

Diaspora: Quest for Identity in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

Godari Mounika

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad

[doi: 10.33329/ijelr.12.2.54](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.12.2.54)



Godari Mounika

Article information

Article Received:20/03/2025
Article Accepted:24/04/2025
Published online:29/04/2025

Abstract

This paper attempts to study the quest for identity in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008) through the lives of its protagonists Nina and Ananda. The study examines how the characters in the novel navigate their identities about their self, social and cultural contexts. Nina, the protagonist, migrated to Canada after her marriage to an immigrant, Ananda. Nina had self-identity as an English professor in Delhi. Now in Canada, she finds herself without a professional educational status, and her role largely defines her identity as a wife. She became a strong woman in the alien country and learned to survive alone.

Keywords: Identity, Diaspora, Immigrant, loneliness.

Introduction

The term "Diaspora" originates from the ancient Greek word "diaspeirein," which means "to scatter" or "sow over". The concept of diaspora describes a vast and diverse population that, despite sharing a common heritage or roots in a particular nation or region, has dispersed to various parts of the world. These communities often find themselves caught between preserving their identity and adapting to their new environments. The factors contributing to this displacement are diverse, ranging from economic migration and education to conflict, persecution, or environmental disasters. As a result, diasporic communities develop complex relationships with both their host and home countries, navigating issues of belonging, cultural preservation, and identity formation. This dynamic interplay between past and present, homeland and host land, shapes the experiences and perspectives of diasporic individuals, influencing their social and cultural lives.

Manju Kapur, hailing from a prosperous Jat family. She was born on 25th October 1948 in Amritsar, a town in the northern Indian state of Punjab and has established herself as one of India's prominent women novelists. She is married to Guna Nidhi Dalmia and has Three children. Currently residing in the USA. She is a professor of English at Miranda House, University of Delhi. As a diaspora writer, her experiences traversing different countries have significantly influenced her literary works. Manju Kapur attended Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where she earned her master of Arts in English and experienced life as an Immigrant. Manju Kapur has authored six notable novels such as *Difficult Daughters* (1998). It won her the prestigious Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the best first book, Europe and South Asia in 1999, *A Married Woman* (2003) was shortlisted for the Encore

Award, *Home* (2006) was shortlisted for Hutch Crossword Book Award in 2006, *The Immigrant* (2008) was a finalist for the Indian Plaza Golden Quill Award and the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2010, *Custody* (2011) has been optioned by Balaji Telefilms and *Brothers* (2016).

Discussion

The quest for identity is a profound journey of self-discovery, awareness, and growth, where individuals explore and understand their values, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. Through this process, people uncover their true selves, developing a deeper understanding of who they are and where they're headed.

This paper explores the life experiences and identity of the novel's protagonists, focusing on their struggles and transformations as immigrants, and how these experiences shape their sense of self. Nina, the protagonist, is introduced as a well-educated woman in her thirties, working as a teacher at Miranda College in Delhi. Unmarried, she lives with her mother, having lost her father at the young age. After her father's passing, their family relocated from Lucknow to Delhi, leaving behind her grandparents' home. Nina's mother, like many traditional Indian mothers, prioritizes her daughter's marriage, eagerly desiring Nina to tie the knot soon.

Nina's unmarried status becomes a subject of gossip and speculation among her colleagues at college and the neighbours in her community. Manju Kapur's insightful depiction brings to light the authentic experiences of India's middleclass society, showcasing its intricacies and social pressures. When an NRI proposal arrives for Nina, her mother's joy is boundless. The novel expresses Nina's life and her marriage to Ananda, a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) who has settled in Canada and works as a dentist. Ananda, having completed his dentistry studies, practiced as a dentist in Dehradun, a city in North India. Ananda is an only son, with a married sister Alka, who resides in Delhi with her husband and children. In his happy life a tragedy strikes when his parents die in an accident. His sister Alka urges him to get married, but Ananda shows reluctance still grappling with his loss. Ananda's maternal uncle, based in Canada, invites him to join him there. Ananda decides to make the move to Canada. He departs for Canada, leaving behind his homeland and loved ones. He undergoes the immigration process and starts his new life in a foreign land. Ananda had to face the loneliness when he arrived in Halifax for the first time. Ananda stays with his uncle's family in Canada, yet feels lonely, having to handle all responsibilities solo. In his uncle's home he missed the intimacies of Indian life, the meals, rich spices he was used to. But soon he assimilated the western culture. His uncle tells him that in Canada, self-sufficiency is a norm, and people are generally independent. Manju Kapur skilfully depicts the dryness of relatives in her writing. Manju Kapur vividly portrays Ananda's immigration experience, detailing the challenges he faced in a foreign land and how he navigated the complexities of adopting to a new environment. With the help of his friend Gray, Ananda shifts to a new rented house, starting a new phase in his life. He had a relationship with Sue, and after they parted ways, he accepted Nina's marriage proposal by his sister.

