Unpacking Trauma and Its Gendered Dimensions: Voices of All Generations in Select Novels of Manju Kapur

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of trauma on men, women and children, highlighting the consequences across genders. Examining the psychological, social and physical ramifications, this paper delves into the unique challenges faced by each group. It emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive approaches in trauma intervention and recovery, recognizing the nuanced experiences that shape resilience and healing in the aftermath traumatic events. This paper encompasses the trauma faced by genders in the select fiction of Manju Kapur.

Keywords: Trauma intervention, psychological, healing

Manju Kapur is an acclaimed Indian author known for her insightful and culturally rich novels. Born on May 27, 1948, in Amritsar, India, Kapur has made significant contributions to contemporary Indian literature. Manju Kapur's writing primarily focuses on the complexities of Indian society, particularly the roles and expectations placed on women. Her novels often explore themes such as marriage, family dynamics, and the challenges faced by women in traditional Indian settings. Kapur's work is characterized by its nuanced portrayal of characters and its keen observation of the changing social scenario in India.

One of her most notable works is her debut novel, "Difficult Daughters," which was published in 1998 and received widespread acclaim. The novel, set against the backdrop of India's struggle for independence, delves into the personal and societal conflicts faced by its protagonist. Kapur's subsequent novels, including "A Married Woman," "Home," and "Custody," have further established her as a prominent voice in Indian literature.

Her writing is known for its engaging narrative style, exploration of social issues, and the depth with which she delves into the complexities of human relationships. Manju Kapur's

contribution to literature has earned her recognition and readership both in India and abroad, making her an influential figure in the realm of contemporary Indian fiction.

This paper mainly focuses on the trauma faced by the characters in the select works of Manju Kapur, specially *Home* and *Custody*.

Trauma refers to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, often resulting in long-lasting emotional, psychological, or physical effects. Trauma can arise from various sources, such as accidents, violence, abuse, natural disasters, or other life-threatening events. The impact of trauma can be profound, influencing an individual's behaviour, and overall well-being.

Trauma theory, on the other hand, is an interdisciplinary field that examines the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of trauma. It seeks to understand how individuals, communities, and societies respond to and cope with traumatic experiences. Trauma theory encompasses a range of perspectives and approaches, exploring the effects of trauma on memory, identity, relationships, and societal structures.

One prominent figure in the field of psychology associated with trauma is Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Freud's early work focused on the concept of hysteria, which he initially attributed to repressed memories of traumatic events. However, Freud later revised his theory, introducing the idea of fantasy and the Oedipus complex as contributors to psychological distress.

In Manju Kapur's '*Home*', the characters go through the trauma throughout the novel, especially women. The two sisters Sona and Rupa are considered as the infertile women. Sona is caught in the family conflicts, because she did not become pregnant for 10 years after her of marriage. For a woman who does not get a child after marriage, (infertility) is a tragedy. Sona's mother-in-law vilify at her as "*What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoy life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you.*" (*Home*, 18) Sona worries about her childless future and has restless nights. As a result, Sona experiences more mental anguish and psychological turmoil. It describes the psychological suffering of a childless woman. She feels, she is worthless for not having children in the house. The mental and physical trauma experienced by Sona shows her lack of space in her house. After a decade, she gives birth to a baby girl, Nisha, followed by her birth after a year she delivers a baby boy, Raju. After the motherhood also Sona worries about her daughter Nisha, because she is a manglik (inauspicious horoscope). Because no one will marry a girl, who has that horoscope.

In Rupa's case (Sona's sister), her husband Premnath and father-in-law are part of Rupa's family. Rupa is childless. Rupa is really lucky in this situation. In fact, her in-laws don't accuse her of not having children. Despite everything, she endeavours to have children throughout the novel but remains barren.

The central character of the novel *Home* is Nisha. The heroine of the novel, Nisha is a sexual victim of her cousin Vicky. At that time, she doesn't have the mental capacity to comprehend what was happening to her. She faces restless nights and screams during the night. *"In the days that followed, Nisha grew silent. For the first time she felt divided from the family she had so unthinkingly been part of. Her mother was always so particular about her being clean, now she had done something dirty. Her hands had touched that filthy black thing. She tried to block it from her mind, but it proliferated, grew large and terrifying." (Home*, 59) she's terrified when Vicky touches her, *"instantly her skin began to prickle." (Home*, 61) Vicky also threatens her as *"'if you say anything to anybody', muttered Vicky unnecessarily into her ear, 'they will beat you. They will lock you up, and never let you go to school.'" (Home*, 62) Nisha gets horrified by the behaviour of Vicky. From that incident onwards she behaves strangely, she is unable to mingle with the family, unable to eat properly. She refuses to close her eyes, *"'I will stay up all the night,' she declared." (Home*, 63). She says she has bad dreams, but she couldn't say anything to anyone what they were. To settle or change her behaviour, she is sent to her aunt Rupa's house. Rupa observes the change in her behaviour. Later, Nisha completes her school education.

Nisha wants to continue studies, so her family allows her to go to Durga Bai College to study English Honors. She quickly develops feelings for Suresh, a student at Khaba College of Engineering who belongs to a lower caste. Soon Nisha's family gets to know about Nisha's love affair. They decide to discontinue her studies. Nisha swirls into depression once again. She feels her own house as a prison. Suresh refuses to marry her. Because Nisha is unaware of the threats her family has made against Suresh, she becomes extremely depressed. After a while, due to depression Nisha gets skin disease, the family tries every medication, including homeopathic and allopathic remedies, but it doesn't work. Under those circumstances, she completes her education as well. Despite her family being close by, she feels alienated. In an effort to help her to overcome her sadness and bring about a behavioural shift in her, Nisha's father encourages her to work as a teacher in the neighbourhood. But Nisha is not happy with that teacher's job, she wants to start a boutique business. With the help of his father and family members she successfully established the business and runs efficiently. After sometime, Nisha

gets knot with a manglik like her, a widower, Arvind. Within one year of marriage, she gets pregnant and delivers twins, one boy and one girl. This is how Nisha manages to overcome all obstacles and enjoy a happy life.

