

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*: A Feministic Perspective

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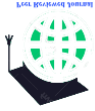
Abstract:

*The narration of human civilization has been the narration of oppression and suppression of women. Though the society has evolved considerably over the past years but still we have to take a long way to go when it comes to two-folds standards of society between men and women. Women are undoubtedly accepted as an indispensable part of the society yet, the cultural conditioning and double standards of our society renders women quite helpless against the suppression and atrocities committed upon them. Her identity and roles are always in flux. She is never seen as an individual, as an independent being. The aim of this paper is to analyse the feministic voice raised by Manju Kapur through her female characters. Manju Kapur, in her fourth novel *The Immigrant* (2008) has tried to raise the feminist voice through Nina and other female characters. Nina, a lecturer at Miranda House in Delhi, marries a non-resident Indian and moves to Canada. She will have to deal with a slew of issues in order to settle there, as she has become entangled in an inescapable web. Nina strives to reinvent herself and create her own identity by leaving her husband, who is completely uninterested in her. Zenobia, Nina's friend, is another figure in the tale who represents ultimate female autonomy. This paper will also discuss gender issues, the role of the family in promoting dual norms in society, and the importance of education, independence, and self-awareness in the life a woman presented by Kapur in her novel *The Immigrant*.*

Introduction

In this modern era of tremendous growth in every sector, including communication and technology, education, and others, women in India are breaking free from age-old limitations. They are losing their femininity and inner identities while exerting themselves in all areas of life. As a result of the development of education, they are dissatisfied with their status as imprisoned and stressed housewives. Betty Friedan observes, "Many young women—certainly not all—whose schooling propelled them into a world of ideas felt suffocated in their households." They learn that their daily lives are out of sync with their education. In the same manner as "shut-ins" do, they feel "left out."

The portrayal of women in Indian fiction has altered considerably from its inception. She has progressed from a meek, submissive, and obedient character in novels by Rabindranath

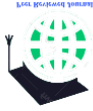


Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, and Kamla Markandaya, among others, to a self-assured, assertive, and even rebellious character in novels by Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Manju Kapur, among others. They are aware of their rights and want for complete freedom from the shackles of the past. Today's woman is more than just a "Second Sex", as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Manju Kapur is a contemporary Indian novelist whose works include *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *The Custody* (2011), and *Brothers: A Novel* (2016), among others. The aim of this research is to talk about Manju Kapur's fourth novel, *The Immigrant*, which came out in 2008.

Feminism is commonly seen as a political agenda that arose in the United States in the 1960s, as we all know. This was a crucial fight for women's equality in all parts of their lives. In wealthier countries, women had already been accorded equal rights, but this idea worried many developing countries. Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, post-colonial feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, and other ideas arose as a result of the various ramifications. When debating feminist notions, it is necessary to examine women's status and issues in the context of the society and culture to which they belong. Women only become aware of their problems when they adopt this viewpoint. The concept of feminism as a unique movement has been a long-running debate in India, and the term "Indian Feminism" has yet to be thoroughly defined. There is a lot of scepticism about its efficacy in India, which is referred to be "Indian Feminism." In India, there is significant scepticism regarding its efficacy.

The Immigrant, which is Manju Kapur's fourth novel, is set in India during the emergency years of the 1970s. It focuses on the difficulties that immigrants have in assimilating to a foreign land. With the support of female characters like the protagonist Nina, her mother, her sister-in-law, and her companion Zenobia, it majorly concentrates on the feminine voice. At moments in the novel, the novelist goes deeply into Nina's and her mother's psyches, whilst Zenobia and Alka are underdeveloped and serve as flat characters in the storey.

The story opens with Nina's hard realisation that she has turned thirty, and the possibility of her marriage is becoming bleaker by the day. Despite the fact that she is a working lady at Miranda House, teaching English Literature, and surrounded by many spinsters, "such as Miss Kapoor of the Economics department, her own misses Hingorani and Rao, Miss Lal of



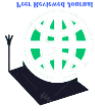
History, or Miss Krishnamurthy of Sanskrit!"(3), she is intensely aware of her age ("thirty, thirty, thirty"). (3) She shares a run-down leased flat in Jungpura Extension with her widowed mother, who is frequently concerned about her daughter's marriage to a nice boy.

In *The Immigrant*, Manju Kapur, also tries to depict the mental and physical toll that women bear, as well as how they react in various situations. Nina's mother is so concerned about her daughter that she travels to the local bus station when she is late. Finally, she finds a good match for her daughter, who is an NRI and works as a dentist in Canada, which provides her enormous relief, as it does for other Indian mothers. Marriage is seen as an everlasting bond between two people, at least in India. But Marriage, according to some feminists, is a contract that forces women into the role of servants or slaves and instils in them a negative image.

Kapur delves into the unique obstacles that young immigrant wives encounter in their daily lives. They are already under a lot of stress in terms of work and family, so life becomes an even more difficult balancing act for them in a foreign country. The immigrant who enters as a wife faces greater challenges. If she can get job, it will be in the future, and only after a lot of relocating. As the Kapur avers:

Nina has no idea why this is happening to her. She has a valid visa . . . She is decent, respectable, God fearing and worthy . . . She feels edgy; she is alone with a woman who makes no eye contact, for whom she is less than human . . . Though she was addressed as ma'am no Kapur delves into the unique obstacles that young immigrant wives encounter in their daily lives. They are already under a lot of stress in terms of work and family, so life becomes an even more difficult balancing act for them in a foreign country. The immigrant who enters as a wife faces greater challenges. If she can get job, it will be in the future, and only after a lot of relocating. respect is conveyed. Nina has been used to respect. It came with her class, her education, her accent, and her cloths. (107-08)

By cooking the weekly dinner together, she may reconcile herself with the idea of remaining at home jobless and forbidden a life outside of marriage, which secures the future in a way that sex never will. The readers realise how depressing it must be to dress every day in a style that is very different from how one is used to dressed, and to live on food that has always made her sick when she changes from her sari to jeans and eats her first morsel of the meal she despises.

