



## Deception and revelation in Manju Kapur's: The immigrant

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### Abstract

The modern Indian fiction writers focus on the contemporary issues in their works. Especially their female characters show a tremendous change. Manju Kapur, in her fourth novel "The Immigrant" has raised the issue of husband wife relations, deception arising out of loneliness and boredom and revelation of it. She describes how Nina's life in India is and how much change takes place in her when she marries an NRI and shifts to an altogether alien land. The problems she faces to settle there and adapting to a different society is shown in a mesmerising way. The loneliness and boredom from which she suffers becomes the chief cause of the tension in their conjugal life which culminates in infidelity and then separation. What she feels and decides when she comes to know of Ananda's extramarital relations is also shown. This is also very strange that she is also having illicit relation with her classmate Anton but it is not revealed to Ananda. The cause behind this might be that the novelist sees at the things only from a female point of view.

**Keywords:** immigrant, deception, revelation, loneliness, problems

### Introduction

Indian fiction has never been so prolific as in recent years and majority of the writers are women. These writers, in their works, raise the contemporary issues like economic stability and social equality for women and for this the female characters in their novels do not hesitate to rebel against whatever comes their way. In fact, a lot of change has taken place in the image of women in the post-colonial scenario. The women writers of today do not portray their female characters as enduring, tolerant, passive, obedient, submissive and self-sacrificing. They are no longer portrayed as victimised lot. Rather, they assert themselves freely about love, sex, gender inequalities and extramarital relationships, the issues which have been a taboo in Indian literature till now. Thus, the contemporary Indian English novel concentrates on the problems of cultural, social and economic change taking place due to the effects of globalisation which has made the world a very small place.

Manju Kapur is a Delhi based writer who has written six novels namely "The Difficult Daughters"(1998), "A Married Woman"(2002), "Home"(2006), "The Immigrant"(2008), "Custody"(2011), and "Brothers"(2016). Her fourth novel "The Immigrant" is different from the earlier ones in the sense that it is set in the 1970s which was the era of emergency in India and in it Kapur focuses on the problems of the immigrants in adjusting to an altogether different society. Moreover, the locale in the novel is shifted mostly to Canada. In her review of "The Immigrant", Sushila Singh praises Manju Kapur by saying; "With this fourth novel of hers, Manju Kapur proves that she is a master delineator of the complex Indian life."(337) Prabhat K. Singh writes; "Manju Kapur looks into the matrix of pains and passions of the housewives of middle class Indian families with her awareness of a woman's existential concerns in "A Married

Woman" (2002), of the tension between tradition and modernity in "Home"(2006) and of the difficulties faced by the women in the alien world in "The Immigrant"(2008).

"The Immigrant" is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator which appears to be the traditional mode used by the English Victorian novelists like Dickens, Hardy and Thackeray. It concentrates on the married life of two main characters namely Nina and Ananda who immigrate to Canada. The novel starts with Nina who lives with her widowed mother in an old flat at Jungpura extension in New Delhi. She is a lecturer in English literature at her alma mater Miranda House. She has attained the age of thirty and her mother is very much worried about her marriage to a decent boy. Nina herself feels frustrated with the realisation that the prospect of her marriage is growing bleaker day by day. She feels utterly lonely at this place and the only person in whose company she feels comfort is Zenobia who is her colleague and confidante. On the other hand, Ananda is a dentist and he is also feeling lonely in India after the death of his parents in an accident. His maternal uncle, who is also a dentist in Canada, and who has married a Canadian girl there, asks him to settle in Canada which Ananda accepts. In Canada, Ananda is initially shocked at the societal norms but soon he reconciles to the circumstances. As in India he missed his parents badly, he gladly embraces the distant land.

In Canada, Ananda comes into contact with a Canadian girl Sue and develops physical relations with her. In his sexual encounters with her, he ejaculates prematurely and this generates a complex in his mind. He thinks that an Indian girl would be an ideal partner in his life as she would not be as sexually demanding as the Western girls. That is why, he readily accepts the offer of marriage with Nina. On the other hand, Nina also has a bitter memory of an affair with Rahul, who was her teacher and fifteen years older than her, and who

had betrayed her. This haunts her continually and she also accepts the offer with an NRI. Her mother, like all Indian mothers, feels elated to find an NRI like Ananda as her son-in-law.

Ananda's complex is evident when he spends his first night with Nina in a hotel in Delhi. He ejaculates very soon and leaves for washroom to wash himself. Nina is surprised and compares this love making with that which she had with Rahul, her boyfriend. "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."(89-90)

The next morning Ananda tries to achieve what he could not at night with the help of some anaesthetic which is revealed to the reader later in the novel.

"As he whipped off his pyjamas, she caught a faint hospital-like smell. 'What's that?' she asked, momentarily distracted from anticipation of what was to come.

'What'?

'That smell'.

'I don't smell anything'.(90)

Ananda hides from his wife what he has used but consummates his love this time.

After a wait of some months which seems very long to her, Nina reaches Canada where they live in a town named Halifax. Nina is welcomed by everyone with warmth and she feels enthusiastic. But soon her enthusiasm comes to an end and she starts feeling utterly lonely and homesick. Writes Kapur;

"The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future and after much finding of feet. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many, many hours."(121-22)

Nina tries to keep herself busy by going to market or to the library. But her loneliness increases with the passage of time.

