagun behaves as the shifting from Raman Kaushik's life to Ashok Khanna's is as natural as changing clothes, but Arjun is not comfortable living with Ashok, a stranger who rarely talks to him and agrees to prepare for entrance exam. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "The situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (3).

Two of the most important works of contemporary feminist theory Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* derive their ideological premises from the twentieth-century philosophical movement, existentialism. This body of ideas was itself rooted in the theoretical constructs of several German philosophers: Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, but had its most popular formulation in the works of French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre.

Raman informs Nandan about Arjun who is leaving VV, one of the best schools in Delhi and going to DPA, a boarding school. Nandan enquires whether Arjun is willing to go, but how can Raman explain "How to explain to Nandan the variations of his son's breath, the quality of his silence, the visual image of a frightened eleven-year-old getting in touch with his father after many months" (204). Nandan suggests Raman to file a stay order against removal but Raman doesn't want to drag Arjun in any uncomfortable situation, so he refuses to do so. "That was the trouble with Raman. He lacked the killer instinct. Are you want the child, you have to assert such things" (204). But Raman is too sensitive about his children to expose them to any odd situation.

The notion of a generally shared conception of women has been much more difficult to displace. The masculine/feminine binary constitutes only the exclusive

framework. In every other way the specificity of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized. Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. To quote Wittig again:

These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from women suggest the necessary limits of identity politics. The suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that it itself constructs has the ironic consequence. This problem is not ameliorated through an appeal to the category of women for merely strategic purposes. (95)

By conforming to a requirement of representational politics, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation. Obviously, the political task is not to refuse representational politics. The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power. Within feminist political practice, a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary.

To develop a bonding between Ashok and Arjun, Shagun insists Ashok to help Arjun in preparing for the entrance test and also to share some moments of Ashok's DPA years. Ashok seems uncomprehending "once he laughed and said, give me time. I'm not an instant father, you know" (212). His only concern is Shagun and not the kids which hurt Shagun.

Nicholson and Fraser argue that feminism should adopt a carefully constructed postmodernism, taking the best aspects of each. They provide a lucid discussion of the postmodern and feminist critiques of the subject. Their views are cited below:

The shifting notion of contemporary feminism provides feminism with a critique of feminism's foundationalism and essentialism, while feminism provides postmodernism with feminism's strength as social criticism. Furthermore, a carefully constructed postmodern feminism would avoid any type of universalisms such as early feminist attempts to find one universal explanation of sexism that would be cross-cultural. (175)

Nicholson and Fraser conclude that carefully constructed feminism would embrace the death of the subject. Rather than a Universalist notion of woman or feminine, social identity would be a multi-strand conception including class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age.

Raman files a case against Shagun for sending Arjun to DPA with a complaint that Shagun wants to keep the child away from his father. Shagun, determined to send Arjun to DPA, manipulates him “He had to tell the judge he hated, VV, she had a letter from school to prove that he hadn’t been attending for months” (213). She prepares Arjun for the questions he may be asked in court.

The court did not understand that people could change, no, they had to go on living with the same person till they died. They had the power to take away her children, put her in jail. This was a very hypocritical country narrow-minded and censorious. The judge would probably ask him who he wanted to live with. (213)

Raman gets hurt to realize the ignorance of his own son. He knows that all this is because of the manipulation and deviousness of Shagun. She wants to send Arjun permanently away from Raman to take revenge because of his denial of divorce.

Ashok has stolen the essence of his family and Raman hates Ashok for this, as well as Shagun.

Raman has always been a good father and thus he is granted visitation rights by the court. Raman is partially relieved that he at least can meet his children on weekends. Moving from one home to another is ok for Roohi because she is too small to understand anything but for Arjun it creates more trouble.

Arjun was smart enough to see that he dreamt when he was troubled by his parents, and this disturbed him. No one he knew dreamt, but then no one he knew had separated parents. His father, nothing his pale morning face, asked him what the matter was, but he couldn't say. He didn't trust his father to understand anything in his new life.
(224)

Shagun has to go abroad with Ashok and a divorce is must for her. Raman can't believe her after her betrayal. She kidnapped the children once, she can do that again and take them abroad and never return.

