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Identity Consciousness: Traumatic Status of Nina in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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Abstract

Literature often provides social proof. Through novels, society can be viewed, which can give an insight into its culture. Among the present day writers, women writers are dynamic witness to the peculiar socio-cultural, historic, political conflict faced by Indian women. Manju Kapur is one among the present day writers like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, and Jhumpa Lahiri have been crowned with literary glory by winning many awards. Her fourth novel *Immigrant*, published in 2008. The aim of the present paper is to focus the status of an Indian woman Manju Kapur's protagonist Nina, who strive hard to maintain her identity after her married life in an alien country with her husband Ananda.

Keywords: Consciousness, Traumatic, Status, *Immigrant*

Introduction

Many Indian women novelists weave their fictional writings based on real life incidents concerning women. They have taken up the issues, which modern women face while playing various roles at home and in society without attaining any personal gratification and fulfillment. They mainly focus on the untold hardships of women before they obtain their marital status, during their marital status and after their marital status. They simply show their women protagonists acting just as essential, but indispensable components of their family machine and bring to light their familial and societal predicament both in India and outside India as immigrants. Euripides in his *Medea* express his feelings about the familial predicament of women, saying that "of all living beings on earth that bleed and grow, it is only the woman who is the most bruised one" (10). However, the women novelists have never failed to give a distinct dimension to the image of their women in their fictional writings. Being women themselves, they have inherent instinctive insight into the reaction and responses of their women protagonists. They explore the problems of their women, the complex working of their inner-selves, their emotional involvement and its consequent disturbances in familial and societal situations.

Manju Kapur brings to light the different roles her women play in their families such as daughters, wives, daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. She also describes their attitudes pertinent to such roles and their resultant behaviour. She first shows how their positive attitudes in behaviour keep their happy familial life and her status intact. Then she demonstrates how their negative attitudes in behaviour, not only affect their status but also place them in a dilemma. Besides, she explains how each of her women characters copes with any difficult situations. Then she narrates whether each one comes out unscathed successfully from or becomes a helpless victim to such difficult situations. Through such portrayal, she brings home the truth that what is to happen has to happen and such happening is inevitable in life because it is God's will.

Every woman should realize the fact that whether she is traditional or quite modern, she does not know when something good or bad will happen to her. Neither does she know how to avoid something bad happening even before it happens. However, she can change the good to bad or the bad to good by her attitudes. If she has a positive attitude, she can brave any situations or predicament for her good and good of her family and her status. She should not give too much thinking to her predicament, but she should realize that only in her predicament lies her ability to rise above or go beyond. Dan Millman in his book *Way of the*

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Peaceful Warrior beautifully sums up what human predicament is and whether it can be avoidable in life:

If you don't get what you want, you suffer; if you get what you don't want, you suffer; even when you get exactly what you want, you still suffer because you can't hold on to it forever. Your mind is your predicament. It wants to be free of change, free of pain, free of the obligations of life and death. But change is a law, and no amount of pretending will alter that reality. (n.p)

Men and women who look at the alien countries from their places of living feel the other side appearing to be always greener. They also begin to believe that the other side is really greener. They also entertain a strong belief that any country other than India such the States, England and Canada are the places meant only for their prosperous, civilized and comfortable living. They also dream of these countries and their life of comfort, prosperity and happiness. Hence, they migrate to the alien countries of their dream. While doing so, they need to adjust themselves to the new environment and a new way of immigrant life. If they fail, they have to meet with innumerable problems. Besides, their personal life will also get greatly affected, resulting in their strange behaviour, even towards their kith and kin as if they were strangers. Moreover, they begin to be indifferent to others' feelings, sufferings and sacrifices and become selfish and loveless to the core. In their selfishness, they become oysters in their words, deeds and thoughts. For most of them, the reality of immigrant life is bitter and it looks as if they had willingly embraced the suffering. Not only do they feel very sad for having come to the seemingly deceptive side, but also they think that the side from which they have come to this side now looks greener. Their deception thus lands them on misfortunes, disappointments and strained familial status.

Nina of Manju Kapur's *Immigrant* stands as a testimony to the actual status and the predicament of Indians living as immigrants in alien countries. It also brings out what will happen to any woman who gets married very late and consequently her attainment of motherhood. Nina's mother has suffered a lot during her marital status. Her predicament knew no bounds when she became a widow. As a married woman, her marital life was bereft of any joy. As a widow and a mother, she prays to God that what has happened to her during her marital status should not happen to her daughter Nina because Nina is too innocent and young to cope with any such predicament in life. She also expects her Nina to be blessed with safe and happy marital status in time. She believes that such a status can only provide her with prosperity, security, contentment and happiness. It is not love marriages, but only the arranged marriages which will pave the way for any woman to attain that kind of status in life. Being a traditional woman, she wants every eligible woman for marriage should marry in time and attain the status of motherhood. If any woman fails to achieve both in time, she becomes a cursed one.

