Chapter-6

The Immigrant
The Immigrant is the last published novel of Manju Kapur. It begins with the description of the mundane life of Nina who seems to have lost all opportunities of marital bliss. Her life has not changed in last nine years and she is about to turn thirty. The traditional belief that a girl’s ultimate goal is marriage overpowers her thinking and makes her feel empty. Unlike the heroines of Kapur’s previous novels i.e. Virmati of Difficult Daughters, Astha of A Married Woman and Nisha of Home, who seem to have emerged into a new woman defying the patriarchal notions, conservatism, strong protest against their doings, Nina, the protagonist of The Immigrant, is in some way an emerged or so called modern girl or a spinster of thirty year old. She fully represents a typical young lady of modern society i.e. frustrated, alienated, grudged, lonely, dissatisfied, unhappy at nothing, puzzled at her own temperament, obsessed by a sense of insecurity, and is an aspirant of an ideal, a utopian world. The major reason for her feeling of being displaced is the traditional eradication that every girl experiences after marriage. In Nina’s case it can hardly be said that she has emerged from a woman trapped in conservatism into a young dynamic exploring modern lady. Her being an established lecturer, the only daughter with no restrictions and a wife of an NRI clearly suggests that she is already a semi-emerged new woman. Her experience is a little greater as she is almost thirty, well settled and habituated to her single status when her marriage with Ananda was arranged. But what she expected from her married life turned out to be unforeseen wreckage leaving her frustrated emotionally, traditionally and sexually. With the result a desert of loneliness and a sense of alienation fill her lap. While the other female protagonists of Manju Kapur struggle against the Eastern rigid social set-up, Nina’s struggle is a bit different from her predecessors. She, at home, has to stand against the patriarchal set-up of the Indian middle-class society, but she, on the other hand, has to fight against her loneliness, frustration and the western ethos. In her desperation to fill her solitude Nina joins a mother’s club which eventually depresses her more as it reminds her of her childless state and
dissatisfactory sexual life with Ananda. She even takes up a menial job in the library and becomes a member of a feminist group. They provide her with temporary refuge but her displaced status and loneliness completely alienate her. Nina strays from her own sense of morality and gets involved with a fellow student in her library science class. Her double displacement alienates her and like a lost soul she struggles to find a foothold in the new country. In the process she faces a number of setbacks but is not undeterred in her resolve. And her emergence into a new woman comes to fore in her exploring new vistas in her graduating into an NRI accepting all complexities and nuances, her pursuing a course in order to do away with her loneliness, importantly in her exploring new vistas in sexual relationships (extra-marital ones) and finally her further migrating leaving for University of New Brunswick, Fredericton to evolve herself quite independently. Hence her leaving behind her mother, her job, her friends, her precious books, her home town, her country and the so called settled life in Canada meant discarding the identity she had created for herself. Ultimately the end of the novel shows Nina embarking her first journey towards independence distancing herself from the dependent life with Ananda and beginning the search for identity in an alien land.

Nina is a native of Lucknow, her grand parents’ home. She has done her schooling from Loreto Convent.

The International Academy in Brussuls was her real school, Europe her spiritual home. (1)

After seven years of schooling she migrates to Delhi to do English Honours and afterwards Post Graduation from the Miranda House and is a lecturer of English at her alma mater. Presently, thirty year old Nina, lives with her widowed mother at B-26 Jungpura Extension. Nina lived during the early seventies when the country was undergoing socio-political reform under Indira Gandhi’s leadership. She was a representative of an
unmarried woman whose sole identity to the rest of the community revolves on whether or not she would be getting married. She herself, although well educated, well traveled, financially and socially independent, believed herself lacking as a woman for she was not a wife or a mother as most women of her age were. She just could not help musing usually that:

Her womb, her ovaries, her uterus, the unfertilized eggs that were expelled every month, what about them? . . . Had she been married, thirty would have been heralded as a time of youthful maturity, her birthday celebrated in the midst of doting husband and children. (2)

The life she had, did not console her parched-up spirit. In Delhi she expected a fuller life, and her mother hoped a good husband for her daughter who would give her darling daughter the homelike pleasure she deserved but “neither expectation was fulfilled.” (3) She was so frustrated living here in the surroundings of Delhi that often she just could not help imagining obsessively “the day when the two of them would leave this small town hell.” (4) Daily she left her house in the hope of finding something good but

So immersed in the world of push, shove, jab, and poke, she hung onto another bus stop before being dropped off at the main road next to Jungpura. (5)

Nothing cheered Nina and let her out of the dissatisfaction she underwent at every minute of her life. The very thought of her getting thirty as a spinster disillusioned her.