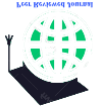


Ananda is ecstatic when she realises that she can eat both fish and beef one weekend. Nina confesses the hidden truth: her eating of fish and meat was motivated by fragmentation and misery rather than a desire for ease. Nina's own gradual assimilation resulted in her change from an instantly recognisable Indian woman in an oversized overcoat to a local college library science student.

Nina feels lonely after moving to Canada, and her loneliness becomes much more intense when she considers having a child. The narrator continues, "However, Ananda refuses to hear the implications. What's the rush when they've only been married for a few months?" (161) Nina's agony endures since her spouse is incapable of comprehending a woman's mental anguish. She contacts the ladies of La Leche League, a club made up of nursing mothers, some of whom have had difficulty conceiving, with the help of Sue, a Canadian family friend. "Helplessness, loss of power, and a lack of trust in her womanhood" are some of Kapur's feelings. "That was the profile of a sterile woman." (165)

Even Nina's mother is shown very weak in this novel who cannot do anything without her husband that is why she feels distress after her husband (Nina's father) passes away, and she is unable to determine whether or not to live with her in-laws. But Nina shows fortitude by taking her mother to Delhi after they were denied entry to their ancestral home in Lucknow. And when she discovers a wavy blond hair on Ananda's bed, she decides to leave Ananda and seek out other horizons. She does not openly retaliate to this day, instead applying for a job as a librarian at a university outside of Halifax. Ananda responds, "Get away from me." Manju Kapur's works deal with pain, suffering, separation, emotional rifts in relationships, exile from one's homeland, disease, and familial death. Nina is frustrated at home while Ananda is busy in his dentistry office.

Zenobia is the novel's boldest female character, albeit a minor one, who is described by Kapur as "abandoned by marriage after six years, but with parental money and an autonomous flat." Her attitude toward marriage was one of "been there, done that." Her life was now filled with relatives, nieces, wonderful friends and now her special relationship with Nina, supportive family, sexual encounters on occasion, and a desire to teach. She persuaded Nina to pursue higher education abroad because she believed it was her only hope of meeting a respectable



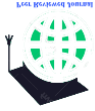
man, as Indian men were “mother-obsessed, immature, chauvinist bastards.”(8) This little description of Zenobia's characteristics is sufficient to convey her personality.

Nina, on the other hand, is portrayed as her antithesis. Like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, she had a secret romance with a teacher who was fifteen years her senior. He took advantage of Nina for as long as he could before abandoning her. Nina, unlike Virmati, did not tell anyone about the treachery and grieved silently over it. In this piece, as in virtually all of her novels, Kapur depicts Nina's deep mental agony.

The core subject in “The Immigrant's”, isn't revolt or raising the feminine voice. Manju Kapur's novel, on the other hand, focuses on the sexual dysfunction issue. “In this situation, I didn't want Nina to get pregnant, and then I had to have a cause for that, “Manju Kapur says in an interview with Jai Arjun Singh, published in the August 2008 issue of “Elle.” The baby is no longer in the house. Why is the infant on the loose? Infertility was insufficient, and I didn't want something as spectacular as impotence - there was more dramatic potential in a lingering unhappiness, which led me to Ananda's sexual problem.” (9 August 2008)

The sexual problem that Ananda is dealing with in the novel becomes the root of the marital problems, prompting Nina's eventual decision to seek out her own location. After her father's death, Nina would no longer follow in her mother's footsteps. She is not as humble as her mother, who bears everything silently. Instead, she refers to herself as a “floating Western world dweller.” (330) She cannot commit to relationships that are merely superficially committed. She's going through a transition at the moment. “Anything might be home when one was recreating oneself,” writes Kapur.

Remove your shallow roots and relocate to a new location. Find a new place to live, new friends, and a new family. It had already been done once, and it would be done once again." (330) Kapur emphasises the significance of self-awareness and self-identification in this passage. She is fascinated by the psychology of women and how their minds work. Nina desires to be recognised as an individual rather than to live a more materialistic life. She wants to strengthen her sense of self-identity and uniqueness. She aspires to be a valuable member of society, rather than a ‘other,’ as Beauvoir believes. She fights on both an ideological and a practical level.



Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can conclude that women's cringing submissiveness dates back to ancient times, and the resulting demarcation of these two sexes based on their gender identity is evident in Indian homes and society as well. The image of a woman is always in reference to a man. She is referred to as a daughter, a wife, and a mother at various occasions. Her persona and roles are always altering. She is never recognised as a separate, self-contained entity. Kapur, on the other hand, is known for portraying strong female characters who never solve problems by lounging on the couch of their drawing rooms. Nina refuses to accept a fate that makes her dependent on others and weak. Nina shows her strength by taking her mother to Delhi after being denied entry to their family home in Lucknow. When she learns of her husband's adulterous affair, she makes yet another bold step by fleeing his home. She does not openly retaliate to this day, preferring instead to build her own way in a strange place, Canada.

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