

# Consequences of Ishita's Infertility in Indian Patriarchal Society: An Analysis of Manju Kapur's *Custody* through Third World Feminism

Ramesh Prasad Adhikary, PhD\*

## Abstract

The major goal of this research is to examine the phenomena of female exploitation in patriarchal culture via a thorough examination of the character of Ishita in Manju Kapur's novel *Custody* from the standpoint of third-world feminism. Additionally, this research aims to examine the implications of divorce, alienation, identity crisis, and uncertainties of matrimony within the context of upper-middle-class urban Indian families. The novel *Custody* portrays the story of Ishita, a young Indian woman who is compelled to divorce due to infertility. The novel provides a dramatic illustration of the consequences of divorce, broken marriage, and remarriage within the context of upper-middle-class urban Indian families. Ishita's character undergoes a stage of isolation, loss of individual identity, and a sense of alienation. This research employs the postcolonial version of feminism to scrutinize the female protagonist characters Ishita and Sagun. The study attempts to investigate a number of third-world/postcolonial concerns, including linguistic dominance, broken marriages, alienation, despair, suffering, and gloom. The findings of this research indicate that the novel *Custody* by Manju Kapur is an outstanding representation of the consequences of divorce, broken marriage, and remarriage within the context of upper-middle-class urban Indian families. Ishita's character undergoes severe psychological distress, and her journey is to assert her motherhood, a task complicated by patriarchy. The research concludes that third world feminism is a useful tool for analyzing the sense of female manipulation and domination in patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Feminism, Exploitation, Motherhood, Divorce, Infertility

## Introduction

This study intends to investigate how divorce, separation, and remarriage are portrayed in upper middle-class urban Indian households under Manju Kapur's *Custody*. Specifically, the research explores the role of women in patriarchal society, where they are often treated as subhuman or not as human beings. The central female character, Ishita, is a young Indian girl who is divorced due to her infertility, and the novel portrays her as receiving less sympathy from her mother-in-law and experiencing rejection instead of love. The novel also portrays elements of isolation, loss of individual identity, and a sense of alienation. Ishita's child is subjected to social stigma, emotional exploitation, and psychological pressure. Through the

\*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj, Nepal

character of Ishita, the research illuminates the hollowness of marital life and the severe mental torture she endures at the hands of her family.

This project employs a postcolonial version of feminism to analyze the female protagonists Ishita and Sagun in Manju Kapur's novel *Custody*, who experience feelings of suffocation and the aftermath of divorce resulting from a broken family. Adultery, extramarital love, and sexual freedom serve as instruments of resistance against patriarchal myths and values used to suppress women. The research focuses on analyzing third-world/postcolonial issues including broken marriages, alienation, sadness, suffering, and a sense of failure as well as dominance via language and other negative emotions.

Third World Feminism emerged as a distinct and historically specific strand within feminist discourse during the late 20th century, primarily highlighting the experiences and struggles of women in the global South. Rooted in postcolonial theory, Third World Feminism sought to address the intersections of gender, race, and class within the context of decolonization and anti-imperialist movements. It critiqued Western-centric feminist perspectives for their limited applicability to the diverse realities faced by women in the Third World. Herr (2014) posited that third World and transnational feminisms have emerged as responses to the limitations of single-focused analyses by white second-wave feminists, which overlooked the diverse and intricate oppressions experienced by Third World women across various social contexts. These feminisms share two central mandates: the need for historically situated analyses of Third World women's oppression and resistance, and the imperative to respect the agency and voices of Third World women.

In this work, the researcher employs the theories of third world feminism and African feminism to examine the struggles of women in patriarchal societies. Third world feminism acknowledges the challenges that women in third world countries face, where women are often subject to social and cultural constraints. Women who make choices regarding their own lives, such as choosing their own marriage partners, are often met with negative consequences and are deemed to have brought shame to their families. Even religion is used as a tool to suppress women's wants, desires, fears, and humor. Mohanty (2010) recognizes the power of third world feminist thinking and the importance of respecting the basic values of women, such as family dignity and service to others. However, patriarchal societies often do not allow women to live their lives according to their own will and desires, as demonstrated by the character of Ishita, who is forced to marry for the sake of her family's reputation. The researcher concludes that this is the reality for many women living in third world countries.

