
Female Perspective – A Journey of Self Discovery and Double Identity in the novel of Manju Kapur *The Immigrant*

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Abstract

“The Immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future and after much finding of feet. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life”.

Manju Kapur is one of the prominent writers ruling this era. She is one of the eminent Indian women novelists like Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Markanday, Bharti Mukherjee etc. Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She is a professor in English at Miranda House College in Delhi. She is also one of Women Writers in India, whose protagonists, not only try to maintain a balance in life but also break the shackles of tradition and prejudices. The factor behind their strength is their extroverted nature which assists them to revolt against the struggles that they encounter.

Manju Kapur has shot into prominence with the publication of her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* in 1998 which won her commonwealth Writers Prize in Eurasia Region. Kapur has basically written about women; their marriage, life after marriage, their quest for identity, their trauma and dilemma if failing to achieve the aspired results in their life but in *The Immigrant*, she has made the departure from the above mentioned themes. While dealing with the issue of immigration, the first thing that comes into one's mind is how an immigrant will manage in a totally new environment and culture? What are the problems ahead in their life? The question of their identity is a very important issue in different ways and Kapur is one of them.

Manju Kapur's *Immigrant* (2009) deals with Nina a lecturer, 30 years old, unmarried and staying with her mother in Delhi. She gets married with a NRI doctor Ananda and went to Canada as a newlywed wife. Here the writer deals with the life of a married woman all alone in an alien land where Indian Culture and individualism has often remained alien ideas. Marital bliss, Women's role at home and their change of attitude is the central focus. The Indian bride in Canada is a phase where the butterfly begins to lose its colour. There is loneliness and a feeling of being uprooted from the place of origin and only a husband to talk with. At the end, readers find a Complete

change in the personality and mental status of Nina. She develops a new attitude towards life and moving ahead with a new Cares and job.

Keywords: Individualism, Marital Focus, Loneliness, Uprooted, Personality, Attitude, Career, Immigrant, Post-Colonialism, Culture, Value, Identity

Introduction

Manju Kapur, a Delhi base fictional writer, has five novels to her credit till her date. The very first reading of her novels gives an impression to the readers that the author is a feminist. In all her novels, Kapur emerges as a great supporter of woman cause voicing the talls of middle class women who struggle hard to find their identities.

Since in all her novels, the story revolves around the female protagonists, Kapur is often called a feminist. In an interview with Deepa Diddi, once Manju Kapur clearly asserts – “She says, *“Yes, I am a feminist writer in the sense that my works are women-centric. My novels focus on the needs and desires of women from different backgrounds and in different situations.”*

Among Indian English novelists Manju Kapur is highly acclaimed novelist. She has four novels to her, credit ‘Difficult Daughters’, ‘Married Woman’. ‘Home’, *The Immigrant* and the forth coming fifth novel. ‘Custody’ are all the she has penned so far.

Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity with each woman rather than limiting the lives of woman to one ideal. The image of woman in fiction has undergone a change in during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring and self-sacrificing home dolls.

The Indian Middle Class Family is a safe, familiar territory and Manju Kapur tells this cliché-ridden story with tenderness and empathy never reducing any character to caricature. Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant* is story of two immigrants, Nina and Ananda. Nina like Manju Kapur, teaches English Literature at Miranda House. She was not married till the age of 30. Ananda, who lives in Canada, wants to marry an Indian girl, and marries Nina. Nina goes to Canada as an immigrant and her journey of life starts in a totally new environment. At the end of the novel, she becomes a new woman, totally different from what she was before her marriage in India. Many factors are responsible for changes in any immigrant personality. Immigrants change their personality because they face pressure of postcolonial ideology, without changing themselves, they can’t live in the developed country. They unconsciously follow the norms and cultures of colonizers and start forgetting their own cultures. Those immigrants who belong to those countries which were colonized in the past, even after their independence, follow the

colonizers. The colonized behave in a way the colonizers have programmed them. They willingly accept the superiority of colonizers and their own inferiority. This is known as culture cringe. The colonized as immigrants have a double identity, which means that they start perceiving the world through the consciousness of colonizers as well as through their own vision, which is provided by their native cultures. Ananda is a perfect example of it in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* one becoming a psychological refuse means that one is not able to feel at home even at his/her own home. Nina suffered in this way at her early time in Canada. *The immigrants* suffers from social invisibility and feels inferiority. To end it, he/she starts dressing up like the westerners. Nina goes to Canada with lot of Saris but she could not wear them due to the colonial mentality. She start nearing jeans instead of salwar suit and saris. She gives up her own dressing style and accept theirs.