Friend and colleague consoled her by remarking on her radiant complexion and jet black hair but such comfort was cold. Nina’s skin knew it was thirty, broadcasting the fact at certain angles in front of the mirror. (6)
Nina was frustrated because of not being married and being conscious of other spinster colleagues. “Academics was full of spinsters minatory signposts to depressing, lonely futures.” (7) She longed for getting married, pined for married life. Suggesting a modern note she longed for a body which,

could feel young in these circumstances, look forward to the gifts, the surprises, the love. (8)

Nina like a modern woman wished for an ideal world, a utopian world but she forgot that the ideal image is that there is no ideal image and the result is the monotony of her life. The novel unfolds many currents of views and flows of different denizens who are just puppets in the hands of Almighty. ‘What is lotted cannot be blotted’ seems to prove the novel. Human being is just a victim of circumstances. Although Nina was thirty year old but her spirit felt sixty as she walked from the bus stop to a single room. The hopes generated by each conversation with her widowed mother, gradually lost luster as the years went by and nothing changed. One of the underlying reasons for Nina’s being frustrated in life, was her dissatisfied disposition after her falling in love with a teacher fifteen years older than her in the English Department at the Arts faculty.

Unfortunately for Nina, he reminded her of her father. She offered him her heart and expected his in return. . . . Eventually the serial lover moved on. She thought the pain would destroy her. She waited for him to declare that she was the chosen one. (9)

Rahul, her lover, seemed to love her seriously. Unfortunately she fell in his love and commitment keeping this relationship secret from her mother.

She was looking of her love on her own terms, untainted by convention and respectability. (10)
Nina felt that she had emerged into a modern woman and as such undertook an affair but her lover left her. She still hoped Rahul would accept her as the chosen one.

But Rahul had always made it clear that he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. Like all cakes this one was chewed, mashed into pulp and swallowed. (11)

Anyway Nina emerged into a rational being and her self respect urged her to reconcile with her loneliness. She like a very clever new woman managed with her anguished spirit and so called maintained what she was in her mother’s eyes i.e. “sweet, innocent, virgin.” (12) Consequently, she led a monotonous life. Even her mother’s presence did not assuage her wounds of loneliness. Though on the one hand she pined for marriage yet marriage was of no good for her. She had her close chap Zenobia to ventilate her heart who--

frequently urged Nina to go abroad for higher studies, that being her only chance of finding a decent guy, for Indian men were mother-obsessed, infantile, chauvinist bastards. (13)

Still the thought of marriage kept on churning her. The other reason for Nina to be so obsessed for marriage was that during the seventies, although a relatively prosperous socio-political time for India, Indira Gandhi had also implemented some controversial laws. The Emergency was declared which gave her complete rule by decree, thereby undermining the democratic process which India had strived so long for, Gandhi also implemented the 20-point economic program which, although increased trade and economic growth, denied large groups of workers union rights and wage increases. Gandhi had also implemented forced sterilization of young men by government officials as a method of family planning.
This implies that at this time to be similar to most women in India is that prosperity, security and happiness would ensue if one was married with a family. Nina’s idea of womanhood is increasingly influenced by her culture, which predicates to be a woman is to be a married woman.

We are conditioned to think a woman’s fulfillment lies in birth and motherhood, just as we are conditioned to feel failures if we don’t marry. (14)

Even her widowed mother had no self identity or status without her husband. She was too fatalist and believed in astrologist who showed some drop of rain in the dry land of heart. “By now the mother was in a state of deep excitement and Nina in a state of deep suspicion.” (15) The search of Nina's mother of a bridegroom took her to the door of an astrologer whose advice harnessed new hopes in the mother's heart. At last, an NRI match was found. He was a young boy, a dentist, on the Eastern seaboard of Canada, in Halifax, Nava Scotia.