Indian author Manju Kapur teaches English at Delhi University. She has authored five books, including *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Eurasia) and gained critical praise internationally. Kapur is renowned for her incisive depictions of Indian middle-class life and her investigation into how overarching modern storylines, including economic liberalization and globalization, affect the most private aspects of people's lives.

The fifth book by Kapur, *Custody*, is set in Delhi in the middle of the 1990s, a time when India was seeing a boom in foreign investment. The plot centers on Raman and Shagun, a seemingly ideal marriage with two kids, but when Shagun meets Raman's new employer, Ashok, their relationship starts to fall apart. The story examines married relationships' ambiguity as well as the nasty court dispute that develops over their two children. Ishita, a lady without children who longs to be a mother, is drawn into the dispute. *Custody* exposes flaws in the Indian legal system and demonstrates how family love may turn into an obsession with having children.

In the book *Custody*, the weight of individuality and the general challenges of contemporary marriage are explored. Kapur uses a group of individuals who could well be one's neighbors to craft an amazing and heartbreaking story of love, sorrow, and treachery. Raman and Shagun are described as the picture-perfect couple who appear to have it all, but their marriage is troubled by adultery, which ultimately results in a contentious custody dispute over their two children. Another character, Ishita, also experiences marital difficulties since her infertility causes her marriage to fail. The gendered structure of custody disputes in India, where males frequently refuse to grant divorce but women have a stronger claim to their children, is another issue Kapur discusses. Instead of focusing on social scandal or familial humiliation, the book focuses on how these problems impact the protagonists. Until the book's second half, when the terrible results of the custody dispute are disclosed, the children in the story stay unnoticed in the background. The story of the Indian middle class, which is conflicted between traditional beliefs and Western ambitions, is told in *Custody* in a way that is both thought-provoking and amusing.

Shagun and Raman's cycle of fury is exacerbated by new stepmothers and stepfathers who have been acquired through second marriages. Nevertheless, Kapur avoids generalizations or moralizing and instead depicts both sides obtaining legal advice and drawing battle lines early on. Kapur handles the difficulties that result from these complicated family structures and the insecurity it causes for the step-parents as well as the kids in an effective manner. While Ashok depicts a more ambiguous form of caring, Ishita's role exposes the second wife's frantic

attempt to take the place of the original mother. Instead of spending too much time investigating whether Shagun's adultery scandalizes society, Kapur concentrates on how it impacts her characters. The backdrop themes of societal decorum and familial humiliation from the novel are still very much present.

### Research Objective

1. To analyze the manipulation and domination of women in a patriarchal society.
2. To illustrate the consequences of divorce, alienation, identity crisis, and uncertainties of matrimony through the critical examination of the character of Ishita in Kapur's *Custody*.
3. To explore how motherhood is portrayed as an intuition of patriarchy in this novel and how women who are unable to bear children are subjected to divorce, as exemplified by the character of Ishita.

### Literature Review

Various literary critics have provided their individual perspectives on Manju Kapur's *Custody*. One such reviewer, Akbar (2011), described the book as a depiction of marriage at its most intolerable, after the emotional fallout of a breakup in an affluent, extended Delhi family, in her review. Akbar highlights the novel's central conflict: a custody battle for the children. The story is fueled by the affair that leads to the separation and subsequent divorce of the couple. The novel then delves into the intricacies of legal procedures and psychological turbulence associated with the custody battle. Akbar emphasizes that the novel is centered around a socially unacceptable romance, which is recurrent in Kapur's fiction, leading to separation, divorce, and re-marriage. Overall, Akbar presents a comprehensive analysis of *Custody*, highlighting its focus on the themes of romance, separation, divorce, and re-marriage, and the resulting psychological and legal complexities. Another critic Benerji (2011) in *The Guardian* writes:

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.