Nina's mother's expectations stand shattered when her daughter even after her age of thirty in spite of education and financial independence remains unmarried. As an unmarried woman, Nina stands to lose the happiness of her being a mother. If she had married in time as her mother desired, and like any other woman of her age, she would have a family of her own with a doting husband and loving children. She feels uncomfortable in the midst of married women and mothers. However, there is a strong belief among traditional men and women that there is a time for everything and when the time

comes, even if one does not want marriage, one can never escape however hard one tries. Nina is no exception to this conventional belief. As expected after long waiting, the time comes for her to get married and it comes in the form of a man called Ananda, an Indian settled in Canada. She knows that fortune seldom knocks twice and when it comes, she should embrace it with her welcoming hands. Therefore, her unconventional status of being an unmarried, thirty year old woman in India compels her to accept Ananda to be her husband with great expectations and enter into marital status with him willingly because she knows:

Happy is the one whether it is a man or woman who gets a woman as his wife or a man as her husband through attainment of marital status. Happier becomes he or she when he or she finds such a true friend in his wife or in her husband. (Schubert n. pag.)

Nina comes to Canada with her husband Ananda to lead a life of happiness with the status of an immigrant in the midst of the native Canadians. But what she expects does not happen and she has to remain at home as a conventional house wife without any chance for her to mingle either with other immigrants from various countries or with the natives. Neither does she know how to cope with the strange situation and the loneliness in which she is placed. As a wife and an immigrant, she has to pass through a difficult phase of her life without anything to fall back upon to drive away her loneliness. Immigrant psyche has a very deep impact on her as a wife because she cries and feels homesick because of her loneliness. She starts passing her time in reading books.

It has been a month, and she is keen to set down roots that would make her feel more at home. In India these relatives had seemed peripheral, more tourists than family. Now her perception has changed. She wants to be close to them. (132) As she has to spend her time only at home, she is fortunate enough to escape from experiencing racism and discrimination from the native Canadians like other immigrants in Canada do.

Another predicament of Nina as an immigrant is that she remains rooted in her Indian way of living and thinking. Being traditional to the core, she finds very difficult to change herself to the western style of living. She also wants her Ananda to be every inch an Indian in his way of living. She expects him to be a loving and loyal husband as an Indian. But Ananda, being an Indian Canadian, is westernized in his way of eating, dressing, moving with all women freely and even having sex with them. Though, he appears to be manly in his sexual behavior, he is very weak in satisfying any women sexually. Moreover, he has adjusted himself to Canadian eating habits and so he has the habit of eating non-vegetarian food. He wants to be a Canadian in Canada and so he is Canadian in everything. There is no wonder when such an Indian wants his Indian wife to be a Canadian like him in all habits. If Nina's status as the wife of an Indian born Canadian is to remain intact, she has to change to her husband's way of life lest she should be in great predicament.

A woman who becomes a wife of a man should naturally become a mother by begetting his children. Motherhood is the greatest blessing bestowed on every woman. When a man and woman make love, it does not mean sexual satisfaction alone. It should be the only way for a woman to become a mother. If a man is not potent enough either to satisfy his wife sexually or make her a proud mother of his children, the marital status of a childless woman is a curse. In both ways

Ananda, who looks manly disappoints his wife Nina because he is not in reality manly to give his wife much needed sexual satisfaction and motherhood. She finds a way out of this predicament in her encounter with Anton. This meeting becomes a turning point in her life and she feels really and sexually excited, independent and assertive. Her feeling of independence paves the way for her enjoyment of real sexual pleasures with Anton. She does not feel guilty about her transgression from her status of a married woman. She goes to the extent of getting even divorced from her marital status to enjoy sexual pleasures with Anton.

The pleasures the life offers are purely temporary as the earthly life of every being is sexual pleasures alone do not make life complete and meaningful. There are other pleasures which make the status of a woman divine, honoured and recognized both in the family and society. Such status is a woman being faithful, loving and caring as the wife of a man and selfless and sacrificing as a mother to her children. Such a status will never place her in any irrecoverable predicament in life. Nina realizes the importance of her being a wife, though not blessed with motherhood. The more blessed and secure status in life for her is only to be with her husband than as a divorced woman. She is determined to adjust herself to her life, treat her husband as her grown up child and shower on him with her love and affection and remain content with what God has given her till her sojourn on earth.

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