The boy had actually been to Doon school with Sanjay Gandhi! Now he was in the IAS, U cadre. Success was bound to crown your career when you could claim some connection with the family. (16)

Ananda’s parents died in an accident and after that his maternal uncle forced him to come to Canada. In India he would not be able to recover from this loss. In Canada he could make a fresh start because this country is full of opportunities. However the path of life in Canada was not that easy and he sometimes felt discouraged but every time his uncle encouraged him to sustain there. Still the immigrant psyche couldn’t be left behind. If he suffered from nostalgia, the answer was ‘No’ and this was significant. Nostalgia implies a deep sense of loss and certain irreversibility--but here there was no loss, as things that were ‘lost’ he experienced all around him. The belonging which was very deep rooted, very strong, ingrained so much so that the transplantation could not dither it. This is significant because it was founded in a breadth of vision
and helped him empathize with local life and conditions in the country of migration. In this way Ananda was leaving the reminiscences of India quite behind and he was entering in the new world after getting his degree. He had new jobs, new appointments and new duties. He also started thinking about his marriage but if he,

married a local girl, he would find himself in a difficult situation. When one comes to a new country, one had to come wholeheartedly otherwise one could be very miserable. He (his uncle) wasn’t telling Ananda what to do, all he was saying was that the boy should think about it. (17)

In Canada a wife was to support his husband and she demanded equality but in turn they also shouldered many responsibilities. Ananda’s uncle Dr. Sharma’s wife had a special empathy for young Indian immigrants facing initial difficulties. Ananda was brooding about this that to marry a white woman would be like marrying the country with your whole body. He was also wondering whether being Hindu would be a deterrent to a church wedding. Ananda’s sister searched and engaged an Indian girl named Nina for him. The exchange of letters started between them but Nina was in dilemma owing to her migrating to Canada.

‘Canada seems like a nice place,’ Nina remarked after two months had passed.

‘Many people go abroad for a better life.’

‘You had the best of both worlds Ma. Living abroad, without having to leave home for ever’.

‘What is there in this country now? Nothing. You know that as well as I do.’ (18)

As regards Ananda and his being mentally prepared for the marriage there loomed before him some of the personal complexities
owing to his sexual dysfunctioning. Any possibility on the horizon was accompanied by tension and tantrums. He had some doubts as to whether he would do well after marriage:

thought mournfully of his sexual difficulties, and wondered whether the breakthrough moment would come with an arranged marriage. Certainly he could count on a willing, patient, forgiving, loving partner. (19)

As far as Nina’s consent for this marriage her openness to an arranged marriage was also romanticized when she found Ananda as the right suitor. To her Ananda was the enviable suitor, an NRI living in Canada, white collared professional, attractive, of similar background and values. Her instincts dictated that she needed to be well settled and secure in ways of marriage and family, and not be burdensome on anyone else, especially since she had seen her widowed mother struggle socially and financially in a husbandless world. She had a father who was also an honest, upright citizen. He facilitated them when he was alive, allowed her to look for similar qualities in her husband. At this time and in that era, marrying an NRI was the next best thing to a secure and stable life. To her Ananda presented himself:

as an eligible, well-off professional, settled in the first world country, and honest, upright citizen . . . Nina she wanted to settle down, she wanted children, she could continue in the same rut for years . . . this could be her last chance. What were the odds of marrying after thirty? (20)

Even though she was a well-educated professional who had made most of her life’s own decision, she was willing to play house and wife when she moved to Canada. She was even willing to start a family right away, as per her cultural and biological demands. It is obvious at this time in the story that marriage and family were quite important to Nina, and that despite her independence and education, her unconventional status of
being an unmarried drove her willingly into accepting a proposal for an arranged marriage. Thus she had succumbed to the demands of a traditional culture. It is interesting to note that this was also the liberated feminist seventies of the west, where casual relationships, women’s choice and free thinking were burgeoning.

Eventually both of them decided to fix for face to face talk and the former concluded with a small kiss that sealed the proposal and put the ball in Nina’s court. The evening of Ananda’s departure came and both of them enjoyed the moment and did not want to miss at all,

His arm around her waist felt nothing but padding, and he slipped his hand under her sweater so he could feel her skin. . . . His hand caressed her stomach, brushed against her breasts. More delight, she was not wearing a bra; beneath the outer volume of clothing she was very accessible. . . . She pressed herself closer . . . his hand played fast and furious with her breasts, now no barriers between him and them. Involuntarily she opened her legs slightly; with alacrity he followed that invitation as well. (21)

On Dec 26 their marriage ceremony was executed at Arya Samaj Mandir in Kailash Colony. The couple booked Oberoi Hotel for the honeymoon. But the bridal night turned out to be an unpredicted emotional setback.

