



## **An Outline of Feministic Perspectives and Radical Feminism in Manju Kapur's Custody**

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### **APA Citation:**

Kumaran, S., Alexander, S. . (2020). . An Outline of Feministic Perspectives and Radical Feminism in Manju Kapur's Custody , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16(4), 2228-2231; 2020.

Submission Date: 25/08/2020

Acceptance Date: 30/10/2020

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### **Abstract**

Radical Feminism is an ideology that emphasizes the patriarchal underpinnings of gender inequality, particularly the social supremacy of women over men. It advocates for significant changes in contemporary society's structure, and while it lacks a singular or cohesive theoretical or political theory, it does maintain a consistent position on males. This article discusses perspectives of radical feminism in Manju Kapur's eminent novel Custody. It also examines the concept of a new woman, marital discord, sexual liberation, and self-satisfaction. Manju Kapur in Custody uses two female protagonists, Shagun and Ishita, to emphasise two important components of feminist perspectives: adultery and infertility. Motherhood is viewed as a patriarchal institution that ensures the subjugation of women through their custody in married households.

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

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the late eighteenth century, feminism began as a social movement to achieve political equality for women. It has begun to investigate male domination and the oppression of women's status in society as a critical theory. It is also seen as a revolt against patriarchal and sexual belligerence in general. Feminism, as a social movement, focuses heavily on limiting or eliminating gender inequality and promoting women's rights, liberties, interests, and concerns in society. Radical Feminism is an ideology that emphasises the patriarchal underpinnings of gender inequality, particularly the social supremacy of women over men. It considers patriarchy as dividing societal rights, liberties, licence, and authority primarily along sex lines, as a result of which women are oppressed while males are upheld. It advocates for significant changes in contemporary society's structure, and while it lacks a singular or cohesive theoretical or political theory, it does maintain a consistent position on males.

Radical feminists see patriarchy, or male supremacy, as the primary and unifying cause of women's subordination, owing to its restrictions on women's reproductive potential, sexuality, and femininity concept. They all oppose the current political and social structure because it is inextricably linked to male domination. They are also skeptical about political action within the present system, preferring to focus on cultural change that undermines male domination and related hierarchical institutions. Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Kate Millet, and Juliet Mitchel, among others, are famous radical feminists.

We can trace the beginnings of Indian writing in English by women writers all the way back to the late 1800s. In India, this is a big step forward for feminism. Indian women were exposed to appealing and exciting Western culture, ideas, philosophy, literature, and movements. They were given the opportunity to express their Indianness through the newly formed English language. English-language writers in India have also emerged from their cocoons and begun to speak up for the voiceless in their society. Feminists, in particular, try to solve the problems of underprivileged women. India has progressed from a magnificent past to deterioration, from spiritual control to communal battles, from incarceration to emancipation, and so on.

Manju Kapur contributed significantly to the evolution of Indian fiction as a post-colonial writer. She instinctively recognizes the condition of women in a male-dominated culture and describes the women's problem. Her works depict not only women's relationships, but also social issues such as the civil rights movement and partition, among others. Her essays address patriarchy, interfaith marriage and family bonds, male-female bonds, and the coexistence of past and present. Her female protagonist is portrayed as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence, and circumstance. Her works also address issues such as gender bias, male-female relationships, human desire, insurrection, and protest. *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody* are a few of her notable works.

Manju Kapur's female characters are all depicted as persevering despite all circumstances. Her writing reflects the fury of feminism. This is seen in her female characters' struggle, their fragility and quest for identity, liberated attitude, female mentality, and feminine biological world. Manju Kapur is a contemporary feminist. *Custody* (2011), her enthralling fifth novel, was her crowning achievement. Many critics consider this novel to be feminist, although it addresses all aspects of marital and family life in Indian society that are both distressing and soothing for everyone. Further this novel is not only curbed to man-woman relationship or the subjugation of feminine but also it delineates with the life of children of a broken family. The institution of marriage and the hollowness of modern matrimony is portrayed dolefully in this novel.

Manju Kapur's stories are like freshly turned pages, reflecting the winds of change, and her heroes are convincing advocates for change. In her novel *Custody*, she uses her two female protagonists, Shagun and Ishita, to illustrate two important facets of feminist perspectives: infidelity and infertility. This novel also tells the story of child custody after a parent's departure from India, as well as the Indian court system. Kapur delves into the lives of wealthy, metropolitan, middle-class Indians, revealing their dark secrets, unstable relationships, and yearning for independence and peace. She strives to extract significant new meanings from the changed reality of cultural settings in which marital roles, dual concerns, equal chances, and societal constraints are examined from a feminist perspective.

