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**Divya S Patel**  
Ph.D., Research Scholar, Shri  
Govind Guru University,  
Godhra, Gujarat, India

## Theme of immigration in novel 'The Immigrant' by Manju Kapur

**Divya S Patel**

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### Abstract

Manju Kapur is one of Indian prominent female writers. Her legacy of writing for woman's issues has fascinating way for inspiring contemporary writers. This research paper inspires woman who believes herself as meek and submissive. Kapur writes about woman's socio-cultural problems in male dominated society. Her woman protagonists establish self-image in the society to prove woman's real strength. Woman has no more household chores for family, but Kapur highlights woman as independent for fulfilling her dreams. Big dreams and fame are not only made for men in society, but also for women who want to see their recognition in contemporary society. In earlytime, women are placid and dependent on her father and husband, but now time is changed, women have self-desires and for that they go against patriarchy to achieve her place in the society. Manju Kapur criticizes male domination for destroying woman's identity and she forcefully declares that woman is not only made for cooking food in kitchen, nurturing children and satisfying her husband, but also for dreaming her desires and establishes her self-identity in society. Here Kapur depicts Nina protagonist of novel 'The Immigrant' as self-discovered woman who transforms herself into western culture. She immigrants from old Indian tradition to western culture, immigrant towards self-identity, immigrant towards adapting foreign lifestyle, and immigrant towards independent life in Canada.

**Keywords:** Immigration, education, westernization, self-identity, betrayal, marriage disintegration, and freedom

### Introduction

Manju Kapur is one of the fascinated feminist writers in India. Her writing about feminine issues reveals the fact of society and it highlights the real problems of women in the orthodox culture. She criticizes outdated norms of traditional culture and it should be banished from its root. It is content to note that feminism is a wide socio-cultural movement especially advocating woman's welfare in society. This research paper brings the immigration theme in Kapur's novel The Immigrant. Here immigration means immigration from tradition to modernism. All heroines of Manju Kapur's novels are struggling against obstacles and they are fighter against basic rights which women deserve in true sense. Woman characters present as struggler to break old norms of tradition with moral courage to combat in life, and they are they are educated with independent thinking for which their family become intolerant of them. Kapur's protagonists carve on identity for them as independent woman with faultless background. Here Kapur portrays middle class woman with high education in her novel. Male domination declares that woman's place is inside the home and they have to accept husband's surname after marriage. This research paper deals with idea of higher education for daughter for herself, not for suitable match in marriage. Education is only the way to decide her bright future which leads towards freedom and self-awareness with self-identity in society.

Indian culture woman is torn between two halves, one tradition and second modernism, and she has to follow tradition. Tradition leads to wards suppression of woman and woman should not be submissive, but she should be free to think about herself to establish her identity in hollow societal norms. Woman's fight for autonomy remains unfinished combat, and woman's life becomes more complex in choreography of cooking, washing, weaving, nurturing, chopping etc. Manju Kapur presents the autonomy and individual identity in her woman protagonists in traditional thread.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Divya S. Patel**  
Ph.D., Research Scholar, Shri  
Govind Guru University,  
Godhra, Gujarat, India

In modern era, many things are changed in the society, but today thousands of women sit within four walls of houses and think that why they have no rights to choose their own lives in their own conditions whether they want to be homemakers as dependent women on their husbands or not to be like that. Kapur's woman characters are rule breakers for independence and want to achieve self-desires.

The Immigrant is a novel based on protagonist Nina's immigration from tradition to modernism. Kapur focuses not only on immigrant process of Nina's India to other land of Canada, but also transformation from traditional values to modern values in her novel *The Immigrant*. Her thirty years old girl Nina Batra, main character of novel lives with her widow mother Mrs. Batra in Jungpura, Delhi, and she is professor in college for ten years. She is still unmarried and here depicts her biological process in her body. "And her womb, her ovaries, her uterus, the unfertilized eggs that were expelled every month, what about them? They were busy marking every passing second of her life." (p. 1) Nina and her mother are waiting for marriage proposal for Nina, and after long waiting one proposal is come from NRI dentist named Ananda who is parentless and lives in Halifax, Canada. Both mother and daughter agree for marriage to live in alien world Canada. Here Manju Kapur depicts Nina's immigration from old tradition to modernism, and different transformations of Nina are following with uniqueness. Immigration theme is used for not immigrant from one land to another, but immigrant from old ideologies to new ideologies of modern world. Different themes of immigration are following.

