



# Fractured Homes and Female Resistance: A Comparative Analysis of Manju Kapur's *Home* and *Custody*

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## Abstract

*This article explores the themes of broken families and women's resistance in Manju Kapur's novels Home and Custody. Both novels reveal how traditional Indian families often become places of control, silence, and emotional suffering for women. The idea of "home," which is usually linked with warmth, comfort, and safety, becomes a space of struggle and pain for the female characters in these stories. In Home, Nisha, the central character, lives in a joint family where women are expected to obey and stay quiet. Her silent fight against gender rules and her attempt to live independently reflect a quiet but strong resistance. On the other hand, Custody focuses on Shagun, whose decision to leave her marriage brings her into conflict with social and legal systems that do not support women's freedom. Her battle for custody of her children shows a mother's emotional strength and her refusal to give in to social judgment. By comparing these two novels, the paper highlights how women in different situations challenge the roles forced upon them. Though they face emotional pain and rejection, they still show strength and courage in their own ways. This study also examines how Kapur uses family relationships to reflect larger issues in Indian society, such as patriarchy, divorce, motherhood, and identity. Through this analysis, the paper aims to show how Manju Kapur gives voice to women who are often unheard and shows that resistance can take many forms even quiet ones.*

**Keywords:** female resistance, fractured homes, patriarchy, motherhood, manju kapur

## Introduction

Postcolonial Indian literature has often focused on the struggles of women caught within the structures of patriarchy and tradition. Manju Kapur portrays domestic life with great depth, exposing the emotional, psychological, and social pressures women face. This paper examines two of her novels, *Home* (2006) and *Custody* (2011), focusing on the themes of fractured homes and female resistance. The analysis explores how Kapur uses the domestic sphere to question social norms and highlight the quiet, persistent resistance of women. Both novels reflect the ways in which the institution of family,

instead of offering emotional security, often becomes a site of control, surveillance, and sacrifice for women. Kapur presents homes not just as physical spaces but as emotional battlegrounds where women negotiate their identities. Her female protagonists are caught between societal expectations and personal desires, making their lives a constant balancing act. Through her narratives, Kapur does not portray resistance as dramatic rebellion but often as subtle, everyday acts of assertion such as choosing a career, refusing marriage, or reclaiming motherhood. These seemingly simple decisions carry deep meaning in the context of traditional Indian society. By placing



women's stories at the heart of her fiction, Kapur invites readers to question the gendered dynamics within Indian families and the cost of conforming to prescribed roles. This article argues that *Home* and *Custody* offer significant insights into the complex intersection of family, gender, and power in postcolonial India.

### **Fractured Homes in *Home* and *Custody***

In *Home*, the concept of a joint family becomes a symbol of both unity and suffocation. Nisha, the female protagonist, grows up in a family where male dominance dictates the rules. Her desires, voice, and individuality are constantly suppressed. The home, meant to provide comfort, becomes a space of restrictions. Kapur also highlights how traditional gender roles within the joint family reinforce generational patriarchy, where older women often act as enforcers rather than allies. Nisha's grandmother and aunts play a part in upholding norms that limit Nisha's choices, showing how internalized patriarchy perpetuates female subjugation. The lack of emotional support isolates Nisha, creating a psychological distance even within a crowded household. Her struggle becomes symbolic of many women's quiet suffering behind the closed doors of supposedly respectable homes. In *Custody*, Shagun's family life breaks down when she chooses to walk away from her marriage. Her decision causes a social scandal and leads to a fierce legal battle for the custody of her children. Kapur shows how marriage and motherhood are tied to a woman's identity, and how stepping out of the traditional role invites judgment and isolation. The novel also critiques the legal and societal systems that often favour the father's right to custody, reinforcing the idea that a mother's worth is tied only to her conformity and sacrifice. Shagun's move is seen not just as personal rebellion but as a threat to social order. Her fractured home reflects not only the collapse of a marriage but also the emotional trauma of being alienated from her children, which is a form of punishment meted out to women who defy social norms.

Further, the emotional disconnect between Shagun and Raman prior to the divorce reveals how modern urban marriages can become hollow despite outward success. Even within material comfort, the absence of communication and emotional understanding leads to fragmentation. The home becomes a cold space filled with legal documents, court orders, and contested rights no longer a site of warmth or intimacy. Thus, in both novels, Kapur portrays the home as a site of emotional conflict and repression, where women's autonomy is constantly challenged. These domestic spaces, though central to a woman's identity, often deny her dignity and freedom.

### **Female Resistance and the Struggle for Autonomy**

Both novels feature women who resist silently and assertively. In *Home*, Nisha tries to establish her independence by starting a boutique and refusing to give in to forced marriage. Though her resistance is quiet, it reflects her inner strength. In *Custody*, Shagun's resistance is more visible. She openly challenges her husband and the legal system. Her fight for her children is also a fight for her own identity. Kapur uses Shagun's character to highlight how a woman's resistance is often misunderstood as selfishness in a patriarchal society. Nisha's quiet refusal to conform is not without consequence. She experiences social exclusion, emotional neglect, and internal turmoil, yet continues to assert herself economically and emotionally. Shagun's struggle for autonomy also reflects her desire to rebuild life on her own terms, even as the court and her ex-husband attempt to control her narrative. Additionally, both women reveal that resistance is not about total escape but about reclaiming space be it financial, emotional, or maternal in a world that constantly tries to shrink their identities.

