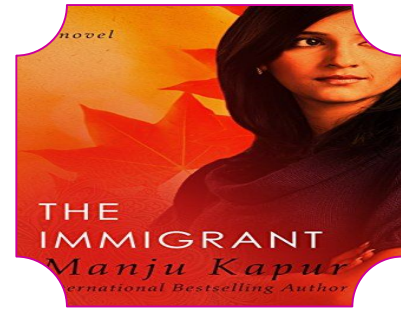




**PORTRAYING THE PROTAGONIST NINA AS A POST-MODERN
INDIAN WOMAN IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVEL
'THE IMMIGRANT'**

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ABSTRACT

*Manju Kapur is considered to be one of the prominent Indian women writers in Indian writing in English. She was born in Amritsar and graduated from Miranda House, did her M.A. from Dalhousie University, Canada. She taught English Literature at Miranda House Delhi for several years and now is retired from her job. At present she lives with her family in New Delhi. She writes about the middle class woman and her problems. The novelist, who herself was an English professor, has taken up cudgels to fight for woman's cause. Her protagonists have chosen their independent course of life in a patriarchal world. In Kapur's novels, every shade of feminism from passive, submissive to rebel feminism is presented. In 1999, Manju Kapur's first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, received the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best first book in the Eurasian region. Her second novel, *A Married Woman*, was the best seller in both India and U.K., and her third novel, *Home*, was nominated for the Hutch Crossword Book Award 2007. *The Immigrant* was short listed for DSC prize for South Asian Literature in 2011. Her latest novel is *Custody*. In all her novels, we meet the woman of modern era, her problems and her desire to become independent. The husband-wife relationship has been taken up as a major theme in all her novels. She exposes the exploitative trends of the patriarchal society in which male plays the dominating role, and portrays the woman who want changes in the norms of traditions. Her protagonists are caught in a flux between the responsibility to themselves and the traditional role of a wife, daughter and mother. Even after coming as a rebellion against their victimization, they have to compromise for the sake of domestic harmony. Manju Kapur has always tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels.*

KEYWORDS: *Prominent, Protagonist, Patriarchal, Feminism, Submissive, Independent, Exploitative, Rebellion, Victimization.*

Feminism is a broad socio political movement specially advocating women's welfare in society. While the beginnings of modern feminism can be traced to mid 19th century, the latter two decades of twentieth century witnessed the rise of 'new woman' or the independent woman, as complex cultural signifiers. The 'new woman' broke free from conventional constraints, and voiced woman's rights, progressive marriage system and changed concept of sexuality. This distinction has become a complex manifestation which creates new levels of tensions in post-independence women writings. Many Indian English women writers portray the independent woman who is not in conflict with the male, but rejects choiceness, and accepts responsibility for herself. 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.

Manju Kapur in her novel *The Immigrant* (2008) vividly presents India in the vexed context of globalization with far greater emphasis than in any of her earlier novels. It is the story of one such woman who gets entwined in the question of her identity. Loneliness and longing are the main aspects that the novel explores about the main character Nina. Nina, the female protagonist of the novel is an English lecturer who perceives, "education as a gift" and is not ready to exchange "the life of mind" for a "humdrum life of marriage" (4). She lives in a single 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 compiled all her wishes even making a trip with 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. The novelist comments on the dilemma of mature and professional woman: "Things are not easy if you are educated, the mind needs companionship, the search becomes longer" (12). When a marriage proposal comes for Nina from an NRI, a dentist by profession settled in Canada, her 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). Though she meets Ananda through an arranged introduction, yet she doesn't grab the opportunity to marry an NRI dentist but exercises her personhood and takes her own time to decide her future. 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 feels sad 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 savored fully.

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. Nina does not like her introduction to Western world. Kapur vividly describes the mental agony of her assertive protagonist. "Rage fills her. Why were people so silent about the humiliations they faced in the West? She was a teacher at a university, yet this woman, probably school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her" (108). 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. 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. Nina had been used to respect. It came with her class, her education, her accent, and her clothes. 'Here a different yardstick is used to judge her' (106). Here

the novel focuses on the NRI marriages where women are uprooted and move to live in some alien land. Women are doubly alienated-one because of their race and the other because of their gender.

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. Leaving behind the stereotypical expectations of her gender and hollowness of her bodily life, she advances to a life of mind. She gives a practical shape to her vocation of reading and takes up a part time job in library. The novelist presents the progressive thoughts of Nina. "The important thing was to get an entry into the system. From small things big things come, but from nothing come only nothing" (212). 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 her 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. 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. As the immigrant woman, Nina finally realizes, "For an immigrant there was no going back" (333). The novel ends with an inspiring message: "The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts she too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, and a floating resident of the western world" (334). Nina represents the post modern and revolutionary woman of new generation in quest of definite identity of her alien land.

To conclude this paper, is an examination of the efforts of Nina to establish herself as a post-modern Indian 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, 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 woman of the past. The theme of migration leads to self-discovery. Her journey "is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence" (Swain, 39).

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