#### **Immigration towards higher education**

Nina fond of education and teaches in Delhi college as an English professor for ten years. After her father's death, she handles financial responsibilities of her house and she is strong enough to manage all obstacles after her father's death. Kapur depicts that education leads towards maturity of individual and it gives respect to woman in male domination. Nina continues her education as a librarian degree at Halifax after marriage with NRI dentist Ananda. Kapur portrays her female character as educated woman in her writing who immigrants herself to education and makes education as a part of life for individual progress.

#### **Immigration towards alien world and loneliness**

After marriage with Ananda, Nina lives in Canada where she feels alien in different world from India. Her husband always busy with her job in dental clinic and he has no time for his wife. Here Kapur focuses on loneliness and silent roads around her. In Canada nobody has time to talk with another in spare time. Nina feels alone alien world. Nina is typical simple woman and so that her husband taunts for being simple in western culture and told her that be like Canadian woman. Apart from it, Ananda has sexual problem during having sex, and Nina can not enjoy sexual life. Another reason of loneliness is lack of sexual pleasure from husband.

Kapur not only focuses on loneliness in alien world but also sexual problems of Ananda which also leads towards loneliness of Nina. Sexual inadequacy leads towards loneliness and here Kapur portrays immigration to loneliness of Nina from crowded life in Delhi. Nina's feelings are written in novel that "The wine made Nina feel high and melancholy, like looking at the sky from the

apartment window and feeling her solitude. (Kapur, p. 128)" In Canada, immigrant people faces more difficult life and there are no option to go back and they have to survive in western culture. Kapur identifies the position of woman in a patriarchal society and deals with real problems of immigrant woman. According to Manju Kapur, women are educated, modern, bold, and assertive but they have to fight for basic rights and struggles for them. Kapur depicts immigrant wife who faces problems in another land as a housewife, and she has to convert herself as a western woman. Without converting oneself into western culture, nobody can survive in foreign land. Nina tries to accept western culture in her life. Loneliness is major part of life in another culture and immigrants have to digest foreign culture for livelihood.

#### **Immigration towards western culture**

Here Nina not only immigrant from one country to another country but also, she immigrants from Indian traditional culture to another western culture in Canada. She has to adapt new culture, food habits, clothing style, day to day lifestyle, climate and incompatibility in another world. Nina traps between double yoke of tradition and modernity. She tries to pronounce proper foreign English accents. Ananda scolds her for poor speaking English and has stated that "That you are a traditional, backward Indian girl, like some of these women you see at the India Club. Can't even speak English properly. (p. 147)" Nina puts on western cloths and adapts western clothing style and sometime she drinks also. Nina becomes alone in home and so that she convinces her husband for her education in Canada which gives her status as a free and independent woman. This step takes her to become self-independent woman in western land. We can note here that Kapur portrays self-independent woman in her writing to motivate other Indian women who believe themselves as massive and puppet for family and society.

#### **Immigration towards self-desire**

The strong and very fascinating character Nina notices nearby society in Canada and remembers her old days in Delhi as a lecturer, and she misses her job. Nina is submissive and dependent woman on her husband and her loneliness in home is very dark for herself. She longs for child but after realization of her self-desires, she wants to be like her husband and she desires to study in library degree course in Canada. Nina joins library degree course in colleges and takes step towards successful life.

#### **Immigration towards betrayal**

Nina is betrayed by her husband and Ananda has sexual problem in early days, and he always believes that "One day he might try again with a white woman. He loved his wife, but he didn't want to feel that she was the only one in the world he could have sex with. (p. 149)" Ananda has extramarital affair with white woman and he never understands his wife's condition in foreign land after marriage. There is lack of communication between Nina and Ananda and this leads to betrayal. Ananda consults his sexual problem to American doctor and tries to solve his problem by sex therapy. He conceals his treatment from his wife.

