

The Institution of Marriage as Presented in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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ABSTRACT

The intent of the present paper is to throw lights on Manju Kapur's views on the Indian marriage institution and at the same time to show the woman psyche as studied by mentioned novelist. In the present paper only a novel, *The Immigrant* is taken for the study. Marriage is one of the most prominent themes in the fictions of Manju Kapur. In marriage institution, various shades of relationship are projected, evaluated and experienced in her novels. Some characters of Manju Kapur marry because of social pressure. Some of the women characters feel and consider that marriage is a bound and they eventually break this bondage and want to make them free from all the responsibilities and bondage. Some of the women characters try to adjust somehow or the other and make their relationship work. In India, the institution of marriage is not just the union of two individuals but it is something more, the union of two souls, cultures, families, the relatives and the society in general. In India, marriage is considered divine if the rituals performed during the marriage are appraised. India has the history of 'Swayamvara' as well as arranged marriages. Through the woman characters novelist presents her views on the Indian marriage institution in her novel.

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most prominent themes in the fictions of Manju Kapur. In marriage institution, various shades of relationship are projected, evaluated and experienced in her novels. Some characters of Manju Kapur marry because of social pressure. Some of the women characters feel and consider that marriage is a bound and they eventually break this bondage and want to make them free from all the responsibilities and bondage. Some of the women characters try to adjust somehow or the other and make their relationship work. In India, the institution of marriage is not just the union of two individuals but it is something more, the union of two souls, cultures, families, the relatives and the society in general. In India, marriage is considered divine if the rituals performed during the marriage are appraised. India has the history of 'Swayamvara' as well as arranged marriages. In the past, marriages also did the task of uniting two kingdoms. Till today, marriage has been an institution which is respected in India and the status of being a married woman has its own privileges. If the 'feel' of marriage in India or as in some of the Asian countries, is compared to that of the west, it gives altogether a different aura and appeal. India has been recognizing the country of tradition, convention and civilization. In India, there are many social institutions like marriage, family, school, hospitals, religion, etc. From the ancient time marriage is considered as the auspicious ritual in India where husband is considered as the god of the wife. Wife has supposed to adjust her according to the traditions and bondages of the in-law house. At her own house, she has to perform a role of an obedient daughter of the parents and after marriage; she has to perform her roles as a loyal wife, daughter in-law and mother. The sage Manu in his *Manusmriti* writes that: "यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:।"

Though in India, the woman is considered as the goddess and a symbol of the power, she has to bear humiliation, sufferings, inequality in the house and society as well. She is

considered as the inferior to the male in the house and society. No importance is given to the woman inside and outside the house whereas in foreign countries, an individual is more important. This concept of marriage being a family event has its positive and negative aspects as is with the other case round. Manju Kapur has observed and evaluated this ritual from her own touchstone of sense and sensibility. Manju Kapur is an Indian, born, brought up, educated, professionally settled and stays in India. Her observations and self-experience are reflected in her novels. In *The Immigrant*, she presents her views on the Indian marriage institute through the women characters of the novel.

2. The Institution of Marriage as Presented by Manju Kapur's in *The Immigrant*

Dealing with the theme of marriage, Manju Kapur has keenly noticed and critically analyzed the psyche of women. Whether India or abroad, marriage brings subtle changes into a woman's life and thus calls for profound adjustments. In India and foreign countries, the level of adjustments of the woman change. In India, a woman may suffer but strives to keep her marriage intact whereas a woman with western background, being more individualistic, may keep the promise of marriage to some extent but, at some point of her life, may also take a decision of choosing her own way of life, even though it would mean breaking up the marriage. The impact of the Western civilization and culture owing to globalization and fast mobilization has negatively touched the very sanctity of marriage especially in the Asian countries and India is not an exception. As a result, the divorce rate in this country seems to be augmenting with the changing times. As contemporary literature holds mirror to Nature, these themes of man and woman relationship where marriage is a bond of hearts and not merely a stopgap arrangement to satisfy natural physical urges, draw quick attention of these writers.

The themes of Manju Kapur focus on the most important issue of marriage and try to examine and explore the sensitivity

of human hearts. Manju Kapur has very delicately dealt with this issue in her novels. She creates a miniature of typical Indian families with varied shades of experiences and incidents in the lives of her characters.