The early editions of *The Oxford English Dictionary* defined feminism as a state of being feminine or womanly as did the 1901 edition of *The Dictionary of Philosophy*. By 1906, however, the *Dictionnaires de Philosophies* defined feminism as a position favorable to the rights of women. *The Webster's Dictionary* defines the term 'feminism' as the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men. Toril Moi in her book *Feminist Literary Theory* (1985) says, "The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new Woman's Movement which emerged in the late 1960s" (36). Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers" (5).

Feminism is a philosophy that fights against such definitions of masculine and feminine, and aims at placing women in a just perspective. The word ‘feminism’ however, must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning should not be restricted to the advocacy of women’s rights.

Suryakanta tells his mother about the meeting with doctor “Papa and Mummy will know what to do” (62). Ishita is too much depressed because of her body which has let her down in this most basic function. She can’t dare to face anyone after the whole incident. She has not expected such response from Suryakanta who pretends to be very caring:

Oh how far from the truth. At that moment Ishita thought it easier to commit suicide than to live. From the day of her wedding she had thought of this family as hers reveling in the togetherness, sharing and companionship. Now instead of love all around her, there would be rejection. (63)

On her next visit to the doctor, Ishita’s mother-in-law goes with her instead of Suryakanta, because she wants to know what exactly the problem is and what the remedy is. On the way to the doctor, her mother-in-law scans her HSG report and medical papers. They don’t talk about anything on the way. When they reach the hospital, the nurse calls them inside the doctor’s chamber:

Smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air, smaller than drops of dew caught between blades of grass in the morning was Ishita as she sat in the gynecologist’s office with her mother in-law, watching as the doctor sketched out the messages concealed in her body. Here were the tubes, here the eggs,

here was where conception occurred. The loss of normal anatomy meant fertilization couldn't take place without intervention. (65)

The doctor suggests Ishita either to go for IUI i.e. intrauterine insemination, or IVF, fertilization that take place in a culture medium outside the body, with egg and sperm extracted from respective donors. Ishita's in-laws decide to go for an IVF treatment, but even after two trials Ishita is unable to conceive.

Luce Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within the discourse of identity itself. Women are the sex which is not one. Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, "women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity" (82). Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes "the unconstrainable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not one but multiple" (75). For Irigaray, that particular dialectic constitutes a system that excludes an entirely different economy of signification. Regarding to the formation of the notion of sexuality she reveals the following ideas:

The sex which is not one, then, provides a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject. In the first instance, humanist conceptions of the subject tend to assume a substantive person who is the bearer of various essential and nonessential attributes. A humanist feminist position might understand gender as an attribute of a person. (49)

Irigaray's stand related to the category of gendered subject is that the universal conception of the person is displaced as a point of departure. She presents gender as a

relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person is. Gender does not denote a substantive being. On the contrary, it denotes to a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations.

Mr. Rajora usually finds her daughter in bed in her grief. He tries to console her that brooding is not good for anyone. And she should think about some job. Angrily she answers “I wanted to work, you got me married” (129). Realizing his mistake, Ishita’s father feels guilty of spoiling his daughter’s life by marrying her at a very early age:

Head buried in the pillow, she thought of the body that had known so much love, and then so much punishment. Stubbornly it had remained barren despite the many spent, the hormones, the injections, the painful procedures. She couldn’t conceive, whereupon SK had decided he could not love her. If only she could tear out her whole reproductive system and throw it on the road. She hated her body, hated it. Everybody in the building must know why she had come back. Return to sender. Receipt for 5 lakhs attached. (127)

Gradually Ishita tries to get over her grief and move on and face the world with her truth. Mrs. Hingorani, her neighbor, offers her to work in her school and teach the slum children. Ishita’s mother suggests her not to waste her qualification on such places and find any better job which can help her financially.