Manju Kapur portrays lack of trust and communication between husband and wife, Ananda has fear of exposing his problem and he has no trust and he doesn't want to come out his sexual problem in public. In marriage, there should not

be lack of trust, love, and betray to each other. After marriage with Nina, he never forget affair with white woman and he only thinks about his pleasures, and never tries to solve problem between husband and wife. He adapts western culture, eats non-veg, and drinks. He scolds his wife for spending money in extra expenditure, and he blindly purchases costly things for his girlfriend Mandy. Nina is betrayed by his first lover in Delhi, second her husband betrays her and third white man Anton cheats her. Here Kapur depicts "Her first lover had taken her virginity and her hopes, her second lover had been her husband, her third had made her international.(pp. 260-261)"

### **Immigration towards marriage disintegration**

Manju Kapur's female character is involved in clash between tradition and modernity, and she falls in love with white man named Anton in Canada. They spend intimate time with each other, and this affair is result of Ananda's lack of love and communication with his wife. Ananda has also affair with his receptionist in clinic, and both betray each-others. There are lack of love, companionship and communication in their married life. Anton has stated to Nina that "I'm married too. But it's stupid to confine yourself to one person for your whole life. What about adventure, what about experiences? Nobody owns anybody, you know.(p. 258)" Anton convinces Nina for physical relationship with him. Nina becomes betrayal for husband, but after realization of Anton's real purpose of hollow love with her, she leaves him and never tries to fall in love with anybody. Nina wants to be independent woman and she decides to leave her husband.

### **Immigration towards self-identity**

Nina had self-identity as an English professor at Delhi for ten years and now in Canada, she has no any educational status yet and she has only status of wife. Nina joins woman's awareness program and spends time with woman's group which discuss womanly problems and tries to solve problems. Ananda dislikes this group and scolds her for going there with stranger ladies to discuss family problems. Nina replied him that "I miss home-I miss a job-I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?(p. 233)" And she also has stated "I have in this country, you are the reason I am here.(p. 208)" She joins group to solve her problems, and she decides to study in library degree in Halifax. One more step towards self-identity in another country and she recognizes her self-desires which makes her life more comfortable in foreign culture. Nina get independent life after achieving Canadian degree and establishes self-identity.

### **Immigration towards financially independent woman**

Nina gets library degree in Canada and now she can do job in library which makes her financially independent from her husband. Ananda reminded her for extra expenditure and told her that he fed her and run house. After that, Nina decides to be free from her husband's salary and her library degree gives her job and she establishes herself as financially independent woman. Manju Kapur's protagonists are educated with respected degrees.

### **Immigration towards freedom and modernization**

Nina reminds herself for becoming free and resists her loneliness by joining library course in college. She decides to leave her lover and her husband who cheat her. She takes steps to modern world which decides her career. After death

of her mother, she comes back to Canada and finds white golden hair in her bed, and here Kapur depicts marriage disintegration in her writing that "The 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.(p. 324)" There are lack of love and trust between husband and wife. Nina says to Ananda that she wants to go away from him and to live independent life. Here Kapur beautifully describes about immigrant person's situation "When something failed it was a signed to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back.(p. 330)"

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it may be surmised that The Immigrant is the story of freedom from cultural norms and struggles for establishing individual identity in another western culture. Nina Batra, protagonist of novel wants to decide what to do or what does not to do for herself. According to Manju Kapur, immigrant people have no choice to come back in home country, but to move on and reveal self-identity in another foreign land for proving oneself. Here Nina decides to immigrant not only form one country to another country, but also to immigrant from old tradition to fashionable western culture, immigrant towards betrayal to each other in foreign land, and lost ethical Indian values for establishing self-desires. Nina breaks traditional rules to achieve self-identity, and for that she sacrifices her marital life and leave her husband. Kapur portrays marriage disharmony for self-respect and achieving self-identity. The purpose of this research paper is to reveal the image of living life style in Canada, not only its better sides but also worst sides in Canadian culture. Kapur's woman characters are strong and having decision power to prove herself in alien world. Nina gets betrayal from her lover and husband. she broke up and shattered within. But she chooses the path of self-discovery and break up all sorts of emotional bonds after her mother's death. Woman characters of Kapur seem strugglers for establishing self-identity in traditional culture and rebel against patriarchal norms in any country such as Canada. Nina leaves her husband Ananda for self-respect and achieving self-identity in patriarchy. Manju Kapur has very skillfully conveyed that freedom comes but not without sacrifice.

### **Conflict interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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