Benerji draws emphasis to women's suffering in the abstract above by stressing their sensation of suffocation, their husbands' fear of being alone, and the incessant movement of their children. Despite marriage being well-trodden territory, the author's possession of the subject is complete. The portrayal of women as being under the domination of their husbands or suffering from male fear and torture is emphasized. Similarly, Umachandran (2011) in *The Times of India* discusses the consequences of a broken marriage, with a focus on the long-term effects on all those involved, particularly the children. The struggle that arises when women's traditional Indian ideals and other cultures collide is highlighted in the book. The women in the book are not portrayed as particularly spectacular, ambitious, or successful, resulting in negative effects on people and divorce with children

In the 1990s, India was experiencing a greater involvement in the global economy and a shift towards individualism, surpassing traditional ideas of family duty. While various critics have addressed the issues of women's suffering after divorce and the custody battles that may ensue, little critical attention is found on the role of motherhood.

This research draws on the insights of the Third World Feminism and postcolonial feminist critics and examines the suffering, identity crisis, and despair experienced by the female characters in Kapur's *Custody*. The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate how Ishita's character suffers as a result of the manipulation and domination of patriarchal society in the novel.

### Methodology

The research article aimed to examine the phenomenon of female exploitation in patriarchal society by conducting an in-depth analysis of the character of Ishita in Manju Kapur's novel *Custody*. The perspective of third world feminism was employed to scrutinize the female protagonist characters, Ishita and Sagun. The research aimed to explore various third-world/postcolonial issues, such as broken marriage, alienation, depression, misery, gloominess, sense of failure, quest for liberty, and domination through language. In order to investigate the subject of female characters and their fights for liberation, the researcher draws on the theory of third country feminism. Third country Feminism has been defined as a collection of feminist ideologies created by third country feminists. They acquire their views and took part in feminist politics.

The research project employed a postcolonial version of feminism to analyze the female protagonists Ishita and Sagun in Manju Kapur's novel *Custody*,

who experienced feelings of suffocation and the aftermath of divorce resulting from a broken family. The study focused on analyzing third-world/postcolonial issues such as broken marriages, alienation, despair, sadness, and a sense of failure, as well as dominance via language and feelings of sorrow and suffering.

### Discussion

In both Indian and global contexts, the book *Custody* examines the dispute between two parents over their children as well as the ambitions of contemporary Indian women for independence. Shagun and Ishita, two female characters in the book, fight to achieve happiness, and their sufferings are depicted. The main character is Shagun, a middle-class wife of a corporate advertising who has an adulterous relationship with Ashok Khanna, her husband's employer. The novel portrays the conflicting aspects of female embodiment and betrayal, and examines how women are becoming more individualistic, while marriage remains a source of conflict for their liberty. Shagun's sexuality is portrayed as empowering and defying patriarchal control, and her relationship with Khanna is used as a resistance to patriarchal values. Overall, the novel highlights the changing role of women in society and their struggle for freedom and independence.

The novel *Custody* portrays the marriage between Raman and Shagun, which begins with the traditional expectation of beauty and prospects. Shagun's first pregnancy is well publicized, and she gives birth to a son out of duty as a daughter-in-law. She is disappointed with her second kid, a daughter, because she resembles her father. In contrast, Ishita shares everything with her husband Suryakanta, despite her inability to conceive. Shagun hides her affair with Ashok from her husband and feels burdened by the need to constantly cover her tracks. She views her relationship with Ashok as a way to fulfill her unfulfilled desires from her college days. On the other hand, Ishita struggles with infertility and goes from healer to seer, herbalist to hospital, in search of a solution. Her inability to conceive creates stress, emotional abuse, and social disgrace within her marriage, shattering her happy life. Ishita feels as happy life is going to end:

Ishita was the dear daughter-in-law in the past. Now she was treated as undeserving and infertile. In the hospital she feels 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, while she sat in the gynecologist's office with her mother-in-law, watching as the doctor sketched out the messages concealed in her body. (p. 65)

In the novel *Custody*, the harsh reality is depicted where a woman is

subjected to disgrace in a conventional society due to her inability to bear a child. Suryakanta, who was once inseparable from Ishita, is now willing to divorce her, while she is thrown out of her in-law's house. Ishita feels shattered and ethereal, as she is being punished for her imperfect body.