But Ishita decides to teach the slum children. Mrs. Rajora fears that it may expose her to different infections, and insists Ishita to look for another job. Julia Kristeva in her book *Language and Female Voice* suggests:

A third space for feminism to operate the space which deconstructs all identity, all binary oppositions. But again, in deconstructing patriarchal metaphysics, the risk of deconstructing the very logic that sustains the two forms of feminism of sameness and difference cannot be avoided. And so the three 'spaces' of feminism are logically and often strategically incompatible. (7)

Ishita wants to move on in her life and she finds it suitable to be with so many children because she can never have one of her own. She wants a life with some purpose, so she starts teaching in Mrs. Hingorani's school. "A drop of ink gets lost in a bucket of water, and here in the bucket of Mandavali her grief receded" (135).

Butler characterizes gender as the effect of reiterated acting. It produces the effect of a static or normal gender while obscuring the contradiction and instability of any single person's gender act. This effect produces a narrative that is sustained by the tacit collective agreement to perform. On Butler's hypothesis, the socially constructed aspect of gender performativity is most obvious in drag performance. Rather, Butler suggests that what is performed can only be understood through reference to what is barred from the signifier within the domain of corporeal legibility. Butler explains that "a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love. A feminine gender is formed through the fantasy which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love" (154).

According to Butler, gender performance is only subversive because it is the kind of effect that resists calculation. She delivers the following contentious claim: Signification is multiplinous that the subject is unable to control it. Subversion is always occurring and always unpredictable. The political potential of gender

performances can be evaluated relative to similar past acts in similar contexts in order to assess their transgressive potential. (121)

Butler's concepts of gender performativity are a misguided retreat from engaging with real-world concerns. She suggests to her readers that this sly send-up of the status quo is the only script for resistance that life offers. Butlerian feminism is in many ways easier than the old feminism. It tells scores of talented young women that they need not work on changing the law.

During PTA meetings Ishita meets those poor women, battling a thousand needs with empty stomach, drunken husbands, semi-literate children, with no chance of escape from their poverty. Working with Mrs. Hingorani and her NGO fills Ishita with confidence. Her father feels proud to look at the brightness of her face:

Ishita along with Mrs. Hingorani marching to Parliament House to protest the nuclear device tested in the Pakharan desert. Drawing parallels between herself and the woman involved in the freedom struggle: they too had courted arrest. Contradicting her father, no it was not necessary for India to assert herself as a world power, not when she couldn't feed her children, making the man think his daughter had grown more in the NGO than in her years of marriage.
(136)

Ishita gets a purpose in her life, but still her parents wish to find a good match for their daughter to secure her future. But Ishita is no more interested in marriage. She wants to focus on her work and help the poor children.

Ishita joins Jeevan, an NGO which works for poor and slum people. Her mother is in search of a suitable groom for her daughter to look after her, but Ishita already has enough of the marriage business, "I can look after myself. You think all

the married women have their husbands caring for them. Look round you” (176).

Mrs. Rajora finds a divorced IPS officer, with two kids. Because Ishita can't produce children she has to marry a man who already has children.

Mrs. Rajora requests Ishita not to talk too much but Mr. Rajora can't support his wife's request “Mr. Rajora thought of his first encounter with his own bride, and how he had to strain to hear the few words that had barely passed her lips. How much had India really changed, that a silent woman was still considered more desirable” (176). Ishita doesn't find the suitor interesting and refuses to marry him. And even a lonely life is the consequence.

She can rather be lonely instead of marrying such person who can't even let her go anywhere without him. If he can't trust her then there is no print of marrying him. Mrs. Hingorani suggests Ishita to adopt a child to fulfil her monotonous life and also introduces her to a couple who has just adopted a child. Ishita finds the mother, beaming with happiness instead of being punished for her barrenness like Ishita “Her husband instead of looking for a new wife was content to beam with her” (182). Ishita thinks about herself, how she has been divorced just because she can't produce children as if she is not human being but only a child producing machine. She desires “May be she and SK should have fought for the right to decide the major issues in their marriage, fought not towards the end when all she saw was his back” (183). She knows right now there is no use of desiring anything, but she dreams.