Anand closed the door and grabbed her. His hands leapt all over, under her blouse, her petticoats; they forced her on the bed to enable an even speedier exploration of her body. Startled, she tried to slow him down, but in five minutes he had come, five minutes and he had not even entered her. The rest was done with his hands, but that was stuff she could have done on her own. . . . He closed her mouth with a kiss. She kissed him back and slid her arms around his long slender waist. If he did not smell anything, it must be her imagination. This time he did make it inside her. For less
than minute, but the marriage had been consummated. They both felt the importance of this. (22)

Nina did not expect this kind of consummation, a fast and furious one, that too of no avail. Here she felt Ananda focused more on the sex rather than on the marital bliss of emotional bonding. As a result of she lay in the bed trying to adjust with the reality.

Involuntarily comparisons arose. Rahul with his obsessive talk of sex, endlessly curious about what she felt in what position, this technique versus that. (23)

After getting visa Nina migrated to Canada but she had still had reminiscences of Indian lifestyle and meals. She took special pickle which her mother gave to her and which she secretly carried to 10,000 miles. Nina thought that Indians become immigrants slowly because they were not among those who had fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death threats. She further explains,

These immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided. In the new country they work lengthy hours to gain entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account. (24)

Finally she found herself in Canada with the expectation of a happy married life and an exciting immigrant experience. In Canada there was a new phase of life for Nina to start a new life as a wife. But soon loneliness set in and Nina found herself as:

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 hours. (25)
Canada in the seventies witnessed the liberated feminism of the west where—

casual relationships, women’s choice and free thinking were burgeoning and was just getting used to accepting immigrants from non-European countries. Although not overtly addressed in the story, it was also a time where immigrants faced issues of racism and discrimination by the majority white society. (26)

However, Nina was not shown to have faced these issues.

Perhaps this was because unlike most wives who had immigrated to Canada under the sole merit of their husbands and were entirely dependent on them, Nina was well spoken, educated with a graduate degree, independent and relatively financially stable. This would make it easier for her as she would not have to face the main issues most immigrant face with respect to acquiring economic and social equality in Canada. (27)

But in the terms of emotional and particularly in sexual gratification Nina had to face only frustration. On the first night she expected that there would be exploration unlike the experience she had had on her wedding night. She “was more prepared for the brevity of their sexual encounter.” (28) To her dismay Ananda was asleep already without realizing that it was their first night in Canada leaving her tossing and turning in the bed. The waiting period was over ultimately but:

That night Ananda couldn’t wait to get inside her. No foreplay, head in her hands to suggest some preparation, but he was too impatient. . . . As she reached for his hand, he sighed, ‘That was better, wasn’t it?’ (29)

In Canada immigrant psyche had very deep effect on Nina as a wife because she cried and felt homesick when she was alone. She had started
passing her time in reading books. Ananda was busy in his job and for Nina it was very difficult to pass her time. Although she had been a teacher in Delhi University but here she would not be able to get a job that easily.

It has been a month, and she was keen to set down roots that would make her feel more at home. In India the relatives had seemed peripheral, more tourist than family. Now her perception has changed. She wanted to be close to them. (30)

More complications in the form of familial maladjustment arose when Nina wanted to settle and for which she wanted a child. But here also God thought something else for her. She could not conceive.

Every time she has sex, she imagines her egg fertilized, and every time she has her period she wonders whether this is a miscarriage, the bleeding is so plentiful, the pain so intense. (31)

Communicating the same to her husband would not do. He lost his temper each time it was suggested. He would simply burst on Nina:

To get pregnant so soon as you married was a very stupid, backward thing to do, it was more important to settle down first. (32)

Consequently Ananda started to be sullen at nothing and she grew more morose. She realized that she was undergoing sexual frustration. And even she could not help thinking that her husband did not have any notion of how she felt when she did not get her sexual appetite fulfilled.

Her idea of matrimony was a husband who was a little more alert to the discreet clues she let drop. (33)

More time spent in speculating over body, though seductive enough to attract or distract anyone, would not infatuate her husband into a
promising sexual relationship. Nina could see her dreams falling into fragments around. Tears gathered in her eyes. Long moments were spent gazing at herself in the mirror, in her underwear or sexy nightie.

Having a husband should not have meant such lonely desperation.