"Till Nina came to Canada she hadn't known what lonely meant. At home one was never really alone. The presence of her mother, the vendors who came to the door, the half hour gardener watered their plants, the part time maid who washed and cleaned, the encounters with the landlady, all these had been woven into her day".(159)

The feeling of loneliness increases when Nina thinks of having a baby but she wonders why she is not able to conceive. This thought generates a complex in her mind. Her mother also keeps on asking about it. Nina consults a doctor who finds no fault with her. She asks her husband to see the doctor as suggested but Ananda has his own complex and he dismisses the idea. Nina is shocked to realise the physical and mental distance from her husband who has lost interest in her because of his own sexual problem. She spends her time thinking of her uncertain future. The rift in their conjugal life widens.

"Distance grew between them. Nina felt imprisoned by the stress, and assured him there were other things besides sex in marriage. Relationship had to develop, feelings had to be shared, surely he understood that?..... everything she said made it worse."(185)

Now Ananda decides to get a cure for his problem and goes to

California without telling the reality to Nina. He says that a conference of the dentists is going to be organised there. After the treatment, his capability increases and he feels liberated. He is confident and makes experiments in his sexual intercourses with Nina. But no one knows what is going on in the mind of a woman. Nina is suspicious and soon she finds out the reality. Their life becomes more tense but it goes on somehow. Meanwhile Nina gets a part time job in the local library which lessens her loneliness and boredom to some extent. She applies for a two year library science course also that will make it easier for her to get a job in Canada and which is interesting to her.

Ananda, in his quest to liberate himself from his complex, develops extramarital relationship with his newly appointed receptionist Mandy. The girl proves to be more possessive and demanding than his wife Nina. Mandy takes advantage of Ananda and even has fights with him.

"It took an hour and many promises to calm her down. For the four days that Nina was going to be away he would spend every night with her. He would show her his apartment. He would take her out for dinner."(250)

There is a kind of balance in the novel which makes it interesting for the reader. Nina gets admission in the library science course and has to spend a lot of time in the classes and the library. There she also develops a sexual relationship with her classmate Anton, an American. She enjoys his company initially but she realises that she is being used as a stopgap sexual tool by Anton. She changes her mind and makes a distance from him. Anton's ego is hurt and during a fieldtrip to New York, he rapes Nina. This incident has a severe effect on her and the feeling of frustration in her increases. As for telling to her husband about it, writes Kapur;

"After a few days she gave him a bowdlerized version of what had happened during the trip. It hadn't been so late, around ten, she had decided to take a walk to clear two glasses of wine from her head, when a man attacked her from behind. He had snatched her gold chain, then dragged her into an alley leading off from the street. She had screamed, but he put a knife against her neck. From somewhere a shape appeared, the attacker's hand momentarily slackened, she had run like the wind. Though she had escaped, she was still in a state of shock."(313)

The above lines are sufficient to show how much gap has come into their mutual relationship. There is the total absence of mutual understanding and trust which is the basis of any relationship. After some time, they get the news that Nina's mother is no more and Nina has to leave for India. Ananda remains in Canada and he is now free to keep his receptionist Mandy with him. Nina, in India, now realises that her bond with her own country has now broken forever. Now she is an immigrant but she reconciles herself when, on her return, Ananda says, "I missed you"(324). She answers with a sigh, "Now there is only you"(324). However, her reconciliation does not last long. She discovers a wavy blond hair next to her pillow while making up the bed in the morning after her return on the preceding night. Kapur delves into her mind at this discovery; "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"(324).

With this revelation Nina is so shocked that she does not speak a word about the hair and keeps it safely as an evidence. Here Kapur writes, "So the marriage was based on more than one person's lies"(324) and again, "She knew he had done it to prove himself."(324). Nina says nothing about it to Ananda but she is preparing herself for the decision she has to make about her life. Writes Kapur;

"At home she could not respond to Ananda's pretence that everything was all right. Each time she considered confronting him with his infidelity, she felt the futility"(326).

Now Nina decides to tell Ananda about her decision to leave Halifax. She gets an interview call at the University of Brunswick and she is confident that that she will be able to get the job. She tells Ananda of her decision and it is like a shock for Ananda. He asks, "Away from me. Why don't you say it?"(329) Nina reiterates, "Yes, away from you".(329) She has made the decision without giving a thought about Ananda with whom she has spent almost three years and whom she owes a lot.

At the end of the novel Kapur writes, "When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back...she too was heading towards fresh territories..."(330) The novel ends on an optimistic note telling us of Nina's process of "reinventing herself" when she leaves her husband with the possibility of finding "...new friends, a new family".(330) We feel surprised whether the sea-change in Nina only on the tenuous evidence of a hair is really convincing. The rationale that Nina deserts Ananda on the grounds of infidelity can hardly be convincing for a reader as Nina herself has committed the same sin. She has also had extramarital relations with Anton though could not be revealed to Ananda which seems strange to an average reader. She must feel guilty of it and should try to start a new life with her husband especially because, after her mother's death, she has no one in the whole world except Ananda.

"The Immigrant" has an open ending which suggests that Nina might come back to Ananda. In fact, she is almost traumatised by her own affair and now the revelation of her husband's relation breaks her completely. Her going away may be justified on the pretext that there is a kind of communication gap between the husband and wife. Nina feels cheated when she finds that her husband had gone for a treatment of sexual dysfunctioning without telling her. This communication gap and the the frustration with life cause the extramarital affairs of both of them. They deceive each other not for pleasure but with the hope of getting out of their situation. Ananda wants to prove himself and Nina is trying to adapt to the alien rituals of her married life. So, the revelation brings about a break up in their married life where "anywhere could be home."(330)

## References

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