Ishita struggles to fight for the meaning of her life, i.e. why she is born “If she had a wish in life it was to be a homemaker, with husband and children, something every girl she had ever known effortlessly possessed” (185). Eventually Ishita decides to adopt a child and shares her wish with her parents. Mrs. Rajora wants her to marry for the security of her future, but Ishita doesn't want to wait for a proposal

to come “I wish you could understand how sick I am of this whole marriage business (188). She snaps at her mother, she doesn’t want to see any ridiculous man. “At least it will be nice to choose my fate instead of just waiting for some husband to appear” (189). Ishita’s father wonders to see the glow and confidence on his daughter’s face, she has achieved with her independence. He wants to see his daughter to be happy, without caring what people think of her, if she adopts a child.

Toril Moi has used the term ‘post-feminism’ to cover the different configurations of feminism and post-modernism present today. Present-day feminist theorists believe that, strictly speaking, feminism is an impossible position. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. Such an oppositional definition posits feminism as the necessary resistance to patriarchal power. Logically then the aim of feminism as an emancipatory theory becomes to abolish itself along with its opponent. “In a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist” (*Feminist Literary Theory* 6). Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. But the struggle for equal rights historically and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. The very argument rests precisely on the fact that women are already as valuable as men are. But in the situation of women’s lack of equal rights, this value must be located as difference, not as equality. Women are of equal human value, when feminism represents the value of women as women, it efficiently counters the systematic devaluation of women under patriarchy.

Mrs. Kaushik and Mrs. Rajora become good friends because of the parallel destiny of their children, both divorced and betrayed at the hands of their winning partners. They exchange talk about their children and their broken marriages. Mrs.

Kaushik suggests Mrs. Rajora to bring Ishita to see Raman when he comes with Roohi at Swarg Niwas. May be they like each other's company and exchange their feelings which may lend to get over brooding. After all, they both are facing the same circumstances somehow.

In Ishita's plight, the second wife's desperate struggle to replace the biological mother, while Ashok presents a more ambiguous kind of care. Ishita goes to see Raman and Roohi, plays with her and feeds her. Raman notices all this and feels pity for Roohi because she is not getting the motherly care and love. He again thinks of Shagun and hates her for what she has done to his children "He was dependent on strangers for a motherly touch that was what she had reduced them to" (267). Ishita is not that much beautiful as Shagun, thus Raman doesn't find her attractive in the beginning but gradually he starts liking her because of her sweet behavior with Roohi:

But how long can a lonely, jilted man resist a woman so totally opposite from his wife? A woman who has entertained his child and done her hair? And fed her when she fussed, and seemed to enjoy it? A woman who has been divorced, who has known rejection, misery and unhappiness? A woman who is casually thrown across his path by mothers who are working in tandem without a word exchanged. (269)

Mrs. Rajora wants to be the first in line for any match that may come for Raman. Mr. Rajora scolds his wife for behaving like an idiot. He doesn't think that a divorced man, already having two children, is as though such a big catch for Ishita. Mrs. Rajora knows the reality of the world, "The reality of the world was that all men were catches and only some women" (270). And this realization makes a daughter's

mother constantly watchful. Ishita is not one of those lucky women who are good catches.

Jane Flax approaches gender from the vantage point of gender relations. Gender relations have for the most part been simply relations of domination. Flax describes gender relations as:

Differentiated and asymmetrical divisions and attributions of human traits and capacities are difficult to chart and document graphically. Through gender relations two types of persons are created: man and woman. Man and woman are posited as exclusionary categories. One can be only one gender, never the other or both. If gender relations are not to continue to be relations of domination, then gender itself needs to be problematized. (173)

Flax eschews Enlightenment essentialisms and universalisms. She, too, finds that feminist notions of self, knowledge, and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment to be contained within its categories. She suggests that both sex and gender find their origin in social relations, rather than in a natural or essential difference in being.