For years and years Nina had masturbation, hoping the day would come when a loving partner would circumvent the furtive, dissatisfied feeling this left her with. (34)

The frustration loomed large with her particularly in the nights with more certainty. Her dissatisfaction reached “epic proportions” (35) Ananda also realized that in the terms of sexual gratification he was not doing accordingly because of which there developed a breach between them. Therefore in order to get his problem solved he went to California to go through two weeks’ sexual therapy but this he kept hidden from Nina and again unwittingly made her feel dejected and isolated:

Alone her thoughts grew darker. The hollowness of the landscape reverberated inside her, with no people, no conversation to even glaze the surfaces. (36)

The absence of Ananda gave Nina almost nothing else than a job in the library. As regards her conceiving problem Nina visited Gynecologist for her treatment and received satisfaction that it was a fault of her husband than hers. She also read many books on sex and learnt many stages like anal sex, erogenous zones, oral sex, communicating about sex, stroking, massaging. She believed in the dictum of Simone de Beauvoir after reading The Second Sex that one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman. Meanwhile Ananda returned, a whole man this time with his masculinity so plentiful. He returned with aplomb hope to mount the castle with suitcase full of books to be read and then trial and error session but he could not satisfy her fire fully which covered under ash of disappointment. His telling the objective of his visit did worse as Nina felt
more offended by his lie. Though Ananda performed better than before but “sadly it looked to her that even good sex did not ensure happiness beyond the act.” (37) She could not help thinking that something was there which was restricting her entering into a clash free relationship. Indeed Ananda was focusing more on performance and timing than on love and Nina also realized it and rebelled, “Ananda, it is about love, it’s not only about performance.” (38)

In the library Nina was in another world, a world in which she could feel more at home. Here she had nice people like Beth with whom she could share her problems and as such the intimacy grew intense. Beth prompted her to join La Leche League, a co-counseling feminist group of “bra burning feminists” (39) but Ananda frowned at her this decision. Irrespective of his liking Nina stepped a new move and was thrilled as:

The raison d’etre of this group is to provide with a safe place in which to express, to grow without fear of criticism, where the individualities will be nurtured and strengthened. (40)

It is interesting to realize that the group was made up of predominantly white Canadian women, who had come together as a supportive measure against patriarchal constraints of the white, male, dominated Canadian society of the early seventies. Here she realized that finding her own feet was more important than anything else. Still nothing came of it. Even having a new move by joining the group did not satisfy Nina so much. She got fed up with the job of library which was simply temporary refuge. A few months later Nina got the letter they had all been hoping for a degree recognized by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and with it the possibility of a job anywhere in North America grew deep. Her life as a student began for next two years. She joined Library School to pursue a degree there. Fortunately here was a chance for Nina to assuage her tortured spirit as may be she:
Became a librarian, and brought home the bacon, she could become a student again and specialise. (41)

Nina was thrilled beyond imagination due to her being in Library School as there she found nice people and among the students of the Library School a colleague named Anton was one who looked upon Nina and found her attractive. He liked Asian women as he found them warm, intelligent, gentle and empathetic. Library School assumed an excitement for Nina that she hadn’t anticipated. Nina ran into a relationship with Anton and coffee, strolling and gossip was the outcome. At the same time Ananda also struck into an illicit relationship with his clinic receptionist. So in there own way both of them headed to some forbidden path irrespective of the consequences. Quite recklessly Nina ventured into commitment thinking it to be the means of liberation from the frustrated life with Ananda as he was--

an admirer of beauty, and he really loved her skin, the way she looked, the way she talked, so different from western women. (42)

Finally on one occasion taking the advantage of the opportunity Anton-

Sat down on the narrow bed and pulled her close. Her loneliness welled up and overcame her. He started kissing her, drawing her legs up around his body. . . . The moans grew into soft screams. On he kept -- she found herself arching, she found herself offering her breasts to him, she found herself whimpering, she felt wet and hot, she felt driven beyond the point of herself. (43)

For the first time she had a sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent. She enveloped the room in a distant gaze - a woman of the world, a lover of men. Nina felt guilty after the sexual encounter with Anton. She began to ponder what she had done. But soon she rationalized herself when she felt:
That she liked, she had lived. Who can feel guilty about living? Judging from the evidence, and the sexual therapy centers, every citizen in North America regarded good sex as their unalienable right. It was her right too. (44)

After she had had sex with Anton, it seemed especially hypocritical to hang on to vegetables. So she became non-vegetarian eating each meat and even wine too.