### **Patriarchal Structures and Gender Expectations**

Kapur's narratives reveal how patriarchal structures control women's lives. In *Home*, Nisha is constantly reminded that her role is to obey, marry, and bear children. Her ambition is seen as rebellion. In *Custody*, Shagun is judged for leaving her husband,



while Raman, her ex-husband, is shown as a more socially acceptable parent. Through these stories, Kapur questions the fairness of societal norms that expect women to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of family honour. Both novels portray how these structures are deeply rooted in Indian society, making resistance a difficult but necessary act. In both narratives, male privilege operates subtly, allowing men to navigate between tradition and modernity while women are punished for any deviation. The societal double standards are exposed through the differing consequences faced by men and women after marital breakdown. Additionally, the burden of preserving family values is disproportionately placed on women, making them the guardians of honour and tradition even at the cost of their personal well-being.

### **Motherhood and Emotional Labour**

Motherhood is a central theme in both novels. In *Custody*, Shagun's motherhood is questioned because she does not conform to the ideal image of a self-sacrificing mother. On the other hand, Ishita, Raman's second wife, is shown as willing to do anything to become a mother even at the cost of her dignity. In *Home*, Nisha's infertility becomes a point of shame, affecting her self-worth. Kapur shows how a woman's ability to bear children is often tied to her value in the eyes of society. Both novels explore the emotional labour women perform to maintain family relationships and how their worth is measured by their roles as wives and mothers. Kapur portrays how motherhood becomes a contested identity while Shagun is emotionally attached to her children, her decision to leave the marriage questions her moral worth in society's eyes, highlighting the unrealistic expectations placed on mothers. In both novels, emotional labour such as managing family expectations, preserving harmony, and enduring personal pain is depicted as invisible work that falls entirely on women, leaving them mentally and physically drained.

### **Resistance as a Form of Rewriting Identity**

Both Nisha and Shagun attempt to redefine who they are, despite societal rejection. Nisha's decision to work and live independently, and Shagun's choice to leave a loveless marriage, reflect a form of rewriting identity. Kapur shows that resistance is not always loud—it can be as subtle as making a choice that goes against what is expected. These acts of resistance give the characters a sense of agency, even if they do not lead to complete freedom. The journey itself becomes a powerful statement of self-worth. By redefining their roles outside of traditional expectations Nisha as a businesswoman and Shagun as an independent mother both characters create new identities that challenge the limitations imposed on them by society and family. Kapur illustrates that resistance is not merely a reaction to oppression but a deliberate act of self-creation, where the characters reclaim control over their bodies, choices, and futures.

### **Trauma, Silence, and Psychological Isolation**

In both *Home* and *Custody*, Manju Kapur reveals how trauma and emotional suffering are often silenced within the walls of domestic life. In *Home*, Nisha's experience of childhood sexual abuse by a trusted relative is not addressed with justice or support but buried in family silence to preserve honour. This lack of acknowledgment forces Nisha into emotional isolation, where her pain is internalized and her voice stifled. Similarly, in *Custody*, Shagun's decision to leave her marriage and fight for custody of her children subjects her to social judgment and emotional alienation. Her trauma is compounded by a legal system that questions her worth as a mother. Both women are denied a space to express their emotional turmoil, resulting in deep psychological loneliness. Kapur powerfully shows how silence whether chosen or imposed becomes a coping mechanism in environments where speaking out is either discouraged or punished.



### Entrepreneurship as Empowerment in Home

In *Home*, Nisha's journey into entrepreneurship becomes a turning point in her path toward independence and self-worth. Denied the opportunity to marry the man she loves due to caste restrictions and family pressure, Nisha channels her frustration into starting a boutique. This decision marks a quiet yet powerful rebellion against the gender norms that limit women to domestic roles. Through her business, Nisha not only gains financial independence but also creates a space where she can assert control, make decisions, and define her identity on her own terms. Manju Kapur uses Nisha's professional growth to highlight how economic empowerment can be a form of resistance, particularly in a society where women's contributions are often undervalued or confined to the household. Nisha's boutique becomes more than a workplace; it becomes a symbol of her resilience, ambition, and refusal to be defined solely by traditional expectations.

### Marriage, Divorce, and Social Stigma

In *Custody*, Kapur brings to light the harsh realities women face when they step outside the conventional boundaries of marriage. Shagun's decision to leave her husband and pursue a relationship with another man is not seen as an act of personal agency but as a scandal that tarnishes her character. Society quickly labels her selfish and immoral, while Raman, her ex-husband, is portrayed with sympathy and understanding. This double standard reflects the deep-rooted stigma surrounding divorce, especially for women. Similarly, in *Home*, Nisha's refusal to marry within the constraints of caste and her eventual rejection from marriage proposals place her at the margins of her community, as if her worth is tied solely to her marital status. Through both characters, Kapur critiques a culture that values conformity over happiness and punishes women who choose differently. These narratives expose how marriage is often less about companionship and more about fulfilling societal expectations—expectations that

women are forced to uphold, even at the cost of their freedom and identity

### Conclusion

Manju Kapur's *Home* and *Custody* present powerful portraits of women navigating fractured homes and asserting resistance within the constraints of patriarchy. By comparing these two novels, this paper highlights the emotional and social struggles women face in contemporary Indian society. Kapur's portrayal of fractured homes goes beyond personal conflict to reflect broader social commentary on the imbalance of gender roles in Indian households. The novels underline how resistance, though painful and slow, is a necessary path toward empowerment and self-realization for women. By giving voice to marginalized female experiences, Kapur contributes to postcolonial feminist literature that calls for rethinking traditional family structures and gender expectations. Kapur's female characters speak not only for themselves but for many others who find strength in silence and courage in choice. Through her nuanced portrayal of domestic life, Kapur contributes meaningfully to postcolonial feminist discourse.

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