

## **Infertility: A Stigma to womanhood with reference to Manju Kapoor's custody**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Motherhood is the backbone of Indian societal norms .Its a parameter for every woman to qualify herself as a perfect female.A woman is the medium to continue the families for generations as, she is blessed with the womb to conceive a child and be a baby giver to every family.It's a main role of every woman for generation in India and today even SHE is the family grower.As, a society is made up of human beings and will be always,the role of progeny is crucial.These progenies are born out of a woman .As a result woman and her function of carrying progenies is given prime importance as far as Indian societies are considered.Thus being a mother is indispensable for an Indian woman .The glorification of Motherhood so much that a woman cannot even imagine herself childless. Its not her own instinct but the culture in which she is born and brought up makes her think of herself a mother of family to create and continue their heirline. Female sexuality and maternity are ultimately socially,historically,culturally deep rooted in the material, biological, sexed body of an Indian woman .*

*In a typical Indian scenario female sexuality and maternity are the features controlled by the rules and regulations of Patriarchy.Its impact over female sexuality can be determined through the various traditions and rituals related to marriage,sex and child bearing.Whenever culture and society contest in India its respectability is always determined by the woman,her behaviour especially sexual one which is always kept a watch upon and her adherence to the norms set for her.*

*Women are made to restrict their sexual instincts.They are either a daughter, a wife or a mother atleast in India, as a result they are never the separate individual free of family and societal burden.These roles and responsibilities are inflicted upon her irrespective of her choice.*

*Maternity is one such aspect by which a woman is measured in India.As a woman needs to have husband ,similarly she must have a child.A barren woman is not accepted .She is rejected ruthlessly by an Indian society.People even don't have a thought over her physical and psychological trauma.An infertile woman is not a woman to be regarded and accepted in Indian society. She is a bad omen and is neglected during traditional ceremonies even.She is rejected to make an aarati or kumkum tilak to a newly married woman nor she gets an invitation for any such occasion .The real irony is she is disregarded first from her own family members and then inevitably from the society.We may find many examples around us even where husbands remarry just because of this cause .*

*Then the question arises whether being fertile is of prime importance? and whether a woman should be rejected by the so called society on the pretext of being infertile or not having any child after marriage? Should she be made devoid of her right to live as a simple human being?*

*Manju Kapoor's novel Custody takes a different stand. Its protagonist Ishita seems to be a common woman suffering from the infertility problem, going through the same vicious circle of rejection from her in-laws and trying to establish her identity but slowly the revolution occurs and eventually she succeeds in proving herself a truly caring and responsible mother as compared to Shagun who fails to execute her motherhood properly and leaves her child forlorn.*

*Maternity is surely a power of woman. Since a woman only is endowed with this capacity she must be very proud of it, but at the same time its not the only indispensable fact to prove herself a true woman. Ishita also starts realizing it once she comes in contact with Raman.. She also comes to know that she can be happy even after being infertile as it is not her whole womanhood to carry a child. Rather she can feel Raman and can make him happy and herself even. With Raman she has found her sexual instincts regained, she revived the eroticism once again which was lost deep beneath her past life of barrenness.*

*She has got completely fragmented when her first husband Suryakanta fails to support her. He doesn't establish himself to be a true husband. For him the child bearing is her individual physical issue and he neglected her completely in her struggle against family and society. Ishita searched whole heaven and earth, tried every remedy to get a child conceived. But alas destiny turned the table against her completely and proved her incapable to conceive a child completely because of severe fallopian tube blockage. It was a moment of complete disruption for her and she needs her husband to care for her and to understand her but he left her to her fate.*

*This hurts Ishita and she gets under depression. She thinks of the whole matter & finds how neutral and indifferent her husband and in-laws are who forsake her for her physical deformity. They even don't think it necessary to consult a doctor. If it would have been Suryakanta the family would definitely thought of some remedy. But as she is a woman, a marginal second sex, her life and reflexes of this incidence on her are completely ignored by everybody who was supposed to care for her. Ishita wonders about this mystique of Indian woman where she is called Grihalaxmi on one hand and thrown outside the house on account of such a cause for which she is not at any fault. And it is her own family members who shattered her.*