Simone de Beauvoir's work emphasizes the inequality of gender relations, where the woman is defined in relation to man and is often considered the incidental, inessential "Other." This perspective leads to the negative qualities being assigned to women, while men assume the position of the Subject and the Absolute. Beauvoir (1952) argues that men fear female competition and control women's sexual initiation and pleasure. Women are not free to choose their erotic destiny, and their lives are often limited to tending children and being bound to one man. She believes that the bond between men and women should be based on mutual love and consent. Beauvoir (1952) also examines the issues of unwanted motherhood, unmarried motherhood, and abortion. Ultimately, de Beauvoir calls for the emancipation of women from the bonds of slavery to achieve equality.

The novel *Custody* not only examines the problem of infertility but also divorce, the duality of contemporary society, the bond between parents and children, and the desire for independence. It serves as a representation of the modern Indian woman who is forging a new path in society. The novel emphasizes the importance for women to recognize and affirm themselves as independent human beings rather than mere attachments to male counterparts. *Custody* sheds light on the negative effects of modernity on society, including the emptiness it brings to people's lives. It also reveals the realities of life in metropolitan areas where people often become victims of modernity.

Shagun succumbs easily to a relationship with Ashok, who is adept at manipulating people and extracting the best out of them, as the book *Custody* describes, "Ashok's reputation was based on his ability to get the best out of people" (9). Due to Raman's frequent job-related travel and prolonged absences from home, Shagun experiences exhaustion and homesickness while caring for their children alone. Consequently, she is attracted to Ashok's charming demeanor and flattery. Ashok is employed at the same brand where Raman has worked for many years, and he is also drawn to Shagun's extraordinary beauty. Ashok gives her the chance to serve as a model for the business after the two fall in love. Shagun hurriedly accepts the proposal since she wants to realize her ambition of becoming a model. Ashok, charmed by Shagun's beauty, then starts to carry out his wooing strategy:

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 initiates an affair with Ashok seeking to add excitement to her dull routine, but gradually becomes further entangled. Ashok desires to have her from the very moment he encounters her, as possessing her would put an end to the peculiar void in his existence.

Mohanty's work "Feminism Without Borders" criticizes the restrictive measures of patriarchy on third-world women's freedom. She strongly argues against defining women solely as victims of male control and violence, which freezes them into objects who defend themselves while men are perceived as subjects who perpetrate violence. Mohanty (2010) opposes the male-dominated society that does not consider women's desires and instead creates a consensus for physical violence against women, such as rape and sexual assault. Women are seen as powerless objects to defend the chauvinism of men who are taken as powerful objects to commit violence against women, which is a bitter reality for third-world women.

Shagun had not entertained the idea of divorcing her husband, Raman, or abandoning her children to marry Ashok. As stated in the text, "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). However, Ashok, who is skilled in manipulating people both in his personal life and at work, is adamant about marrying Shagun and taking her with him to New York when he is posted there. Shagun declines, stating "Don't bother you will finish and go I have to stay for my children" (81). Nevertheless, Ashok persists in his efforts to persuade 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 highlight the gender bias in Indian society regarding the birth of a baby boy versus a baby girl. A girl is seen as a burden whereas a male is seen as the family's successor. The birth of a son elevates Shagun's rank and releases her from the duty of producing an heir. In contrast, parents continue trying for a male after having a daughter. Astha is urged by Hemant to keep trying for a son.

In the framework of a gendered society; women's identities are very useful yet have limited market value. The impact of divorce on the psychological well-being and future prospects of children, whether they are young or grown-ups, is a matter of great concern. Arjun, a kid of divorced parents, is depicted in the book to have stopped attending school as a result of his feelings of guilt over having a single parent. He observes other children enjoying time with both their parents, while he feels embarrassed about his situation. Shagun, the mother, portrays Raman, the father, in a negative light to their daughter Roohi, claiming that he is trying to harm her. This tactic is used to create a negative image of Raman in Roohi's mind. The novel highlights the struggles and suffering of children due to their parents' decisions. Research suggests that children of divorced parents are at an increased risk of psychological issues compared to children of non-divorced parents. The negative impact of divorce on children can manifest in various ways, such as physical symptoms like stomach and leg pain, poor academic performance, and other mental health concerns.