Raman is hurt due to Arjun's reluctance and he feels an unknown distance has filled the air between him and Arjun. Raman shares his grief with Ishita "When I am alone with him its fine. But when Roo is there, he just lashes out, I don't know why, though I imagine it has to do with the divorce I can only trust it won't cause any lasting damage" (287). It introduces another image of woman, who shares everything equally with her husband, either it is drinking.

Ishita feels completeness in the company of Raman and Roo. She always yearns for such a caring family to look after, and who will love her in return. Ishita

and Raman like each other's company and share their grief. They start meeting each other frequently. Raman takes Ishita to his home to help him in caring Roo, and offers her a drink and she approves to have one. She tells him that her parents don't know about her drinks, "We used to drink sometimes when we went to friends' houses when the elders were not around" (290). Raman proposes for marriage and gifts her diamond ring.

For contemporary feminists, different processes of socialization account for a larger part of the observed differences in the behavior of men and women. Today feminists protest against the way the social institutions, supported by cultural values and normative expectations force women into an unreasonably narrow role.

Supporting this idea Luce Irigaray points:

Feminism is a philosophy that fights against such definitions of masculine and feminine, and aims at placing women in a just perspective. However, the term 'feminism' must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an extreme awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning should not be restricted to the advocacy of women's rights. Feminism has become an international school. There are different schools like Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, Existentialist and Postmodern etc. These theories cover several aspects of life aiming at women's liberty. (68)

The term feminism itself demands a broader definition. In a generic way, it has come to mean a movement to support the demand for equal, political and economic rights with men. Feminism does not mean only an awareness of women's plight but also a determination to change the situation. The treatise 'Half the Sky' defines feminism as "the awareness of the women's position in society as one of disadvantages or

inequality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages” (10).

When Arjun comes home during vacations; Ishita and Roohi, goes to Ishita’s parents’ house, leaving Raman alone with Arjun. Ishita decides to send a medical certificate to deny Roohi’s visits to Shagun. If Arjun finds Roohi fit and sound, he may tell his mother and she may file a contempt of court against them. On the contrary, Raman wants both children to spend time with each other to establish the bonding of brother and sister relationship stronger.

Ishita convinces Raman that it is not in their favour to let Arjun meet and see that Roohi is well. Raman agrees, but is partially hurt-“Why was not it possible to have everybody he loved under one roof? Thought Raman. If he was another sort of man, perhaps he would have handled such things better” (365). Raman and Ishita send a medical certificate to inform Shagun that Roohi can’t visit her because of her ill health.

As a result, Shagun pretends that Arjun too cannot visit Raman on medical grounds. If Raman is keen to see Arjun, he has to send Roohi to Shagun. But Ishita is determined not to send Roohi ever to visit Shagun. After a great deal of sacrifices her life is complete with the love of a child and husband, and right away, she can’t let anybody snatch her happiness from her:

Day by day she enveloped Roohi in a fierce and fearful love. The child was hers, if there was justice in the world she would remain hers. To this end she fasted, to this end she turned religious; to end her surreptitiously visited astrologers and numerologists. Her fingers sprouted myriad gems glinting from which gold settings: topaz,

moonstone, ruby and amethyst. She, who had objected to the pearl her mother, had forced her to wear during her first marriage. (381)

Shagun warns Raman either to visit Roohi to her, or to face a contempt of court as well as a custody case for her children, and she also threatens him that he will never be able to see Arjun. Raman tells Ishita about the conversation with Shagun, but Ishita can't let Roohi suffer between the trauma of two mothers, two homes and two countries. The post-modern feminists are wary of definitions of any kind.

