



REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANT*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the representation of repression of and resistance by women in Manju Kapur's novel The Immigrant. It also aims to examine and investigate the fictional representation of gender based oppression, subordination and marginalization of women in the patriarchal society. As a contemporary feminist writer, Manju Kapur has shed light on some of the common issues pertaining to the life of women, especially Indian women and her writings primarily deal with the plight and repression of women and their resistance to it. Some of the most dominant themes found in her fiction include marriage, family relationships, mother-daughter relationship, husband-wife relationship, separation, and extramarital relationship. The institution of marriage is one of the most prominent themes in the fictions of Manju Kapur. This research paper focuses on the theme of marriage. It aims to point out how repression is carried out as a common and overt practice through marriage.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender, Family, Patriarchy, Repression, Resistance, Subordination, Oppression, Identity etc.*

INTRODUCTION

The Immigrant (2009) is Manju Kapur's fourth novel. The protagonist of the novel Nina marries Ananda, a dentist in Halifax, Canada. Ananda comes all the way from Halifax to get an Indian bride. Even though Nina does not find that spark in him, she is pursued by her mother and her friend to marry Ananda being told that her future lies in going abroad with



Ananda. They pursue her to consider Ananda as an ideal match as settling abroad will promise good prospects to her.

Special attraction for the NRIs has been the strongest and unjustifiable obsession for the parents to create a hallowed picture of the diaspora life for their daughters. Most Indian parents consider it prestigious to have their daughters settled abroad. Manju Kapur consciously underlines the intention of boys who aspire to get a suitable girl from India ‘who would surround him with familiar traditions’ (The Immigrant 77) and, as a reward, the girl will get to experience the prosperity of the West and freedom that she is not used to in her motherland. She also reinforces the plight of such married girls by using the most appropriate epithet ‘like a tree and vine’ where vine just like creeper has to depend on the individuality and firmness of a tree. Nina’s future is decided on such hazy hopes and fancied convictions. So Nina also decides to cross the seas to marry a person who lives on an unseen land. For Nina’s mother, her duty is over by marrying off her daughter abroad. Nina lands on the new foreign land with dreams of a family and a perfect life but they are shattered soon. Ananda’s lack of virility leaves Nina sexually unsatisfied and she is unable to conceive. Moreover, Ananda gets hostile whenever Nina tries to suggest a treatment for his premature ejaculation. She realizes that Ananda was aware of his problem and so, “this might be why he had come home to look for a bride. Was this the kind of man he was? Passing off shoddy goods to the innocent east? She did want to know this answer” (The Immigrant 186). Here we see that Ananda’s male ego doesn’t allow him to consider his wife’s suggestion. He finds it difficult to accept the fact that he is unable to satisfy his wife and give her a child. Nina has to repress her desires due to her husband’s ego. As any conventional Indian woman, Nina too accepts the repression of her happiness and desires as a part of the marriage. Like most girls she too accepts the situation and continues to suppress her happiness. Ananda is portrayed as the typical Indian man who subordinates his wife without considering his wife’s feelings. This form of inconsideration towards one’s spouse can be viewed as a form of repression too. Ananda lacks the sensibility to understand Nina’s point of view. In spite of being an educated man who has acquired the values of the Western world, Ananda still expects his wife to be the submissive and subservient woman.

The husband wife relationship has to have sharing and when it is not so, there is a rift in the marriage. Ananda goes for a therapy but without Nina and that hurts her more. In order to distract herself from her problems, she joins a course of library science where she meets Anton. Both of them are drawn towards each other and her relationship with Anton makes her feel relieved.

In this new place, away from her homeland, she feels liberated “Her life was her own; she didn’t owe anybody any explanations” (The Immigrant 273). For Nina, marriage to Ananda



was the bedrock of her life in Canada and she realized it well. She tries to get satisfaction through her extramarital affair with Anton but she soon gets disillusioned as she realizes that Anton was simply using her. Nina's library course makes her independent and after her mother's death back in India, she feels free to take decisions of her life as it would affect nobody.

In the novel we see that Manju Kapur has presented two sides of her protagonist's character. In the initial part of the story Nina accepts the trouble in her marriage as part and parcel of her life. She considers repression of her desires as her moral duty in order to show her solidarity. She decides to display her obedience and support towards Ananda by suppressing her desires. However, in the latter part of the story, Nina transforms into a strong, independent woman. She realizes that until she resists the conventional norms that society expects every wife to adhere to, she will not be able to find her happiness. She decides to end her miseries by getting involved with another man. Nina attempts to begin a journey in search of fulfillment, a fulfillment that she desired from her marriage, from her husband and the life that they would create.