Raman was responsible for tutoring Arjun for his class tests and exams. However, due to various incidents in her life, Shagun forgets about the schedule of Arjun's tests. As his behavior deteriorates, Arjun begins to pinch Roohi whenever he tries to get his mother's attention and resorts to signing his mother's name on his exam papers. He is envious of Ashok, as he has taken up Shagun's focus entirely. Although Shagun is aware of the reason for Arjun's behavior, she is unable to help him. Arjun must learn to cope without Raman. The impact of parental separation can lead to significant behavioral and psychological problems in children, which requires attention and support from both parents.

Simone de Beauvoir's argument is that women are not inherently inferior to men; rather, it is society and its traditions that create gender inequality. She argues that women are not born, but rather become women through socialization and education. Throughout history, women have been relegated to a secondary status in relation to men, but this is not due to any inherent weakness or inferiority on the part of women. Instead, it is the result of societal expectations and traditions that have been controlled by men. De Beauvoir argues that women must be granted the same intellectual and professional opportunities as men in order to achieve true equality, and that failure to do so has led to various social problems.

For a change of scenery, Ashok advises to Shagun sending Arjun to boarding school. Everything Ashok says about Arjun hurts Shagun: "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 makes every effort to get Arjun to attend his lessons, but he is adamant about staying the course. Shagun eventually

gives the suggestion Ashok made to her some thought and tells her son that she would be sending him to the boarding school Dehradun Public Academy. Any recommendation pertaining to his schoolwork and school is not given any consideration by Arjun:

Arjun averted his gaze. She focused on his back. Don't push him; just let the thought go; if he doesn't want to go, it won't work, Ashok had said. Additionally, don't amuse him or coddle him; just leave him alone. Another was deciding, guiding, and making decisions. Even if her own approach had failed, it felt weird. (172)

Arjun thinks it is a good idea to go to a place where no one would know about his parents' divorce; this way, he won't have to put up with the sympathy and curiosity of others around him or accept shunning friends. But he also feels uneasy leaving Ashok to look after his mother in Delhi. He feared leaving his mother in the care of that man (173). Shagun acts as though the transition from Raman Kaushik's life to Ashok Khanna's is as natural as putting on a new outfit, but Arjun feels uncomfortable living with Ashok, a stranger who hardly ever communicates with him and who offers to help him study for the entrance exam.

Roohi experiences other effects of her parents' divorce, such as thumb sucking and nighttime bedwetting. Shagun is powerless while fully understanding the causes of the changes in her daughter's life. "Let the thumb at least be constant in all the recent upheavals" (254). According to the agreement, Roohi is dispatched with Raman, and Shagun is allowed to travel to New York and reside with Ashok.

The novel under consideration underscores the fatigued state of the judicial system in India, as seen through the lens of the custody battle over two young children. Raman, the father of the children, seeks advice from his cousin Nandan, following their abduction by their mother Shagun. Nandan advises Raman to build a strong case for custody against Shagun, stating that it would require a plethora of evidence, including diaries, letters, and witnesses, to prove her unsuitability as a mother, exposing the children to nefarious influences. Despite Raman's initial reluctance to disclose his personal life publicly, he eventually acquiesces, recognizing the importance of securing custody of his children. Without an agreement between the parties, a dispute is certain, according to Nandan, and because such cases sometimes take years to resolve, clients get disenchanted. In contrast, Shagun files for divorce from Raman because she wants to relocate overseas with Ashok and has to do so in order to get a visa in his name.