*Infertility thus disempowers Ishita. But if we will go to find out the root cause of her suffering and frustration is the indifference of her near and dear ones. In carrying the burden of infertility she is all alone. A woman's status in marital life is decided by her ability to give birth and rear children. As Anderson says, "Motherhood is usually identified as an essential part of being a woman, to an extent that women without children are usually portrayed as unfulfilled and incomplete". So, body is a source of discontentment for an infertile woman. The French writer Simone de Beauvoir argued that women are repeatedly told from infancy that they are made for childbearing. While the splendors of maternity are forever being sung to her, the drawbacks of her situation—menstruation, illnesses, and even the boredom of household drudgery— are all justified by this marvelous*

*privilege she has of bringing children into the world. Beauvoir pointed out that such pervasive socialization shapes women's desire to "choose" motherhood.*

*Kapur in her novel shows how a barren body is a curse for her. when she gets divorced she feels disembodied. she gets filled with agony, dejection and gloominess. However with her natal family she starts regaining her self-esteem. She wipes out the five years from her life and starts afresh. She starts experiencing the love again in the company of Raman and gets fulfilled with his body and also offers her body to him and finds a complete satisfaction in that.*

*When she encounters Roohi a forlorn child of Shagun , she feels a motherly attraction for her and showers love over her to make Roohi comfortable and feel cared. She thus finds herself doubly furnished with two things lacking in her life. The strength of this fulfillment makes her win the past griefs and become autonomous, an independent self-satisfied woman, who exercises her female desires and enjoys eroticism as well as motherhood. She establishes an intimate emotional bonding with Roohi, her little arms, her smell, her presence completes her life.*

*Thus Ishita and Raman gets synchronized by mind and thought and get married in a court to start a life afresh leaving behind the bitter scars of their previous ruined marriages. Ishita herself chooses her life partner and enjoys the marital and motherly bliss in her new home. Her motherly instincts get into reality and she presents love, care and affection to Roohi . Roohi's well-being is Ishita's first priority. She confidently speaks before the Judge in the court: "Ever since my marriage I have put her welfare above everything. I think of her as my flesh and blood. If anybody is like a stepmother it is this lady. To be a mother you need a heart" (412). The judge interrogates the child and Roohi rewards Ishita by speaking in her favor and claiming her to be her mother. Though Roohi is a minor but her custody is given not to her biological, but to her stepmother, Ishita*

*Thus Ishita who bears the stigma throughout the novel of infertility succeeds in overcoming the biological mother of a child and obtaining its custody. The positive end of the novel shows victory of Ishita's individual womanhood over society, culture, family and marital norms who refused to accept her. It is a saga of her being triumphant and proving herself much better at her position than those who claim to be the socially valid members like Shagun whose infidelity ruined the life of innocent Raman and Roohi. She claims the best and receives the same as SHE deserves it. She no longer defines herself as inadequate or incomplete woman and resolves the feelings of hopelessness and loss and attains an acceptance of life as an individual. She as a childless woman fills her empty space with Roohi and achieves motherhood though not biological and enjoys experiential and emotional benefits of motherhood. Her body which was disempowered by her infertility becomes empowering for her and she experiences a triumphant liberation.*

*To conclude the society, culture or family should never judge a person on its set norms rather should have a flexible code where right things should be accepted with logical reasoning and should encourage a woman especially to take her own initiatives believing in her capacities if we want to have a healthy society where a woman can breathe easily , express and feel normally without any patriarchal shackle. Then only many Ishita's will live. And they must live as it is their right which no one can deny.*

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So, Ishita negotiates infertility, decodes its very meaning and de-stigmatizes it by being the caring stepmother to Roohi. She gets back her status as a wife and a mother. She views the infertility problem separately from her identity by externalizing it rather than internalizing it. She no longer defines herself as inadequate or incomplete woman and resolves the feelings of hopelessness and loss and attains an acceptance of life as an individual. She as a childless woman fills her empty space with Roohi and achieves motherhood though not biological and enjoys experiential and emotional benefits of motherhood. Her body which was disempowered by her infertility becomes empowering for her and she experiences a triumphant liberation.

Kapur explores and writes about the labyrinth of a woman's bodily/sexual experiences in order to decode the many tropes of violation that effect the body's materiality as well as its psyche. She uses women's body as a conceptual tool to examine certain discursively constructed social determinants that deprive a woman of rights over her body.

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