



## **Redefining Womanhood In Manju Kapur's The Immigrant**

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### **APA Citation:**

Kamala, K., & Shanthi, R. (2021). Redefining Womanhood In Manju Kapur's The Immigrant, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3027-3032

Submission Date: 11/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 25/12/2021

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to explore how women in Manju Kapur's novels have emerged as individuals and marriage the sacred social institution becomes the primary source of conflict for her. The women in Manju Kapur's novels are unlike traditional women who consider marriage as the summom bonum of a woman's life and they have to submit to the wishes of their husbands. Defying all batriarchal norms and conventions they emerge as new women who are self-conscious. This fictional representation of New Woman has created a crisis in family and society and has shaken the deep-rooted tradition. Pre-marital relationships, fornication, post-marital relationships and divorce are not considered as social taboos. The protagonists in Manju Kapur's novels are the personification of Now Women. Subverting male hegemony they emerge as convention-bashing new women.

**Keywords:** *Partriarchal, sexual freedom, emancipation, self-conscious, extra-marital sex, convention-bashing.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Manju Kapur is a postmodern Indian English novelist Defying patriarchal norms Manju Kapur in her novels has rendered her protagonists the postmodern touch which they deserve. They are audacious, progressive and self-assertive women carving a niche for themselves. She uses sexual freedom as an instrument of defiance to thwart deep-rooted patriarchal hegemony. Kapur's new woman is an epitome of certain characteristics strikingly different from traditional women. Firstly, she is well-educated and is conscious of the changes that take place in society from time immemorial. She is economically independent. They are not puppets in the hands of others to move as they liked. They challenge the patriarchal norms that compel women towards domesticity. They assert their individuality and strive for self-reliance through education. They yearn to be a part of social and intellectual movements of the day. Their views are generally liberal and struggles to overcome the stumbling block of tradition and crosses patriarchal threshold that might subdue her personality or make her identity indistinct. Taking up the role of an abolitionist of woman slavery in any form she never stops to battle for the rights of women.

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* is a mesmerizing tale of an arranged marriage in which she makes an attempt for mental thirst at the cost of physical lust. As the title suggests, the novel purports the

real meaning of immigration at the cost of humiliation, inhibition secret and unwanted sex through the protagonist Nina Batra Nina is Manju Kapur's mouthpiece. She comments thus:

The ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing ready enough to attach yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but once that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back. When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible again (TI-334)

A woman has to cope with family and society for her independent existence Manju Kapur always tries to make her protagonists bold and self-conscious. The novelist discusses the two aspects that are important in man woman relationship.

First is sexual aspect and second is psychological but it is sexual aspect which overpowers the psychological aspect. In sexual aspect Kapur has shown premarital and extramarital relationship in the novel. In premarital sex Rahul, the boy friend of Nina, ignites the fire of sex in her. In extramarital relationship, Nina finds a partner in Anton. In both the relationships Nina comes forward by herself (Kumar 6)

Manju Kapur focuses on Nina who involves in different relationships at different times Nina makes a truly endearing life for herself. Rahul is her first object of crush. He is fifteen years older than her, a teacher in the English Department of Arts Faculty. She dedicates herself to Rahul emotionally and physically. She expects Rahul to reciprocate the same But Rahul had always made it clear that he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. Like all cakes this one was chewed, mashed into pulp and swallowed too. Eventually she could only choose her loneliness and resigns to her fate. When she discloses her heart to her close chap Zenobia, she encourages her for higher studies saying that being her only chance of finding a decent guy, for Indian men were mother obsessed, infantile, chauvinist bastards. Ananda is the hero of the novel. The protagonist Nina was going to tie and migrate in Canada with Ananda. He has been practicing as a dentist with the last seven years in Canada.

Ananda's sister Alka finds an Indian bridegroom Nina for him. She says that marriage is a question of adjustment and one still needs a canvas to paint on. Ananda thinks mournfully of his sexual difficulties. He wonders whether he could look on a willing, patient, forgiving, loving partner. He ponders whether the break through moment would come with an arranged marriage certainly. The marriage the ceremony is executed and the couple reaches Canada for a settlement and to start a new life. The bridal night proves to be the turning point in Nina's newly married life. It is the night of thunderclap for Nina Ananda's sexual dysfunctioning leaves a bad impression on Nina. Ananda gives pleasure to himself rather than caring for Nina.

