

## DEPICTING NINA AS A POST MODERN PROTAGANIST IN MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANT*

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### Abstract

ManjuKapur is a well-known Indian novelist in English writing, who was graduated from the Miranda House University College, Delhi and completed her Master of Arts at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She worked as English lecture in Miranda House University College. She is an author of five novels. She wrote *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011). She bagged Common Wealth Prize Award for her first novel *Difficult Daughters* and her fourth novel *The Immigrant* was shortlisted for the DSC prize for South Asian Literature and India Plaza Golden Quill Award.

Manju Kapur while championing the cause of women, creates her women-protagonists as being modern in their attitude to life, setting their back against tradition, flouting conventions and deviating from customs; and in this process they encounter many a hurdle in their way and being well equipped to brave storms of life, emerge as finished modern women. Manju Kapur imbibes the spirit of the fast changing times, renders her protagonists capable of adapting themselves to situations that challenge them at every stage in their lives.

**Key words:** Immigrant, Post-colonialism, Culture, Value, Self Identity

Manju Kapur in her fourth novel *The Immigrant* (2008) vividly presents India in the vexed context of globalization with far greater emphasis than in any of her earlier novels. The central figure Nina is an English teacher at Miranda House, New Delhi. She lives in a one room apartment with her widowed mother. Nina is financially self-reliant yet the typical Indian mind-set of considering a daughter a burden, a liability, a responsibility of the mother makes Nina's life burdensome. She lost her father early in life and now her mother was her only anchorage. She wanted to see her mother happy so though grudgingly sometimes she complied to all her wishes even making a trip to the astrologer regarding her marriage. At a mature age of thirty she has less hope of finding a husband yet nurtures a faint hope of a better tomorrow. When a marriage proposal comes for Nina from an NRI, a dentist by profession settled in Canada, Nina's mother's happiness knew no bounds and she prayed for the proposal to materialize. After a brief courtship (mainly through exchange of letters) and after much doubt as to why an Indian with a Canadian citizenship and having lived seven years in Canada was "looking to India for a wife"(57), and after much deliberation Nina finally succumbed to the rosy picture Ananda presented to her of her life abroad. "Then Ananda promised her such a future, laced with choices, edged with beautiful snowflakes that glittered through the distance, promising at the very minimum change, novelty, excitement"(78). She agreed to jump the fence "to join legions of women who crossed the seas to marry men living in unseen lands (78). In the nineteenth century it was the Northerners to leave their homelands for Asia, Australia and Canada.

"In the twentieth century it was the Asia women's turn. The immigrant man needed a bride who would surround him with familiar traditions, habits and attitudes, whose reward was the prosperity of the West and a freedom often not available to her at home' (78). The marriage took place with a lot of show of material wealth of Ananda. His Canadian friend Gary and his wife, Sue came to attend the marriage, so did his maternal uncle with his Canadian wife and children. Ananda put them all up in Five Star hotels and after the marriage ceremony the couple too moved to Oberoi Hotel for their honeymoon. Nina worries about the expenses, "She knew NRIs did stay in such hotels, but anxiety about money had been her companion since infancy, and it asserted itself on every possible occasion. Ananda on the other hand was flush with dollar confidence. His ability to spend in India (unmatched by any such extravagance in Canada) had to be savoured fully (89).

After two days Ananda left for Canada leaving his newly -wed wife behind to join him later after getting her visa. After three months she got her visa and proceeded to cross the ocean. The first bitter experience of being an immigrant comes her way when she reaches Toronto and at the immigration clearance counter she is asked to step aside. She waits. The white people queuing for entry into the country look away, the colored ones have pity in their eyes" (105). The immigration woman examines each page of her passport suspiciously. Nina's claim that she has married a citizen needs to be scrutinized despite the paperwork. The color of her skin shouts volumes in that small room. She feels edgy; she is alone with a woman who makes no eye contact, for whom she is less than human. Suppose they found a way to kill her? That would be one less unwanted immigrant (106). The immigration woman officer asks her all sorts of irrelevant questions that make her feel edgy. "Rage fills her, why are people so silent about the humiliations they faced in the west? She was a teacher at a University, yet this woman, probably high school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her. Though she was addressed as ma' am, no respect is conveyed" (106). Nina had been used to respect. It came

with her class, her education, her accent, her clothes. ‘Here a different yardstick is used to judge her’ (106).

Nina has discovered that the only thing she has to rely on herself and she has an urge to adapt to circumstances and go forward. Therefore she has rejected Ananda’s invitation for a consultation with a gynecologist. She doesn’t even feel happy about Ananda’s sperm test result. Ananda is highly disappointed with Nina’s response to his sperm test. He has expected her to be more appreciative that there is nothing wrong with him. Instead, she has joined in a Library degree course in HRL, out of her performance in the personal interview for admission, and her admission is assured with a scholarship and a guaranteed job anywhere in North America. Thus Nina is taking the first step towards autonomy. In the Library School, Anton, another student immigrant from America, who likes Asian women for their warm, intelligent, gentle and empathetic attitude, becomes the best friend of Nina. By the company of Anton, Nina completely sinks into Western culture. All around her she heard of open marriage, no need to live according to the rules of others. Her life is her own and doesn’t owe anybody for giving explanation. Nina practices smoking, drinking, eating meat and even adultery with Anton as she doesn’t have sexual fulfillment with Ananda. Adultery doesn’t make her feel guilty, not beyond the initial shock. Instead, she has the sense of her own self, autonomous and independent. Thus, “Her first lover had taken her virginity and her hopes, her second lover had been her husband, her third had made her international”. (261) But When Nina has found that Anton’s importance of his wife is much greater than for her, she resolves to cut him off. As a result of that she has been raped by Anton, therefore she leaves him once for all. The death of Nina’s mother has broken Nina’s last ties with her homeland. It makes a little difference inside her psyche, so when she has come back to Canada, she thinks of Ananda as the only anchor in her world. But he gives her a shock through an evidence of blond hair on their bed. That hair explained much-the distance, the silence, the ticket for two months in India, his strange indifference interspersed with tenderness, the shifty look that skittered about her. She didn’t blame him. His body spoke, when his tongue could not. (324) At last Nina found that she should be her own anchor. So she decided to be distanced herself from the dependent life with Ananda and began her search for identity in an alien land.

Therefore, as the immigrant woman enters her new country and learns about her new habitus, she has a conflicted positionality. She now has to understand, differentiate and negotiate between her pre-migration patriarchal-dominated habitus to a post-migration habitus; which privately may still be dominated by her patriarchal culture, and publicly may dictate that she negotiate through western ideals while either maintaining or discarding her cultural ones. Furthermore, considering that western systems still maintain various systemic and institutionalized patriarchal constraints on women as a group, immigrant women may also have to struggle against these public patriarchal systems alongside non-immigrant women, while simultaneously enduring private oppressions at home.

This paper is an examination of the efforts of Nina to establish herself as a postmodern woman. She has liberated herself from the patriarchal constraints and gets the ability to choose her own career through education, the ability to decide whether she wants to have children, her sexual freedom, her change in dress and image, and eventually her decision to leave her male partners. Thus, Nina becomes the epitome of emancipated Indian women who are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their views, and more articulate in their expressions than the

women of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in words.

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