Marriage is an institution that binds people in relationship, as husband and wife, as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, as sister-in-law and so on. Bond of marriage cannot be evaluated without the feel and depth of relationship. Hence, when the tie of marriage is to be valued, the changing equations in relationship are also to be examined. Examining the theme of 'Marriage' in Manju Kapur's novels, it is noticed that for her, marrying off her female characters is of utmost importance. Indian cultural traits can provide different reasons for her such an approach to her characters: social, religious or even status to save the family from external criticism for not getting married 'at the right time'. Manju Kapur's novels deal with the problem of marriage. How a mother reacts to the matter of marriage is a very common issue in the families where there are daughters of marriageable age. The ensuing instances project how the girls are assessed with detached passion when it comes to their marriage. Astha's mother in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*, worries about her daughter's marriage. She tells by expressing her anxiety to Astha that:

When you are married our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth (01).

Nina's mother in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*, also wants a husband for her educated daughter. The major topic of conversation of Nina and her widowed mother has perfectly narrated in the novel as she writes:

In the last eight years had been Nina's marriage-who, whom, where, how?...From where could fresh possibilities be unearthed on the eve of her thirtieth birthday? The lack of these, reflected in her mother's dull, mournful eyes, was what she was going home to (03).

In all novels of Kapur, 'Mothers' are eager and anxious about their daughters' marriage because daughter's marriage in India considered as the big responsibility of the parents. To find proper suitor and get married their daughters at right age are the main concern for the Indian parents. When an Indian girl attains puberty, her parents keep eyes on her and day and night think about the marriage ceremony. Marriage of a daughter is not a matter of ceremonial celebration for the Indian parents but a practice rooted in traditional ritual, more of a moral and social responsibility. They feel relieved, mentally as well as morally. This discrimination is deeply rooted in their psyche wherein, despite having self-sufficient potential, a woman is considered a weaker sex. Society overshadows a woman's capabilities by adhering to a singular philosophy, 'Man for war and Woman for hearth'. Marriage in a way is compensation to what she does not possess, that is power to assert and rule. Manju Kapur as an Indian, she is very much familiar with such things. She like Indira Goswami observe her surrounding life, society and culture and tries her best to

present them in her novels. 'Marriage' to all these characters, therefore, has different meanings.

The Immigrant is a story of Nina. She is a professor, who marries Ananda, a dentist in Halifax, Canada. Though Ananda is an NRI, wants a bride from his motherland, India. He comes in India to marry Nina from Halifax, Canada. On one of the outings before marriage when they go out for dinner, Nina thinks:

But she hadn't felt the spark of instant attraction. Was that so necessary in marriage? He was decent, considerate, thoughtful, everything his letters had suggested. Perhaps, given time, he would grow on her. Together they would walk the path of slowly growing respect, mutual dependence, create the habits that tied people like a tree and a vine (71).

Though Nina does not find that spark in him, she is pursued by her mother and her friend to marry Ananda. She is told that her future lies in going abroad with Ananda. Nina's future is decided on foggy 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 land with dreams of a family but they are shattered soon. Ananda is incapable of satisfying her sexually, so she is not able to conceive. Not only that, whenever she comes up with any suggestions regarding the treatment for his problem of premature ejaculation, Ananda becomes hostile. 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 (186).

The relation of husband and wife is very delicate; both must share same feelings to maintain it for long time. Nothing should be concealed from either of them. Ananda conceals his physical problem from his wife Nina and goes for a therapy without informing her. When she comes to know about the reality she feels much hurt. To come out of this grief, she joins a course of library science. She feels much hurt when Nina comes to know about the reality of her husband's extramarital affair. At the end of the novel, she decides to leave her husband's house for her new life and she does not surrender her life to the male dominated society.

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, who breaks through the bondages of marriage and comes out as independent 'anchors' responsible for their own lives. "You had to be your own anchor" (328). For Manju Kapur's characters, especially the women characters, marriage is a necessity to make one's life complete and find their 'home'.

3. Conclusion

Along with the theme of marriage, Manju Kapur deals with the other themes like alienation, rootlessness and belonging, loneliness, issues of identity, dislocation, relocations and

assimilation into the host culture. *The Immigrant* deals with the rootlessness that Ananda and Nina suffer on the foreign land. While Ananda, a dentist, 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. *The Immigrant* is a tale of Nina's journey from being a dependent on the foreign land emotionally and economically to

becoming independent emotionally as well as economically. 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, the sense of alienation with a tinge of exile is felt.

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