Raman apprises Nandan about Arjun's transfer from VV, one of Delhi's best

schools, to DPA, a boarding school. In response, Nandan inquires about Arjun's willingness to move, but Raman struggles to articulate the nuanced emotions and sensations he experiences while observing his son's behavior. Specifically, he struggles to convey "the variations of his son's breath, the quality of his silence, [and] the visual image of a frightened eleven-year-old getting in touch with his father after many months" (204). Despite Nandan's suggestion to file a stay order against the removal of Arjun, Raman refuses to do so, unwilling to subject his son to any uncomfortable situations. Nandan opines that Raman lacks the killer instinct required to secure custody of his child, but Raman remains unwilling to jeopardize his children's well-being.

Shagun tries to help Ashok and Arjun get along by asking Ashok to help Arjun with his entrance exam preparation and by sharing stories from Ashok's time at DPA. Shagun is disappointed because Ashok appears disinterested. Shagun is adamant on enrolling Arjun at the boarding school after Raman accuses her of keeping the child away from him and launches a lawsuit against her for sending Arjun to DPA. She coerces Arjun into saying he hates VV and then uses a letter from the school to show that he hasn't been coming to class in a while, getting him ready for any questions the judge might have.

In the novel, the characters try to maintain privacy about their personal lives. The official story is that the children stay with Naani in Alaknanda. However, the court's rigid and unchanging attitude towards people and their lives is problematic. They have the power to take away children and imprison individuals. Arjun could even be asked by the judge who he wants to live with since dads in this unjust society have greater rights than male children. Even if it is evident that Arjun is a part of his mother and resembles her, he must express his desire to live with her.

Raman is upset by his son's stupidity since he knows Shagun has been playing tricks on him. As retaliation for Raman's rejection of a divorce, she wants to permanently remove Arjun from the relationship. Ashok and Shagun are to blame in Raman's eyes for taking the soul of his family. The court grants Raman, who has always been a decent parent, visiting privileges. Even though Raman is somewhat happy that he may see his kids on the weekends, Arjun has a harder time adjusting to the move than Roohi, who is too little to comprehend (213). Raman has a dream about a large playing field where he is running in circles, sweating profusely. The area is surrounded by impenetrable hedges, beyond which are boundary walls with iron-barred gates guarded by sentry-like kiosks. Arjun knows that he dreams when he is troubled by his parents, and this upsets him. He cannot trust his father to understand his new life. (224)

In order to go abroad with Ashok, Shagun insists that a divorce is necessary. Raman is skeptical of Shagun's intentions after her previous betrayal of kidnapping their children, as he fears she may do so again and take them overseas permanently. Shagun becomes frustrated with Raman's demeanor and the way he informs her mother that Roohi is ill and unable to see him on the weekends. This draws attention to the corruption problem in India, where it is simple to get a medical certificate even from unprofessional physicians. Since getting this communication three weeks ago, Raman has struggled to fathom his life without Roohi. In the end, Shagun and Raman decide to get a divorce on mutual terms, giving Shagun visitation rights but giving Raman custody of the kids. Shagun gives up all rights to property and gives up all valuables, requesting merely a divorce. Both parties can be remarried after the documents are signed.

The examination of Ishita's life constitutes an endeavor to shed light on issues associated with a woman's pursuit of identity, self-realization, and her journey towards autonomy. This literary work narrates the lives of two women of the same generation, who have divergent lives and perspectives. Ishita faces rejection due to her infertility, while Shagun is accustomed to affection and admiration. Ishita's parents reside near Raman's parents, and Mrs. Kaushik favors Ishita for her amiable demeanor. Although Ishita is not strikingly beautiful, she possesses an exquisite smile with beautiful, even teeth. Upon completing her Bachelor of Arts, Ishita's parents decide that she should pursue a Bachelor of Education, stating that "if she got a job in a government school, she will have security, a steady income as well as lighter hours at work, that future matrimony demanded" (52). Ishita intends to secure a job before tying the knot - "Marriage was far from Ishita's thoughts. She knew it lay in her future but she wanted to work first" (52). Hence, when she completes her Bachelor of Education, she applies for a teaching position. But at the same time, her parents find a marriage proposal suitable for their loving daughter. This work also reveals the blind religious beliefs of Indian society, which result in the starvation and suffering of women. Ishita complies with her mother-in-law's directives without questioning them, as her mother has advised her. She "fasts on Tuesdays" (56) and does "the special jap 108 times a day" (56). Kapur also recounts the incident of God's drinking milk all over India. Eventually, all temples are thronged with devotees offering milk to God and seeking to fulfill their desires. Ishita's mother informs her of this miracle, and Ishita also goes to offer milk to God. However, nothing helps her conceive.