Red meat. Flesh. Mammals. Cow. Cows that looked into your eyes--cows that her mother worshipped on fixed days of the Hindu calendar. . . . Her meat eating was the result of fragmentation and distress, not a desire for convenience. (45)

She thus paralleled her fidelity and vegetarianism to all that was pure and Indian, and her infidelity and eating of meat to that which was tainted and unindian. Nina and Anton found it convenient to have sex on Wednesday afternoon. As the summer holiday approached, Anton had to leave for three months, the periods intolerable for her. With the passage of time the hollowness of this relationship propped out as Anton showed no interest in her beyond the physical relationship but that he made quite clear in the beginning, though Nina did not take it that seriously. Nina realized that she was also responsible for her this sorry state having grumbling against no one and as such came to the terms with it as well. She suggested:

Her life was her own; she did not owe anybody any explanations. If Anton gave her pleasure, if his easy acceptance of her gilded her studies, didn’t she owe it to herself to sleep with him? (46)

But all her dreams were shattered when she found a wavy blond hair next to her pillow. It now tells the story of her husband’s transgression. She thought of her transgression which had been against a faithful husband but the discovery of yellow hair made it clear that their marriage,” was
based on more than one person's lies.” (47) Nina now felt relieved and enjoyed her regeneration. She set herself free from the yoke of matrimony and social sanction. She decided to be by herself away from her husband, thinking that independence would facilitate her thought processes. She is now an independent self financially self-sufficient and socially acceptable. Nina cherished the sense of freedom only for a short while and the worst of this relationship occurred when Anton showed his real face. One day he tried his best in spite of her refusal asserting her, “come on now Baby, don’t say you are not enjoying it” (48) but that was the last arching into her and “at last he shuddered and groaned, grew limp, slipped outside and sank to the side of her bed.” (49) She felt she was a toy to be used, abused, misused and finally to be thrown from the human phase.

Her first lover had taken her virginity and her hopes, her second lover had been her husband, her third had made her international. (50)

When she was young, she fell a prey before Rahul who exploited her and squeezed her body like lemon and enjoyed the moment. When she was married she was but just a time pass nipple in the hands of her impotent husband Ananda who always used to do experiment with white women. When she was at the threshold of a job of Librarian she was molested, teased, fucked and finally raped by Anton, “she collapsed onto the bed, one of many defenseless creatures in an uncaring city.” (51) Here the novel indubitably proves the point home that it is a traverse of mental thirst at the cost of physical lust for which Nina had to go through rigorous ordeal. The novel recalls to our mind while grappling with reading session the following statement of Emilia addressed to Desdemona in Othello of W. Shakespeare:

‘Tis not a year or two shows us a man:

They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
They eat us hungrily, and when they are full,

They belch us. (52)

The woman has been exploited by man as though it were his natural birth right. Her innate attributes of compassion and sacrifice have enchained her with the manacles of servitude. Hence it ascertained that the perpetual subjugation of women is divinely ordained. In one of the interviews Kapur unlocks when she was asked if the examination of women's history was a persistent theme:

I get both inspired and depressed. I wish I could write like that. Writing is a muscle that needs to be exercised all the time. One of the main occupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both the private and public spaces in their lives – what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the homefires burning-and at the cost of their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home? They have to do so many things, they have to play so many roles and there is a lot of stuff to say about women and it is also what I know. (53)

So Kapur portrays Nina in the novel behaving contrary to the will of male dominance. She did not respond to Ananda’s pretence that everything was all right. Each time she considered confronting him with his infidelity, she felt the futility of her own relationship with him. To have any real purpose, she would have to confess her own; they would have to examine why they had betrayed each other. They would have to be a woman’s group, knowing that the only way forward was to function with honesty, trust, all judgment withheld.

She looked the cards of her life as she wondered which hand to deal. In any game she would have flung them down. (54)
Buds blossomed, leaves emerged, the grass turned green. Nina enjoyed every breath of air, despite her heavy heart. She graduated and applied for jobs and got a call for interview from the University of New Brunswick, “in her bones she knew she would get the job. Interviews had always been easy for her.” (55) She felt she was going to emerge into a new woman with promising career ahead.

Financially self sufficiency, rental ease, social acceptability. She hoped independence would facilitate her thought process. She looked down the path on which there would be no husband and saw no difficulties, the pain, the solitude. (56)

She went away from Halifax and thought of all those who had been quite nice to her but felt that they were all temporary. The novelist describes,

She thought of those who had been nice to her, wayfarers on the path, nothing permanent, but interacting with them had made that stretch easier. Colleagues at HRL, the woman's group that encouraged her to be angry and assertive. Beth, Gayatri library school; the sense of community was there, warming but temporary-everything temporary. (57)

According to the author, Nina has thus liberated herself from the patriarchal constraints she faced in the story through the various processes that changed her habituated identity; the ability to choose her own career through education, the ability to decide whether she wants to have children, her sexual freedom, her change in dress and image, and eventually her decision to leave her husband.

Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, was not necessarily lasting, but ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was signal to move on.
For an immigrant there was no going back. . . . When one is reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. (58)

In Nina’s emerging into a new woman it is clearly discernible that she was already an almost new woman in the terms of being educated, professionally settled, free to have her own decision, living on her own conditions. Still Nina seemed to have emerged into a new woman in terms of her establishing herself in alien surroundings getting herself free from married constraints and living her life on her own accord. Her emerging into a new woman suggests how as an immigrant she conformed to the ways of alien land.

If we feel for some of the causes behind Nina's breaking the nuptial ties and liberating herself from traditional familial constraints it can be safely said that there was a subtle underlying patriarchal tone to Ananda's character and his actions. He was not seen as one who overtly tried to control and oppress his wife. However, through his various attempts to change her and steer their lives according to his reasoning, it can be connoted how he tried to control Nina throughout the story. Ananda, as an Indian immigrant, a successfully integrated man in Western society, was also struggling against a white classist western society as he constantly competed to be and to have all that is Canadian, an Indian-turned-Canadian bride, sex with stereotypical white Canadian women, a white collared Canadian profession, Canadian food and clothes and Canadian ideals. It can be argued that due to his struggle for equality in such a society, his need to maintain power and control over his wife and their life together pacified this yearning. This also continues with Ananda's fascination with fair skin and white skin. Prior to his arranged marriage, the women he had relationships with were the typified blonde, blue-eyed, white skinned, sexually assertive women of the west. His inability to detach from these women and his need to relate to them depicts his aversion to his own culture and a desperate effort to assimilate into western society. Naturally when the woman he married was the opposite
of this, he made every effort to westernize her so that she would seem less Indian and fit better in Canadian society. He tried to control Nina’s dress, eating, name, sexual practices, and even her desire to have children. This is because Ananda found it necessary that Nina fitted in with white Canadian society by discarding all things that identified her as an Indian woman, thus erasing her identity as an Indian woman and as an immigrant. Nina could not understand why this was necessary to fit in with Canadian society. Ananda made a point that to Nina’s advantage her name could be Indian as well as western and she should thus fit in well in Canada because of that. He then asked Nina to stop wearing her saris everywhere as they were too formal.

Women who are not used to wearing Western clothes find themselves in a dilemma. If they focus on integration, convenience and conformity they have to sacrifice habit, style and self-perception . . . in Nina’s case it took months to wear down her resistance. (59)

Ananda continued to suggest throughout the story that Nina’s life would be much more exciting and easy in Canada if she were to conform to eating meat. Sexuality and extramarital affairs were thematic in the novel as an element of identity and power struggle with Ananda. He found sexual relationships with his wife less fulfilling than if they were to be with his white Canadian mistresses. According to Ananda, sex with his wife was mundane and routine whereas on the other hand, it was exciting and powerful. His infidelity could be construed as his control over Nina’s choice, for if she were to find out, it would require her to make her own choice with respect to the course of their marriage. Thus by hiding this from her, she was left without choice and was obliquely controlled. Ananda’s preoccupation with his penis controlled every other aspect of his life in this story. It is realized that his need to marry was because he believed it would solve his problems with premature ejaculation. Before their marriage Ananda did not disclose to Nina that he was having
problems with premature ejaculation. When Nina found this out after their marriage she was confused and hurt by this surprise and at times left sexually unsatisfied. This would then imply that if she were to have known prior to her marriage, it might have played a role in her decision to marry him. Thus, his deception had led to his control over her choice of husband and their sexual relationship as a married couple. In the beginning he thought that having sex with Nina was actually helping his ability to sustain himself, despite that it lasted a couple of minutes, despite that he used his dental anesthetic on his penis to sustain erection, and despite that it provided no pleasure to his wife. Eventually when Nina confronted him with this, he got defensive and angry, implying that only his sexual satisfaction was paramount to both.

He knew he had miles to go before he reached his goal of pounding some woman to sexual pulp, but with marriage he had gained his confidence. One day he might try again with a white woman. He loved his wife, but he didn’t want to feel that she was the only one in the world that he could have sex with. (60)

When Nina asked if they could see a fertility specialist, after many failed attempts at trying to conceive, he justified his non-cooperation by stating that it was still too early for them in their marriage and that there was no rush. However, all the while he was more concerned about the scrutiny that his penis and sexual performance would be under fertility testing. This is an example of how he had put his needs above the needs of a prospective family, again by subtly controlling the situation and directing the course of their married life. Ananda, being the only earning partner, also controlled the finances and paid the bills. On one occasion Nina spent three hundred dollars on clothes, western clothes which he encouraged her to buy. However, upon receipt of the bill, he got very angry at her frivolous expenditure. When she said that she did not even know how much he earned, and as such did not ask for much, he claimed that it was very expensive to run a dental practice. He said that he was still
recovering from the wedding debt, insinuating that she should not be questioning him after what he had done for her financially. What he did not tell her was that he was actually recovering from a very expensive sexual therapy session. Knowing that she had no proper income of her own, he continued to make her feel guilty for spending his money and continued to control her expenses. Generally it is a known fact that financial control over women is one of the main acts of patriarchy by men. This is especially true if the woman is not working and/or is financially dependent on the man who is earning.