Kapur depicts the two distinct aspects of the female counterpart, infidelity and infertility, in *Custody*. Infidelity empowers a woman; infertility, on the other side, forbids her. Through the characters of Shagun and Ishita, Kapur seeks to show the plights, depressions, alienation, and agony of modern women in their search for self-satisfaction. She explores extramarital relationships and uses sexual liberty as a confrontational strategy to challenge patriarchal ideals and stereotypes.

Furthermore, in modern life, this story emphasises the evolution of individual tendencies. Without regard for social standards or ethics, everyone chases their own satisfaction. The tale begins with the story of Shagun and Raman, who married according to tradition when she was just twenty-two years old. She gave birth to a baby boy named Arjun not long after. Everything was going well until her son was almost eight years old, when she gave birth to a baby girl named Roohi, for whom she was unprepared emotionally. As time passes, Raman becomes increasingly preoccupied with his work, ignoring Shagun and his children. As a result, there was a lack of communication and a lot of miscommunication between them. She loses hope in her own life.

She aspires to be a role model for her family, but her life changed drastically after she married. "After marriage there had been a child. Then the claims of husband, family and friends made a career hard to justify, especially since money was not an issue." (Custody 11) When Ashok Khanna arrived, her life was turned upside down. She develops feelings for him. Kapur presents her as a self-sufficient woman who wants to enjoy her life to the fullest. She spoke out against male supremacy, patriarchal systems, and women's subordination in the guise of marriage, culture, and custom. Shagun's betrayal of Raman reveals the adultery and vainness of a modern marriage in which one's own self is more important than anything else. Despite the fact that Shagun possesses many abilities to shape her profession and live a vibrant life, she is enslaved by the institution of marriage and the patriarchal system. Regardless of these factors, this relationship gives her with a pleasurable experience and teaches her to be self-reliant, confident, and independent.

Ishita is another protagonist who, in contrast to Shagun, plays a role in which Kapur addresses the issue of female infertility. Infertility is viewed as a curse in Indian society, and Ishita fell victim to it, losing her life. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rajora, have only one child. Mr. and Mrs. Rajora, like traditional Indian parents, plan to marry her as soon as they discover a suitable proposal. After two years of marriage, it became evident that Ishita had some pregnancy concerns, and her in laws treated her as if she was to blame. As a result, Ishita suffers from emotional pain. Kapur exposes the hollowness of marital life through Ishita's life, where a woman is defamed because of her infertility and the fact that she is unable to take her family name to the next level. She was subjected to severe mental tortures and misery because she had no one to look after her or assist her. Even her mother-in-law couldn't understand or sympathise with Ishita's situation.

Motherhood is viewed as a patriarchal institution that ensures women's subjugation in married life through their custody. Kapur depicts the terrible, distinct experiences that an infertile lady has with her infertility. Ishita suffers from a sense of disconnection from herself and believes she is failing to fulfil her responsibilities as a woman. Her mother-in-law does not want to waste any more money on her, so she mulls over the following: "Had there been something wrong with Suryakant, they would have moved heaven and earth to get a son's defect corrected. In an ideal world the same resources would have been put at the disposal of a daughter in law. But this was not an ideal world" (Custody 68).

In recent years, the topic of female sexuality has sparked heated debates and debates among academics. The modern writers recognise that if women wish to be powerful and liberated, they must confront the patriarchal system, culture, and engage in debates and conflicts over sex morality (patriarchy) and female sexuality. The new sexual ideology is built not in its restriction and suppression, but in its privilege and assertion. Through the characters of Shagun and Ishita, the entire article eloquently depicts radical feminism's viewpoints. Despite the fact that Shagun's decision goes against Indian norms, she is happy and comfortable as an independent woman. Both people desire to rediscover themselves in society and break free from patriarchy's grips. Kapur, as a radical feminist, uses Shagun and Ishita to speak out

against the patriarchal system. Divorce is not a barrier to a woman's ability to succeed in society. It was vividly illustrated by Ishita. This article is a critique of motherhood, marriage, the nuclear family, and sexuality in light of radical feminism, exploring how much our culture is constructed on patriarchal ideals.

The novel's whole plot revolves around issues of freedom and identity in the context of a man-woman relationship. She strongly opposes the traditional social environment, which obstructs women's liberation and exacerbates their servitude. Kapur eloquently encapsulates an Indian mindset that sees a woman solely through the lens of her job as a wife. She effectively illustrates the truth that a woman receives love and respect in patriarchal society because of her body, and that if her body fails to play the conventionally expected role, her marriage may be jeopardised. In such a society, marriage is the female's enslavement for the sake of the continuance of her husband's bloodline, and the woman is viewed as a reproductive machine with no personality. Ishita is rejected when she fails to play the prescribed gender role. Shagun, who dares to breach the threshold of her husband's home and emerges as a modern woman, and Ishita, who rises after her failed marriage and emerges as a strong and independent woman in Custody, are two of Kapur's protagonists.

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