Alice Jardine in her book *Men in Feminism* (1987) states:

Who and what, then do we mean by “feminist”? That word...poses some serious problems. Not that we would want to end up demanding a definition of what feminism is, and therefore, of what one must do, say, and be, if one is to acquire the epithet; dictionary meanings are suffocating, to say the least.(8)

Jardine states: “Feminism is generally understood as a movement from the point of view of, by and for women” (9). She suggests feminism as a movement by women which takes on different and very specific forms in different contexts.

Ishita herself feels unsettled in her second marriage, which she has attempted to seek fulfilment “Over the next few days her sense of danger intensified. She saw a sword dangling over the family life she had created so painstakingly. That sword must be cut down, assiduously blunted, so that it never had the power to threaten” (389). On the other side, one can notice that Shagun is unhappy with Ashok's attitude towards her children. She feels as if she is a single parent, because Ashok is interested only in Shagun, not in her children.

Feminism tends to be thought of as a movement of women, and many feminists absolutely reject the idea of allowing men into it. However, men can be as

strongly opposed to the injustices from which women suffer as women can. Feminism is not concerned with a group of people it wants to benefit, but with a type of injustice it wants to eliminate, even though on the whole the elimination of that injustice is beneficial to women than men, yet feminism is not just a movement in favour of women, but it is a movement in support against injustice.

Ishita meets Mrs. Hingorani when she visits SwargNiwas. Mrs. Hingorani finds her withdrawn and sad. Ishita shares Roohi's case with her. Mrs. Hingorani helped Ishita to get rid of her grief, when she was divorced from Suryakanta. Mrs. Hingorani reflects a real modern woman in the true sense. Through Mrs. Hingorani, Kapur expresses her views:

Now it was Mrs. Hingorni's turn to look sad. Solving family problems in court was not something she approved of Adults should behave like adults, not like the children they were fighting over. Really, why did people have babies if they were going to subject them to the messes of their own desires? (404)

On the hearing date of custody case, Ishita, Raman, Roohi and Shagun reach to the Tees Hazari Court. Shagun tries to interact with Roohi but gets no response, instead Raman, angry with Shagun, blames her of deserting Roohi at such a tender age and pretending to love her.

All of them are called by the judge inside the chamber for questioning. The judge asks some question to the parents. He wants to know about Shagun's husband's absence in the court. Therefore the judge calls them for a few questions. Roohi tells the judge that Ishita is her mother and she wants to live with her. Ishita has already prepared Roohi for such questions in the court. Eventually, Roohi's custody is provided to Raman and Ishita, and Arjun's custody is given to Shagun, till

the time the kids become eighteen years old and decide on their own. Ishita is happy and confident after the court's decision.

Manju Kapur discloses the deviations; modernity is leading in our society, and the hollowness of modern life. *Custody*, Manju Kapu's fifth novel, exposes the life of Metropolitan cities where people have become the victims of modernity. It is inspired by globalization and economic liberalization. With the initial surge of foreign investment which stormed in India, it was a period of economic and financial boom. The deluge was welcomed by investment bankers, bureaucrats, industrialists whether big or small, along with Government officials. The protagonists quite naturally have materialistic pursuits. The novel is about Raman, a developing marketing executive, his wife Shagun and Ishita.

There is the ultimate picture of exploitation, manipulation, victimization and suffering. Each character has a unique mind-set, reflecting the modern virtues that we have been adapting. The author manages to create a sublime atmosphere that exposes the various disasters that a family goes through. The future of the children is at stake. There is screaming, yelling, crying, and all the possible melodrama.

The core finding of this research is that Ishita and Shagun manipulate both their kids for the sake of custody and for their welfare. Ishita needs Roohi as she can never bear a child of her own. Shagun, being the biological mother of Arjun and Roohi, claims their custody. The novel reveals the unimagined uncertainties of marriage. The parents bargain with each other for their children for the sake of divorce. This novel gives an insight to go deeper into the heart of children who are torn between the crude and shrewd battle of their custody. In this battle of egos, she has successfully presented the sufferings of innocent children, the complexities of life and different structures of values in her novel.

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