As she lay in bed she tried to transform reality into a scenario that would not confuse or upset her. Togetherness was the important thing. To be critical of how it was achieved was against the spirit of marriage (TI-91)

Some of the factors responsible for the failure in the relationship are Ananda's excessive boast of success, his preference to money and sexual dysfunction. Nina is devoid of warmth of even newly married love. Her life is shattered. She clearly understands that Ananda's love is sex based and not on what a woman longs for. Nina is perceived wrongly by Ananda who thinks that worldly possessions and comforts are the bases of true relationship. Ananda is a man of cold sensuousness who shows his love only in the dark. Nina seeks love in Ananda which is of no avail. She is a lover of love not of ostentatious possessions. Nina cannot see the long awaited lover in Ananda after her marriage. She realizes that her life in Canada is going to be like that only.

There was no one to shout, get up, it's getting late, not a task that would suffer by her staying in bed, no person whose loneliness she had to assuage (TI-115)

A sense of alienation dawns up on Nina from the start. Life in Canada means no dependency on others. Ananda always boast of his success and toil. Nina is in Canada as an immigrant. She has come as a wife. As a wife she has more difficult time. She is alone for many many hours. Her husband's sexual dysfunction is the centre of her shattered relationship. It does not give her delight at all. Ananda is involved only in his performance instead of loving his wife. He does not give her the love of a husband. Ignoring Nina's craving for love her husband concentrates on his timing. He fails to understand that Nina could not adjust in Canada without his love and care. He is more involved in his clinic than in his wife. This makes Nina an alienated figure. Her husband's feverish talk of Canada, self-dependency, his grudge against India are some other factors that collapse the relationship. His emergence as a sexually potent man than a husband leads him to seek other woman at the cost of his infidelity.

He loved his wife but he did not want to feel that she was the only one in the world he could have sex with. What kind of man would make him, with his masculinity so limited (TI-151).

Nina's sense of alienation, isolation and seclusion leads to her intense craving for a child. Her inability to conceive even after six months of marriage worsens the situation. Ananda's sexual dysfunctioning sneaks into her mind when she is on the verge of accusing herself for not getting pregnant. This means question mark on his potency. Want of any work and the monotony of remaining at home without doing anything pinched Nina more. This urged presence of a baby in her life. Ananda is hot up as he feels it to be too early to have a baby. He fails to understand Nina's plight. He sounds stubborn due to his suggestive incapability in sexual matters. Nina does not probe into Ananda's case to understand his predicament. She becomes more selfish and fetish to have a baby. This is because Ananda did not communicate this mishap to her.

Each felt violated and refused to make conciliatory gestures. Nina brooded over her situation for a few more days before picking up the yellow pages to look for gynecologist (TI-170).

The thought of getting his sexual dysfunctioning exposed shudders Ananda. He takes it to be an invasion in his humiliating privacy into which he does not involve even his wife. The gap between Nina and her husband is aggravated when Ananda senses a supposed inferiority complex and eventual disrespect for him in his mind. The basic pleasure of union of two bodies and souls has long been forgotten. When Nina wants sex to get an egg fertilized in her ovary with the passage of time the sexual frustration reaches fever pitch. She wonders whether she needs to be more emphatic but the state of permanent sexual frustration she is in, makes it difficult. It grieves her that Ananda has no notion of how she feels. Her idea of matrimony is a husband who is a little more alert to the discreet clues she let her drop. She openly asks her husband whether anything is wrong with his sexual capabilities. She conveys to him that his impotency is the reason for his frustration. This leads Ananda to toss and turn in bed.

The root cause of dissatisfaction in their married life is that they just give importance to sex and everything else is secondary. As a result Ananda goes to California to get his problem cured. He keeps this visit a secret. He has lied to Nina. Nina will welcome his move to overhaul his sexual problem. Ananda does not know why he has lied to Nina. He has just told her so. Nina's relationship with Ananda leads her nowhere. A spirit of lethargy dawns on her after Ananda leaves for California.