Suryakanta informs his mother of the meeting with the doctor, stating "Papa and Mummy will know what to do." Ishita is too depressed due to her body, which has let her down in this most basic function. She cannot bring herself to face anyone after the whole incident. She had not anticipated such a 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 regarded this family as hers, relishing in the togetherness, sharing, and companionship. Now, instead of love all around her, there would be rejection" (63).

During her next visit to the doctor, Ishita's mother-in-law accompanies her instead of Suryakanta because she wants to know precisely what the problem is and its remedy. On the way to the doctor, her mother-in-law peruses her HSG report and medical papers. They do not converse about anything during the trip.

The impact of divorce on individuals can be significant, affecting their economic, mental, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as their current and future relationships. Divorced individuals may experience higher levels of depression and anxiety and have a poorer self-concept than married individuals. Divorce can also lead to social isolation and smaller social networks. In another context, the protagonist in the given passage, Ishita, experiences grief and self-hatred due to her infertility and past mistreatment by her husband. She eventually decides to teach slum children, despite objections from her mother, to find purpose and move forward.

In feminist theory, a third space is identified where it can operate to deconstruct all identity and binary oppositions. However, in the process of deconstructing patriarchal metaphysics, there is a risk of dismantling the very logic that underlies the two forms of feminism of sameness and difference, resulting in logical and strategic incompatibility of the three spaces of feminism.

Ishita desires to move forward in her life, but due to her inability to have children, she finds it fulfilling to work with many children. In pursuit of a purposeful life, she begins teaching at Mrs. Hingorani's school. She describes her grief receding like a drop of ink lost in a bucket of water in the Mandavali region. During PTA meetings, Ishita comes across poor women who struggle with a variety of requirements, such as empty stomachs, inebriated spouses, illiterate kids, and no way out of poverty. Ishita gains self-assurance from working with Mrs. Hingorani's NGO and her father feels proud of her when he notices the brightness in her face.

Ishita participates in a protest march to Parliament House with Mrs. Hingorani over the testing of nuclear weapons in the Pakharan Desert. She draws comparisons between herself and the women who participated in the liberation movement and risked being arrested. Ishita challenges her father's assertion that his daughter has matured more via her job with the NGO than in her years of marriage, saying

that India can not claim to be a world power when it cannot even provide for its children.

Ishita rejects the suitor's proposal since she doesn't find him fascinating. The result might even be a lonely life. Instead of marrying someone who won't even allow her leave the house without him, she might choose to live a lonely life. There is no chance of getting married to him if he cannot trust her. Ishita is introduced to a couple who have recently adopted a kid by Mrs. Hingorani, who also advises her to adopt a child to liven up her dull existence. Ishita discovers the mother, who is beaming with joy rather than being punished for her infertility like Ishita. "Her husband instead of looking for a new wife was content to beam with her" (182) Ishita writes. Ishita imagines herself as a machine that exclusively produces children, thinking about how she was divorced only for her inability to conceive. The woman wishes that "Maybe 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 dreams while knowing that it is pointless to wish for anything at the moment.

Mrs. Kaushik and Mrs. Rajora forge a friendship based on the shared misfortune of their divorced children, betrayed by their former partners. As they discuss their children and failed marriages, Mrs. Kaushik suggests that Mrs. Rajora introduce Ishita to Raman during his visit to Swarg Niwas with Roohi. Mrs. Kaushik reasons that the two individuals, both struggling with similar circumstances, may find solace in each other's company and be able to overcome their respective sorrows.

