



## Comparative study of Manju Kapur's novels *The Immigrant* and *Brothers*

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Manju Kapur is one of the eminent Indian English writers who portrays the transformation of Indian women from being indifferent to liberated and empathically aware of their individuality. Her works represent the issues faced by contemporary women and their will to seek self-identity, fulfillment, and liberation from the shackle's tradition and social mores. She has portrayed the desperate efforts of a middle-class Indian woman. Seeking a life outside the cobweb of responsibility within a traditionally oriented family. Her works are woven within the conflict between tradition and modernity. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the representations of the Indian women in Indian patriarchal society in relation to the contemporary Indian tradition and values by analyzing Manju Kapur's novels *The Immigrant* and *Brothers*. It depicts how Manju Kapur's characters struggle in their lives for their identity and independence, being caught in traditional and modern values.

Keywords: Identity, Self, Immigrant, Independence, Women, patriarchy.

Manju Kapur belongs to the contemporary women writers from India, like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Shobha de, and Meena Alexander. Manju Kapur as a feminist attempt to portray in her works the intricacy of themes of Indian sensibility, the quest for self-assertion, and the status of women in this patriarchal social setup. Her themes include the existential crisis in the social surroundings where males and females are shown in contrastive terms males being rulers, females being ruled over. Her protagonist got swayed by problems of loneliness, alienation, and pessimism. Kapur's female characters are highly individualistic and sensitive, sometimes they are adapting to their environments. Her characters search for their grounds, she excels in depicting the inner furies of women and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment.

Kapur in her novel *The Immigrant* explains the story of Nina. Nina is the main character and the protagonist of the novel *The Immigrant*. A thirty-year-old lecturer in English at Delhi University who gets married to a Canadian dentist Ananda Sharma and relocates to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and experiences a new life in a new set-up. The author explains the experiences of the Nina as an immigrant felt outside her own country. However, the theme of the novel is about the complexities of having an arranged marriage and its ramifications in a place where this institution is not sacred anymore and therefore is free of societal expectations. The marriage ceases to be a lifelong affair and dies slowly along with the Indian-ness of the newly migrated bride. Though it is the physical need of the couple which fulfills the marriage at the start, later it is difficult to find sexual gratification in their respective lives. Gradually they get to know the unpleasant realities of married life.

Nina's mother is desperate to get Nina married and sets her struggles to fit into her marriage to an NRI Ananda Sharma. Nina leaves her teaching career and her mother in order to be with her husband in Canada. Marriage is arranged by the girl's mother and the boy's sister. Though it is not only the physical fascination for the people who are initially very happy about the marriage. Though everything looks perfect and wonderful at the start. Nina and Ananda are very happy in their world which is made more beautiful by their grocery shopping in the evening, dining out at the Indian restaurant, and being happy in the company of each other. Nina is pleasantly surprised when she looks at the self-sufficiency and independence when Ananda is involved in doing the household chores. It is difficult for Nina who is brought up with the belief that a wife must take care of the daily needs of her husband. However, Ananda is accustomed to doing his work all by himself and doesn't ask Nina to do it for him.

Nina's character in the novel portrays the dilemma of identity and her struggle as an immigrant forsaking her career, country, independence, and her social life to fit into a patriarchal institution called marriage. While in the novel *Brothers* Manju Kapur, the woman characters are less empowered, the patriarchal hold binds their lives to their household the character of Tapti on the other side is an independent empowered woman, who takes her independent, decisions in her life.

The novel is set in India and Canada in the mid-seventies around the marital relationship of Ananda and Nina. The novel examines the difficulties and struggles of an immigrant Nina, who abandons her career, country, independence, and her social life only to fit in a patriarchal society called marriage. This novel like Manju Kapur's other novels too deals with the theme of the survival of a woman against all odds. The Remarkable part of the novel deals with the theme of marriage and its consequences on the young couple Ananda and Nina when Nina travels to Canada to live with her husband. Though it is sexual disturbance, dysfunction forms the most important theme of the novel which results in the later problems in their relationship.

Kapur's novel *The Immigrant* shows how first Ananda then the character Nina is in a dilemma she was an independent woman but because of her marriage to Ananda, she had to leave her career and also her country and had to live away from her country feeling many emotions and feelings of loneliness she feels alone staying away from her homeland. She lived there with Ananda all day she waited for Ananda's arrival. She spent her time alone reading books sometimes and doing chores at home. She missed her homeland when she and her husband had some problems in their marriage. Even afterward they had some problems in their marriage, one of which was sexual dysfunction. Nina had some dreams of becoming a mother and being parents of a child, but it didn't happen, and Ananda was always busy with her office work and Nina had to change her living by adopting the new country. She had to face many difficulties living alone and missing the people of her own homeland, missing her mother, her independence, and other things.

*Brothers* is Manju Kapur's sixth novel, which emphasizes the lives of women at several places, rural, urban, domestic, and public, presenting the views of the happenings within the home with the same urgency as the goings on in the world. Kapur neatly weaves a narrative that spans eight decades, from World War II to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The novel *Brothers* is divided into three parts—Tapti, Virpal/Himmat, and Mangal. In the first part, we see Himmat Singh Gaina's Hospitalization in ICU and his following death. The anguish of the family and the public, in general, are presented in detail. It gives the idea about the affair between Tapti and her brother-in-law uncovering another angle of the murder. It appears like a form of honor killing by a fierce Jat his own brother. The second part Virpal/Himmat depicts the growth of the Gaina family through two generations. We have two pairs of brothers—Virpal and Dhanpal, Himmat Gaina, and Mangal Gaina. The story spread out in the village of Lalbanga in Rajasthan, which is divided into the caste families of Jats, Rajputs, Bhils, Yadavs, Gujjars, the Malis, pitted against each other. Virpal the elder brother is drawn by the national politics of satyagraha and the Dandi march. He wishes to be some service to the nation. He has a clash with the village Rajput's and is criticized for no valid reason. Later he escapes to the town of Ajmer to work for the nation's cause. Dhanpal is left behind and in the course of time gets volunteered in the British army to fight against Germans in Asia.