Alone her thoughts grew darker. The hollowness of the landscapes reverberated inside her, with no people, no conversation to even glaze the surfaces hour after hour, day after day could pass without single word uttered (TI-189).

Nina does not sound pleased when Ananda comes home with a sense of victory over his impotency and has sex with her with better performance Nina feels that he need not have to lie so much on his way to California. She thinks that it is not possible for Ananda to keep her in confidence. Nina is not able to feel relieved. The gratifying sexual love and life for which Nina always craved for is still a failure. Ananda's doubt and lie came creeping in her relationship with Ananda. When she pries, her husband gets offended.

Nina joins the la leche league without informing Ananda. Nina is groomed as a feminist against her husband. She discourages Ananda's further efforts to rejuvenate the shattered relationship. There is no hope of reassuring relationship between them even after getting Ananda's sperm test with positive result because Nina gets listless at it. However Ananda does not reciprocate when she needs it Nina's passions cool down when Ananda feels that he has just recovered. She focuses her interest in establishing her foot on her own.

Ananda gets frustrated in his life He finds a new and fresh substitute in his newly appointed receptionist Mandy. His extramarital relationship with Mandy proves another step to break up with his wife Ananda considers Mandy the least sexually inhibited and demanding. He gets initial pleasure in this relationship physically. But he feels torn in his within psychologically.

He went home that first afternoon, in a slight daze. A-he had committed adultery. His wife never knew B-there was no way he could give, this up. It was too splendid a thing C-life was full of surprises and new experiences. He owed it to himself to do them justice (TI-239).

It seems that things started improving between Nina and Ananda when Nina focuses in Ph.D., programme. With her husband's consent and money. But this is also a mere betrayal. Nina's extramarital relationship with Anton proves another step to destroy her married life. Anton comes as a turning point in Nina's life. Anton is a thorough utilitarian who caste his evil eye on her with some evil end in mind. Though married she falls into a bantering relationship. When Nina proposes a field trip to Ottawa Ananda approves because he thinks that he will be left free to enjoy his extra marital life with Mandy. But Ananda is conscience stricken on psychological plane. Filled with the guilt of this he would not fight with Nina even when she is irritating him. This artifice lessens her relationship and makes it seem superficial. Love for Nina begins to wear the face of responsibility and when he is with Mandy he naturally feels less burdened.

Anton on the other hand is an admirer of Nina's beauty. He has been dating on her Nina's face is gleaming with satisfaction. This fascination and admiration results in their physical relationship.

For the first time she had a sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent, so strange that sex did not make her feel guilty, not beyond the initial shock (TI-267).

Nina expects the affair to be satisfying psychologically but it futile. She is disillusioned when Anton becomes cold and dispassionate after the trip. The sense of autonomy she has in Ottawa turns out to be illusory. It stems from a man finding her desirable, and her own sense of adventure as she responds, All of Nina's thoughts and ideologies are influenced by the world of literature. She seems to live in a world of fiction rather than that of real one. She feels liberated after having sex with Anton. She likes the relationship inspite of the fact that Anton has always made it clear he did not mean anything serious about their relationship. As for Anton it is just a healthy give and take.

Her life was her own. She did not owe anybody any explanation. If Anton gave her pleasure, if his easy acceptance of her gilded her studies, did not she owe it to herself to sleep with him (TI-273).

Nina and Ananda starts making up between them because both of them are guilty of adultery. They pretend to be tolerant because they did not let each other sense their secret relationship. Mandy demands much from Ananda. It is not that easy for Ananda to give As a result Ananda's relationship with Mandy starts getting sloped. Both Nina and Ananda feel torn in their within. Nina becomes self conscious and frugal to shopping Ananda gets tensed because his hard earned money is being spent mercilessly by Nina. Nina realizes that Anton's relationship with her is just a time pass. He remains loyal to his own wife whereas Nina is about to lose her conventional marriage with Ananda. Not only Ananda arranges and gives consent for Ph.D. but also gives Nina's ticket to India to her surprise. The reason is that he will be left free to seek the fullest enjoyment with Mandy. Mandy wants to justify her relationship with Ananda. When Nina returns to Canada after two months she is still a stranger to Ananda and he to her Neither of them has the warmth of love but pretends to be tolerant.