An immigrant leaves his land for the new land where he gets a new identity. The immigrant suffers from the double identity: he wants to adjust his personality according to the new land's culture, but at the same time, he wants to remain in the identity of his own culture. In this dilemma, he is unable to get any identity: even if he accepted the culture of the Newland, his appearance remains the same as where he was born. He can't escape from the personality of his native place. We can gain new qualities of new cultures to enrich his personality, but his identity will not be pure or absolute. It will be a mixer of two or more cultures. An immigrant willingly wants to be parts of the new culture by changing his personality. His identity surings between two cultures. We lives in a very strange type of identity. We fails to end up this dilemma and remains in double identify. Kapur in *The Immigrant* says

***These immigrants live in two minds. Outwardly they adjust will.
Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading
assumptions about a heart that is divided.***

(Kapur 2008, 120)

An immigrant thinks that new world has some expectations from him and he tries his best to fulfill it. We wants to confront the expectations of both the new society and his own family. ***In the new country they work lengthy hours to get entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account. Years pass like this, ungrudged years because they can see their all sustaining dream of a better life coming true.***

(Kapur 2008, 120)

Indian Immigrants like in Kapur's *The Immigrant*, in which Ananda's uncle and aunt told him about western domestic norms.

Nina who is the main protagonist of the novel feels humiliated, discriminated and marginalized by the colonizer's country. The central characters, Nina and Ananda, are both NRIs drawn to new lives in Canada in the Seventies. Ananda leaves New Delhi after his parents are

killed. He is young, ambitious determined to qualify as a Canadian dentist and citizen, in the footsteps of his uncle, who is already a wealthy doctor in Halifax, Kapur captures the painful gulf in familial expectations that separates the bereaved Ananda from his Canadian relatives. In their home he misses the intimacies of Indian life, the communal meals, rich spices and vegetarian diet he is used to. Ananda's feeling of rejection fades, his understanding of western manners grows, but his sense of shame remains.

Nina leaves New Delhi to marry Ananda. Theirs is a partially arranged marriage promoted by Ananda's sister and Nina's mother. Nina has pursued a career, teaching English. Ananda and Nina are bound together by their overlapping loneliness. For Nina it is literally true that Ananda is all she has in Canada. When he is out at work she sleeps, reads or shops for sugar-rich junk food. Ananda has been professionally successful.

Kapur carefully unravels the story of this desperate, but moving marriage. She does so without condescension and with careful attention to the couple's mundane moments of tenderness. *That night, in bed, Nina was more prepared for the brevity of their sexual encounter. It was easier to not compare Ananda with his predecessor in a different country. 'Welcome home, darling, 'said Ananda, putting his arm around his wife afterwards. And that was the main point, wasn't it? Not her orgasms, but the fact that she was home'.*

Immigration involves compromise, and sometimes it is the obvious – almost clichéd – cultural differences in food and clothing that Kapur focuses on. At other times she teases out the subtler signs of adjustment, as when Nina objects to Ananda's friends calling him Andy, noting the telling difference between the injunction, "Call me Andy" and the untruth, "My name is Andy". Andy, Nina insists, is not a Hindu name.

Kapur explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives: the way a young woman's life, already so pressured in professional and reproductive terms, becomes an even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture, when Nina hears over the phone that her mother back in New Delhi has died suddenly, she breaks down and howls with unrestrained grief. That grief throw into stark relief the muted resignation with which she has set about her marriage in Canada. Her mother had always promised to follow her abroad when she became pregnant. Nina had envisaged an idyllic future: mother, daughter and grand child united at last in a Canadian home.

Kapur, in her characterization of Nina and her battle to adjust in an alien land reminds of 'Ashima' in Lahiri's novel 'The Namesake'. All the female characters of Manju Kapur are seen as women struggling against all odds.

Nina's life passes through certain ups and downs. Only Ananda seems to be her solitary anchor in Canada. But next morning all her dreams are shattered when she finds a wavy blond hair next to her pillow. Nina now feels relieved and enjoys her regeneration. She sets herself free from

the yoke of matrimony and social sanction. She is now an independent self financially self sufficient and socially acceptable.

True “*that is the ultimate immigrant experience*” (333) where nothing is steady and stable but where if one thing fails, the immigrant tries another. An immigrant cannot go back. The book ends with a message which can make the immigrant’s journey pleasant.’

The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts. She too was heading towards fresh territories a different set of circumstances a floating resident of the western world” (334)

Kapur beautifully portrays the psyche of the immigrants. She minutely analyses their thought process so sensitively that the reader begin to equate her with her characters. Manju Kapur deals with the universal issues, relating to the middle class Indian society. She in particular takes up the cause of the females who are victimized on account of conservative and traditional mind set of the Indian masses.

References:

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