Marriage becomes a burden when, Nina, on returning from India, finds out that Ananda also has cheated her, "So the marriage was based on more than one person's lies. Discovering this made it worse. Her transgressions had been against faithful husband, her constant understanding that any exposure would cause ruin and grief" (The Immigrant 328).

She decides to move away from Ananda and while she takes such an important decision of her life, she is facilitated by the fact that she is not in India—"the things that might have made separation in India difficult for Nina were hers to command in Canada" (The Immigrant 333). Nina refreshes as an independent person who takes the responsibility of her own life and that too on a foreign land. It is her education and her job that help her to be an independent and empowered person. Virginia Woolf, a champion of feminism, advocated in favour of economic independence of women. Education certainly helps women to come out of their cocoons and make a room of their own. Nina can be cited as one of such lucky women who have the courage to be on their own. But the pertinent question, here, is - could she have taken this decision of separation if she were in India, where the influence of society and family is sometimes suffocating for a woman?

Manju Kapur also deals with the rootlessness that Ananda and Nina suffer on the foreign land. While Ananda struggles to find a place for himself in the American society, it is Nina who suffers double displacement. A self-made person that she is, after marriage she has to sacrifice not only the company of her mother but also her hard earned status of an economically independent person to a lonely and dependent person on the foreign land.



Nina's journey on foreign land begins with her dependency on Ananda both emotionally and economically. However, the scenario changes once she becomes financially independent. Nina decides to take control of her life. She realizes that as an empowered woman and individual she has the right to find her happiness one way or the other. Initially Nina also suffers from the sense of alienation. However, her education and own decision to follow Ananda to America after marriage help her settle down quickly in adjusting to the ways of American lifestyle. For Nina, America means freedom from the confined Indian society. Manju Kapur's Nina in *The Immigrant* even though migrate to a foreign land in the seventies, she suffers alienation but is more adaptive to the new world.

The Immigrant can be said to be divided into two parts, one is the mother-daughter relationship and the other is the husband-wife relationship. Nina's mother is also a typical Indian mother who wants a husband and home for her educated daughter. In the first three novels, the mother-daughter relationship is not a smooth one but in the fourth and the fifth novel, the mother-daughters are more like friends sharing, caring and supporting each other. After Nina's father's death, the mother and daughter were left with no choice but to move to grand parents' house in Lucknow. Nina and her mother struggled and suffered for years before Nina got a job and settled in Delhi. The grandmother resented her daughter-in-law's existence; Nina resented her mother's meekness, the mother put up with everything because Nina's security depended on her patience.

The room in Jhangpura is the place where both women try to live without the support of any man. But the quest for a home for her daughter is yet to be fulfilled and Nina's mother becomes desperate to find a suitable groom for her daughter so that her responsibilities are over. Both of them were fated to lead lives devoid of men. "The mother had fallen through the bad karma of marrying a prince who would die young. The only thing she had to look forward to was her daughter's marriage, after which she would suffer more loneliness. At least the mother had hope. She had nothing" (*The Immigrant* 7, 8).

The separation of a mother from her daughter was certainly painful. They had been each other's support after her father's death. Nina could see her mother's sorrow, "Every glance at the sad pathetic face, pinched cheeks, badly dyed hair, eyes blinking behind spectacles marred her happiness. She had been her mother's life since her father's death, now that life was going 10,000 miles away" (*The Immigrant* 102). Nina's marriage to an NRI leaves her mother lonely. The distance seems to be a curse when Nina hears about her mother's death. Nina thinks of her mother's last moments.

Nina's mother had promised her to visit Nina's house once she became pregnant but that does not happen and her death leaves Nina's dream of ideal future of her mother, daughter and the



grandchild together in Halifax, shattered. She feels helpless for not being able to do anything for her mother. Her mother's death leaves Nina with nobody in the world to answer to and Nina gets the courage to take her decision of separating from Ananda.

In the novels of Manju Kapur, marriage is more or less an adjustment done in order to fulfill the wishes of the family and the expectations of the society, except for Nina, and Shagun who break through the bondages of marriage and come out as independent 'anchors' responsible for their own lives. "You had to be your own anchor" (The Immigrant 328).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that Manju Kapur's protagonist represents the Indian woman who in spite of her modern outlook is still a captive of her conventional social norms. Our patriarchal society continues to manacle women in the stringent traditional value system. Women like Nina, face repression and suppression to such an extent that these values and social norms become a burden. The need for resistance arises with the need for freedom and fulfillment. Women decide to break free from the confinements of social shackles when their happiness and self-respect is threatened. Nina finally finds the courage to step out of her miserable life and marriage to rediscover herself and to find a life she had always dreamt of before she set foot on foreign soil.

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