His obvious pleasure upon her return contributed to her guilt. She had transgressed, her discontent was her fault. From now on she would devote herself to him, but in this endeavor she experienced a barrier impossible to cross (TI-296).

The passion and warmth of love soon ebbs in Ananda when Nina arrives in Canada. Nina feels that she has found a more caring husband in Anton than a lover. Nina remains only on formal terms with Ananda. There is no mutual love and affection between them. Her husband regards Nina's character a fictitious character. He considers himself a thorough realist. The novelist comments thus: "All feelings except the most obvious were drama, she could not be happy living on the surface where he floated. For her that was not living at all" (TI-331).

Nina and Ananda enjoy extra marital relationship, betray each other. They themselves are responsible for marring their married life.

Compatibility between husband and wife is indispensable. But in the present novel sex overtakes other factors needed for compatibility between husband and wife Nina and Ananda both want to join the bandwagon of liberal sex-social, psychological and ideological factors remain on the fringe while sexual factor remain at the center (Kumar 163).

Nina does not prefer to sit at home being a working woman. She attracts her attention to do something in a foreign land. She decides to find a job in a library. Her husband says to her that is not easy making it in a new country. He also feels that Nina sounds silly because she is starting a family. She is not fertilized even after several attempts and appointments with doctors. Hence she moulds herself to be independent.

She didn't care so much about having a child now. These walls, this room was inimical to it. She wanted to be outside, she had enough of inside. Slowly she left the apartment block and still started walking. The sky was grey, a few brown leaves still clung to trees otherwise bare (TI-172).

She goes to library to study and devotes herself to studies. As the study of different books becomes appetizer she loses her interest in going to library. She focuses her interest in studies and settlement of her own. Along with it she is also hungry of having more sex with Ananda. As their union bears negative results she compels Ananda to go for a sperm test. Ananda takes it as an attack on his manhood. She becomes more restless. Ananda gets himself investigated with the help of surrogate and she moves in wrong directions. Nina is not satisfied with the way he gets sex therapy. A slight clash is the result.

He had not expected his wife to be so narrow minded, she was the one who had nagged him to seek help, and now she quarreled with the form it had taken. It looked to him as though she had some kind of ego problem (TI-210)

Nina wishes to firm her feet to be independent. She wants to settle herself before having a child. She says to him that she misses home and a job. She feels like a shadow. She conveys to him that she has become nothing but his wife. She does not discuss anything with him. She believes more in the advice of women instead. Ananda did not understand what was so special about her feet. He understands that as an immigrant she has to find her way. He is hurt when Nina prefers to go to some women for help instead of following his advice. He also hopes their child would make the family more whole, give them all a greater sense of belonging.

Nina in the beginning thinks of a job in Canada just to while away time as she is all alone at home. But as time passes her husband's patriarchal behaviour makes her understand that she is spending his money which hurts her dignity and self-respect. This gives rise to a strong urge for economic independence in Nina's head and heart. When Ananda snubs her for purchasing a sweater for three hundred dollars she is determined to be economically independent. "From now on, I will only buy clothes when I have money of my own" (TI-274). The novelist wants her heroines to be well aware of her independence and individuality. Nina comes to know about her husband's post-marital relations. As a consequence she rejects the patriarchal world of her husband. Asha Saharan asserts thus:

Nina discovers the infidelity of Ananda and this breach of commitment results in estrangement of companionship in marriage. She gathers her determination to re-establish herself independently by throwing away the yoke of marriage. At the moment of crisis, she over powers the disturbances of mind and leaves all the bondages behind, triumphant in her new found visibility and power, impinges on her quest for empowering the female body (Saharan 4).

Nina not only needs helter but also wants her individual self to be valued. She decides to go to a place where she can be well aware of her identity and individuality. She needs completeness and togetherness. She aspires identity and individuality. It is in her search of identity and individuality, she leaves her husband and home. The novelist comments thus:

When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home, pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again (TI-330).

## 2. Conclusion

Thus the novel "The Immigrant" proves that it is an attempt of mental thirst at the cost of physical lust. It is for this attempt that she has to go through rigorous ordeal.

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