In the face of her struggles, Ishita must contend with the attempts of Raman's second wife to replace her as Roohi's biological mother, while Ashok's attempts at care are more ambiguous. When Ishita visits Raman and Roohi, she plays with the child and feeds her, eliciting pity from Raman at the thought that Roohi lacks a maternal figure. Raman's thoughts turn to Shagun, and he despises her for reducing their children to having to rely on the kindness of strangers for maternal care: "He was dependent on strangers for a motherly touch – that was what she had reduced them to" (267). Though initially unimpressed by Ishita's physical appearance, Raman begins to take notice of her kind behavior towards 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 expresses her desire to be the first in line for any potential match that may come for Raman, but her husband scolds her for acting foolishly. He believes that a divorced man with two children is not as desirable a partner for Ishita as Mrs. Rajora thinks. However, Mrs. Rajora is aware of the reality of the world, where all men are seen as catches, but only some women are considered as such (270). This realization makes her constantly watchful as a mother of a daughter who is not considered a good catch like some women.

In the novel, Ishita is shown to be struggling in her second marriage and feels a sense of danger looming over her family life. Meanwhile, Shagun is unhappy with Ashok's lack of interest in her children and expects him to help her with the issue of visitation rights for Roohi. Shagun feels burdened by her past and mentions her grief to her mother in a letter. Raman learns that Ashok is coming to South-East Asia as head of the region and may file a case of contempt of court against him. Nandan suggests that Raman lodge a case before Shagun does it. Raman and Ishita file a lawsuit requesting that forcing Roohi against her will to visit her biological mother would be psychologically damaging and cruel, as Roohi loves her stepmother.

When Ishita visited Swarg Niwas, she met Mrs. Hingorani, who noticed that Ishita appeared withdrawn and sad. Ishita confided in Mrs. Hingorani about Roohi's case, and Mrs. Hingorani was able to help her overcome her grief from her divorce with Suryakanta. According to Kapur, Mrs. Hingorani embodies the true essence of a modern woman. Mrs. Hingorani emphasized her disdain of resolving family disputes in court when she thought back on the custody dispute. She thought that grownups ought to behave like grownups and not like the kids they were fighting over. Mrs. Hingorani further questioned the purpose of having children if one is only going to expose one to the results of one's own aspirations.

Ishita, Raman, Roohi, and Shagun came to Tees Hazari Court on the day of the detention hearing. Shagun made an effort to communicate with Roohi, but she got no answer. Raman was furious with Shagun and said that she had betrayed Roohi when still a child and pretended to love her.

The judge called the parties to the custody dispute into his chambers to conduct interrogations. The judge enquired as to why Shagun's spouse wasn't present in court and questioned the parents. Ishita is Roohi's mother, and she told the judge she wanted to live with her. For such in-court interrogation, Ishita had previously prepared Roohi. In the end, the court gave Raman and Ishita custody of

Roohi, while Shagun was given custody of Arjun until the kids are old enough to make their own decisions (at the age of 18). After the court's decision, Ishita felt satisfied and confident.

### Conclusion

Finally, Manju Kapur's novel *Custody* examines the difficulties of marriage, divorce, custody, and the position of women in Indian society. Ishita and Shagun exploit their kids for custody and their wellbeing, according to the study's main result. The tale explores the many social value systems and depicts the pain of innocent youngsters caught up in a custody dispute. By utilizing third world feminism, the study also focuses on the perception of female manipulation and dominance in patriarchal societies. The patriarchal system, which ensures that women are under control by keeping them confined to the home, makes Ishita's struggle to claim her motherhood more difficult. Overall, the research provides insight into the problems of women in a patriarchal society and their struggle for independence.

### References

- Akbar, A. (2011, March 11). Rev. of *Custody* [Review of the book *Custody*, by M. Kapur]. *The Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/custody-by-manju-kapur-2238058.html>
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1952). *The Second Sex*. Penguin.
- Benereji, M. (2011, March 4). *Custody* by Manju Kapur - review. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/mar/04/custody-manju-kapur-review>
- Herr, R. S. (2014). Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism. *Meridians*, 12(1), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.12.1.1>
- Kapur, M. (2011). *Custody*. Random House India.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2010). *Third World Feminism*. Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.
- Umachandran, S. (2011, April 17). Book Review: *Custody*. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-toi/book-review/Book-review-Custody/articleshow/8003725.cms>