After getting married, Ananda and Nina spent quality time together at the Oberoi hotel. Ananda struggles with intimacy with Nina, leading to avoidance. Nina recognizes the problem but feels constrained by traditional expectations, making it difficult for her to address the issue openly. The silence between them grows, and Ananda returns to Canada, while Nina awaits her visa approval. Upon receiving her visa, Nina boards a flight to Canada as an immigrant, but the travel process and check-in hassles cause her stress and discomfort. Manju Kapur portrays Nina's journey experience captures the complexities of immigration, cultural adjustment, and emotional struggles that come with entering a new world. Nina's excitement and anticipation of reuniting with Ananda in Canada fill her as she arrives, hoping to start a new life together in their home there. Nina's life in Canada is marked by loneliness, as her husband's demanding dental job keeps him away, and she is left to adjust to a new world without his presence. The happy relationship between husband and wife is the major source of pleasure

and prosperity if there is a sense of true dedication and devotion to each other; otherwise, it's become the cause of stress, unhappiness, loneliness and grief. Here Manju Kapur focuses on the loneliness of Nina in the foreign land. And Ananda is distancing himself from Nina is another reason for Nina's loneliness. She feels comfortable in wearing the traditional dresses but Ananda told her to be like a Canadian woman. Nina adopted western dressing. Manju Kapur depicts the struggles of an immigrant wife who faces challenges in a foreign land as a housewife has to transform herself into a western woman. Nina finds that wearing jeans and T-shirts makes her feel more at ease, allowing her to connect with new people more easily. Although she's not comfortable in the latest trendy clothes, her casual style seems to help her build connections with others. Here Manju Kapur depicts Nina's cultural transformation from Indian cultural wearing dresses to adopting a western cultural style. Nina makes a strong assertion to Ananda, "I need to find my feet in this country. I can't walk on yours." (The Immigrant 216).

The journey of self-discovery, which began at the Halifax Regional Library, finds her fulfilment in her new identity as a Library Science Student. Nina immerses in her studies and library. Meanwhile, Ananda secretly pursues a relationship with Mandy. Nina started her extramarital relationship with Anton. Both are comfortable with their new partners. Nina returned to India after her mother's passing. After participating the traditional funeral rites and ceremonies, Nina returns to Canada. Nina wants to shed her past baggage and starts anew, but Ananda showed little reaction. She begins to search for job at the University of New Brunswick. This is the real immigration in their lives. She gained fortitude and learned to live on her own as a result of this ordeal and she progressively adjusts to the strange traditions of the West throughout the novel, and by the end, she is a completely different person. Thus, it is proved that migrants' life and characters are unveiled as a result of their experience in new land.

Conclusion

Manju Kapur skilfully blends the themes of Identity, Diaspora, Immigrant, loneliness etc. Manju Kapur portrays the immigrant problems and the struggles they faced in the foreign land to find their identity. I conclude this paper saying, that the concept of Identity continues till there is a change of attitude in every immigrant as Nina changes. Nina's breakup sets her on a path of self-discovery, as skilfully depicted by Manju Kapur.

References

- [1]. Kapur, Manju. *The Immigrant*. Random House India, 2008.
- [2]. Sri, Rathika K., and K. Shankar. "Diasporic Sensibility in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*: An Analysis." *IRE Journals*, <https://www.irejournals.com/formatedpaper/1704308.pdf>.
- [3]. Patel, Divya S. "Theme of Immigration in Novel *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur." *International Journal of Applied Research*, vol. 9, no. 8, 2023, pp. 44-46, <https://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2023/vol9issue8/partA/9-8-36-898.pdf>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2025.
- [4]. Kumar, Arun. "Quest for Self: A Study of Manju Kapur's *Home* and *The Immigrant*." *JETIR (Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research)*, <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1801326.pdf>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2025.
- [5]. Geetha Mala, Elinore, and S. V. Padmaja. "Manju Kapur's *Brothers* as a Feministic Novel." *International Journal of Novel Research and Development (IJNRD)*, <https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2308269.pdf>.