In this way, if a woman does not have any money of her own, it then curtails various other aspects of her life that involve certain expenses. She cannot socialize, buy herself necessities, have an emergency fund, pay for health needs, or even something as simple as paying for transportation. She can thus be confined physically and financially. In this case, although Nina was able to spend money for the most part, it is obvious that if it did not suit Ananda then the expenditure was not warranted, this indicating that he ultimately made the financial decision for what was and was not needed and by whom. As part of his need for power and control with the act of sex, acquiring sexual prowess was foremost on his mind and with this he secretly attended sex therapy in California. The therapy he sought did not just include ‘talk’ therapy, but involved sex with a surrogate. By most standards this would be considered a form of infidelity. However according to Ananda, if it will solve his problem then it was worth the over three thousand dollars he had spent on it and justified that it could not be infidelity on his part. His therapy did help him with his sexual issues. When he returned to Nina, his sexual performance was visibly timed by the digital clock by their bedside, for every time he sustained himself longer he logged it into a diary. The statistics that he gathered on himself gave him more self confidence than whether or not his wife was experiencing any pleasure. Sex to him had become studied and strategic. This also exemplified his control over sex.
and over Nina’s sexual needs and the fact that his performance was paramount. As his sexual performance improved and his marital relationship grew distant, Ananda began to have an affair two years into his marriage with his temporary receptionist, a white, blonde Canadian named Amanda. To Nina, his infidelity could be construed as his control over the meaning of their marriage and that his deception could have very hurtful consequence to Nina, and thus exerted control over her trust and emotions. And every change also resulted in a change in her identity. The woman who arrived in Canada was a very different woman at the end of the story. Canadian ideals and society had a significant impact on this transformation. As portrayed by the author, the freedoms of western society sometimes superseded certain constraints of Indian cultural demands and universal patriarchy by allowing Nina the choice to make certain decisions in her own life. The author seems to suggest that her journey of self-discovery into the woman she becomes in the end is one of freedom and choice. She finds that her new found freedom and ideologies have allowed her to make her own decisions for herself despite Ananda’s attempts of patriarchal control.

The Immigrant thus reflects the metamorphosis of the immigrant to one of a confident and settled citizen who is no longer lost in her new world or in the shadows of her husband’s identity. Nina’s disappointment with the sexual relationship with Ananda, the lack of intimacy in the married couple, the lack of orgasm of hers and the inability for them to conceive lead to Nina’s change in expectations of the promising happy married life. And Nina chose to transform her identity as a new woman. She focused more on her image, wore western clothes that flattered her, and even indulged in a sexual affair, behaviour she would not indulge in if she were the typical dutiful Indian wife. She believed that once she got her degree and a job within her field she would have then fully completed her metamorphosis into a more independent woman. In Canada she was allowed the freedom to escape cultural and familial demands and her
education in Canada provided her with financial and social independence. The novel thus purports the real meaning of Nina’s immigration at the cost of humiliation, inhibition, secret and unwanted sex. Observing Nina’s case minutely it is inferred that the immigrant experience is a composite one made up of collectivities, multiple journeys, stillpoints and border crossings. Experiences are shaped by economic position, personal skills and political relationships between country of origin and of adoption. Migration that leads to separation may be seen as rebirth, rebirth in a new place, city, country marked by a new culture, different flora and fauna, new adjustments and so on. But even if migration is reincarnation, it takes the memory back to the earlier birth even as the migrants have to build a new world only to die in hope and dread. Satendra Nandan puts it in this connection:

What then is writer’s enigma of survival? Initially, it is an outrage of more horrendous fates of people elsewhere. One is dislocated from one world, but is connected to so many others. Suddenly they become closer to one’s own. The writer then tries to find new ways of being human, new ways of redefining his humanity, new ways of recognizing his inseparable humanity with others. This is indeed, remaining rooted and defeating the challenges of displacement. (61)
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