These days, it's common for husband and wife to get separated and file for divorce in our society. When things are good, kids will have a good influence, but when things go wrong, it will have an adverse effect on the young minds. The children's minds are left with negative impressions and form a trauma that is ingrained.

A similar pitiful state is exhibited by the young characters in Manju Kapur's novel *Custody*. Raman works in a multinational company. Shagun is the spouse of Raman. They have two adorable children, Arjun an eight years old boy and Roohi two-years younger to Arjun. Both Raman and Shagun's life goes peacefully until Ashok Khanna enters the picture. Shagun spends her life in the four walled atmosphere along with her children. She doesn't like the monotonous life. The charming Shagun attracts Ashok Khanna, the boss of Raman. Shagun develops illegal relationship with Ashok. She doesn't spend much time with Raman as well as with their children. Children are unable to accept the change in the behaviour of their mother Shagun. Raman and children experience a great deal of emotional instability and psychological trauma due to Shagun's behaviour.

Shagun comes out of marriage and she gives divorce to Raman and deserts her children. Raman was given custody of their children. The children are treated like commodities in this ugly battle of "custody" and "divorce," constantly switching between two homes, two parents, and two nations. As a result of Shagun's family division, Roohi, her daughter, develops a mild nervous disorder. She can't remember who her biological mother is or who her step-mother is during her school interview because she is disrupted.

Parental alienation also influences Arjun and Roohi. Due to their divorce and other family issues, they feel alone among their parents. The second marriage between Shagun and Ashok, as well as Raman's hasty union with Ishita Rajora, are the causes of the children's disaffection from their parents. The majority of Arjun's time is spent at his friend's house, "…. Roohi reflected the brokenness of the family in constant loud wails which grated on all their nerves." *(Custody*, 96) This shows the emotional imbalance in Roohi. She also screams sometimes affected by nightmares in her sleep. While Arjun is struggling since Ashok Khanna has taken over his father's place. The children's early years have been replaced with painful memories of their families, leaving them as adults with complex emotions. In Arjun's case, his

academic performance declines as well. Ashok Khanna, who has taken the place of his father, causes him to develop mood upset. The intimacy that exists between Ashok and Shagun also bothers Arjun. Instead of seeing Ashok as his legal stepfather, Arjun tends to view him as a stranger, "*In his father's place there was instead this stranger hovering around Shagun. It made Arjun uncomfortable, the man's fingers running up and down her arm, his hands reaching out to pull her close, the little kisses he dropped on her forehead. She never resisted as she sometimes had with Raman.*" (Custody, 141) Arjun also experiences constant dream hauntings while he sleeps. Arjun gets his first dream when he is returning from DPA School after his first visit. *"In his dreams there was a large playing field covered with stubbled yellowing grass. A pavilion at one end was filled with boys, they were all looking at him running, but he was alone. He didn't know where he has to run to, just that his life depended on winning. Everybody clapped. He looked around for his father, but he was not visible."* *(Custody,* 187-188)

Shagun continuously poisons her children's minds by saying that Raman is attempting to kill her by stealing them away from her. Roohi takes this statement literally and tells her brother Arjun as "*Papa is trying to kill mama*" *(Custody,* 138). This proves that children experience a high level of stress, anxiety, frustration, and psychological trauma.

Both Arjun and Roohi are displayed as younger generations who deals with the difficult aspects of Shagun and Raman's divorce and custody dispute. They are designed to experience alienation from their parents and psychological trauma. Children are the silent sufferers.

It is Raman, who's traumatized sociologically. Society also includes culture. In Indian culture, marriage is seen as an institution that ensures couple to live a happy life together. In Raman's case, a failed marriage occurs because, he has a wife who cheats on him. Raman gets very upset after realising the gap between them. He attempts to mend their relationship, "*Raman did not know what to think. When things were not right between Shagun and himself it felt as though the centre of his world was hallow. Yet the demands of his work forced him to be away long hours, thinning the connection between them.*" (Custody, 30)

After learning Shagun's illegitimate affair, Raman develops a chest pain. But Shagun does not change her mind despite her awareness of his condition and she leaves him in the hospital. She departs from her spouse and visits Ashok. She later files for divorce from Raman and weds Ashok. And she too has children's custody. Raman always worries about his broken marriage, his disconnection with his children, and his reputation among the relatives. He feels

devastated. After the long fight in the court regarding the custody of children, Arjun is given to Shagun whereas Roohi is given to Raman and his new wife Ishita, who will take care of this little girl.

In conclusion, Manju Kapur's depiction of trauma in *Home* and *Custody* advances a larger discussion about the changing scenario of Indian society. Her work of art primarily addresses the difficulties that individuals face when forging their own routes. Readers can identify with Kapur's writing through the journeys of the characters, which facilitate a deeper comprehension of the difficulties in striking a balance between cultural expectations, familial ties, and personal aspirations. Her analysis of trauma ultimately serves as a mirror, reflecting the intricate web of human experiences within the context of a dynamic and constantly changing social environment.

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