Virpal becomes a self-sufficient business in town after the death of the gaur sahib who dies leaving a small fortune to start a business for Virpal. But Virpal also wanted to join politics to work but it was only a partial success for him as he had no connections and belonged to a low caste though he joins Bharat Jagrit Sabha which seeks to build a strong nation through training youth in yoga and Hindu dharma, it has a lot of resemblances to RSS. Dhanpal returns a transformed man from the battlefield his insignificant nature and is transformed into rough, unpredictable owing to the bruises of the war experiences.

Both brothers were married in childhood. Their wives Gulabi and Mithari symbolize the marginalized women with no voice of their own. They had to follow the purdah system. They are used for the purpose of sex, reproduction, and all domestic chores. They are told Their life is blessed if they produce 'son' and are thrashed if they go against the menfolk. The bonding like sisters between Gulabi and Mithari reflects feminist consciousness to a certain extent. The untimely death of Virpal's son Kishen in an accident propels Dhanpal to sacrifice his eldest son to replace his lost son's place. The protests of his wife are not considered at all. Mangal is left to take over his father's mantle in the village. But Mangal is impatient to leave the village and follow Himmat to the city. His aggressive attitude annoys Himmat till the end. He advises Mangal to study before he can make himself suitable. But Mangal interests lie somewhere else. He wished to climb the ladder of success rather too fast taking the help of his elder brother, Himmat meanwhile proves to be a promising student and a natural leader, apart from academics and public life, he is

successful in wooing his dead cousin's wife and indulges in an incestuous relation with her until she escapes out of fear of public shame. Himmat doesn't even know the name of this girl until she disappears from his life and the house. Such marginalized women inhabit the lives of men. Though Himmat fathers a son from his legal childhood wife in the village but shoulders no responsibility of being a parent. Out of hardheartedness, he doesn't even attend the naming ceremony of his son. He becomes the student leader of the university after the murder of a Rajput student. He sees the local IPPP leader the Bishnoi sahib as a passport for his future political life. He does all the menial work of taking care of Bishnoi Sahib during his tours. He knew connection mattered a lot in shaping one's political career. Being married he unscrupulously influences Bishnoi's daughter and wins a ticket as the party nominee for elections. His hard work and shrewd political acumen bring him victory, thus, Himmat rises as a Jat leader unseen in Rajasthan's political history. His extraordinary success sows the seeds of discord between the brothers. Mangal feels neglected and left out.

## Conclusion

Novels *The Immigrant* and *Brothers* are Kapur's interesting portrayals of her writings. In her novel *The Immigrant*, she explains through her women protagonist the difficulties Nina, faces living in a foreign land and the situations she had to deal with alone away from the homeland. Her life is changed after her marriage she had to move to Canada a foreign country. Her living and lifestyle are changed with her circumstances. As she is new when Nina and Ananda immigrate there she looks after the household chores and then waits for her husband. Though she gets bored after some time, she starts reading books to fill the space, but then she has to face the other problems in her marriage. Loneliness caused her to suffer more in her marriage, later she suffered other distractions. So, the novel portrays the dilemma of Nina in a foreign land fulfilling his mother's dream of marriage, adopting the foreign land being an Indian, while Novel *Brothers* displays the cultural conflict. On the other side Manju Kapur's novel *Brothers* is the story of Tapti Gaina who is involved in an affair with her husband's brother, while being an independent woman making her own life living in a patriarchal setup. With her, there are other women wives in the family living in the village struggling in a male-dominated society to find their identity.

Both the novels' *Brothers* and *The Immigrant* explore the themes of family, identity, and societal pressures, but they differ in their individual focus and narrative contexts. The novel *Brothers* presents the story of two brothers and a woman who plays a significant role in their lives. The novel investigates the treatment of women and the challenges they face due to traditional and cultural norms. The author highlights gender discrimination in both rural villages and urban settings, examining the complexities of love, sacrifice, and the pursuit of self-actualization. On the other side, the immigrant centers around the experiences of Nina, a young woman who moves to Canada after her arranged marriage. The novel explores the themes of cultural adaptation, the clash of traditional values with Western ideals, and the struggle for personal fulfillment. Nina's journey as an immigrant reflects the challenges faced by many individuals, as they navigate through new environments and strive to balance their heritage with the pressures of assimilation.

While both novels address the experiences of women within the context of Indian society. *Brothers* focus more on the dynamics within a family and the impact of societal expectations on women's lives. *The Immigrant* places greater emphasis on the immigrant experience and the complexities of cultural adaptation.

While looking at the style of storytelling, Manju Kapur's novels are known for their detailed characterization and exploration of complex human emotions. She examines the nuances of familial relationships, personal growth, and the evolving dynamics of love and identity. Both her novels share thematic similarities, but they differ in their specific narratives and contexts. Both novels offer compelling insights into the challenges faced by women in negotiating societal norms.

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