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## Marriage, Displacement, and the New Indian Woman: A Feminist Reading of Nina in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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### Abstract

This research paper entitled “Marriage, Displacement, and the New Indian Woman: A Feminist Reading of Nina in Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant*” explores the significant role that the institution of marriage plays in Indian society and the transformation a woman undergoes upon entering married life. The novel portrays Nina, an educated yet culturally conditioned woman whose marriage to Ananda, a dentist settled in Canada, leads her into a new socio-cultural environment. Moving from the protected space of her parental home to the unfamiliar world of migration, Nina experiences emotional, cultural, and psychological displacement. Through a feminist perspective, the paper examines how marriage and migration reshape Nina’s identity and compel her to confront the realities of marital expectations, sexual dissatisfaction, and personal autonomy. Although equipped with education and professional aspirations, Nina initially internalizes traditional ideals of marriage prevalent in Indian society. However, her experiences in the diasporic setting gradually transform her outlook and lead her toward a new understanding of selfhood. The study argues that it is the combined forces of marriage and displacement that ultimately redefine Nina as a “New Indian Woman,” a transformation that she herself had never anticipated.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Displacement, Feminism, Diaspora, Identity.

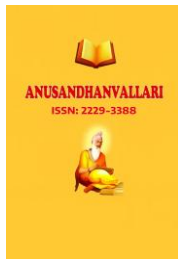
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### Introduction

In *The Immigrant*, Kapur explores the concept of marriage as a deeply embedded social institution in Indian society. For many Indian mothers, marriage is often considered the ultimate goal in a woman’s life, believed to bring prosperity, social respect, emotional fulfilment, and above all, security. This cultural belief strongly influences the mindset of Nina’s mother, who, like many Indian mothers, assumes that her daughter will attain stability and protection once she is married. However, Nina’s perception of marriage is more cautious and reflective. Having observed the realities of marital life around her, she views it not merely as a social necessity but as a complex process of compromise and negotiation. As she remarks, “Marriage is a question of adjustment (74)” and she also worries about her mother, wondering who will take care of her once she leaves home after marrying someone.

In Indian society, marriage has long been more than a personal union rather it is a social institution that encodes women’s roles, responsibilities, and identities. As Simone de Beauvoir contends in *The Second Sex*, marriage often functions as “the destiny traditionally offered to women by society (26),” shaping expectations around sexuality, motherhood, and social respectability. In *The Immigrant* by Kapur, Nina’s journey from Delhi to Canada complicates this construct: although educated and globally exposed, she is unable to detach from the cultural command that equates womanhood with marital obligation and motherhood. Her psychological distress at being childless and sexually unfulfilled highlights the persistence of patriarchal norms beyond national boundaries.

Kapur emphasises Nina’s fear of marriage in early scenes: “I am scared of being married, of becoming



someone else's property" (23). Unlike her mother, who insists that marriage will provide "company and protection," Nina resists the idea of transition from daughter to wife. Her anxiety reflects not personal irrationality but a culturally learned understanding that marriage often encompasses individual identity.

From a feminist perspective, Kapur's novels highlight the lived experiences of women who attempt to resist patriarchal expectations. Feminist theory, particularly the ideas of, emphasizes how women have historically been positioned as the "Other" within male-dominated societies, Kapur's female protagonists exemplify this condition. Characters such as Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman*, and Nina in *The Immigrant* struggle against traditional roles imposed upon them.

Most often, patriarchal norms overpower the struggles of young Indian women who attempt to deviate from the unwritten rules and expectations imposed upon them by society. Nina is no exception; she too becomes a victim of these societal expectations. Yielding to her mother's wishes, she marries Ananda and moves to Canada. Having recently celebrated her thirtieth birthday, Nina enters marriage with numerous hopes and expectations. However, life in Canada soon brings her both physical and psychological disappointment. In the article titled "*Redefining Womanhood in Manju Kapur's The Immigrant*," K. Kamala and Dr. R. Shanthi describe Nina's plight in an alien land as follows:

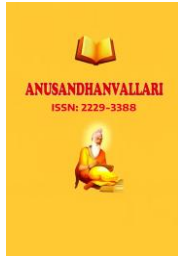
A sense of alienation dawns upon Nina from the start. Life in Canada means no dependency on others. Ananda always boasts of his success and toil. Nina is in Canada as an immigrant. She has come as a wife. As a wife she has a more difficult time. She is alone for many hours. Her husband's sexual dysfunction is the centre of her shattered relationship. It does not give her delight at all. Ananda is involved only in his performance instead of loving his wife. He does not give her the love of a husband. Ignoring Nina's craving for love, her husband concentrates on his timing. He fails to understand that Nina cannot adjust in Canada without his love and care. He is more involved in his clinic than in his wife. (3029)

Thus, in Nina's case, her suffering is not merely the result of cultural displacement in a foreign land; rather, the deeper conflict exists within the institution of marriage itself, where emotional neglect and unmet expectations intensify her sense of isolation.

Nina's transformation into what may be termed the "New Indian Woman" occurs not merely because of marriage but also through the experience of displacement. Her migration from India to Canada exposes her to a social environment that is immensely different from the traditional domestic sphere in which she was raised. In India, Nina's life is largely defined by familial expectations, particularly her mother's belief that marriage provides security and fulfilment for a woman.

However, life in Canada forces Nina to challenge emotional isolation, cultural alienation, and marital dissatisfaction. As an immigrant wife, she initially remains dependent on Ananda and struggles to adjust to the unfamiliar social and cultural landscape. Gradually, however, displacement becomes a catalyst for self-realization. The loneliness and disappointment she experiences compel her to rethink the conventional notion that marriage alone can ensure a woman's identity and happiness. Through education, professional engagement, and emotional awakening, Nina begins to assert her individuality and autonomy. The research article entitled "A Study of Diverse Immigrant Perspectives and Experiences through the Novel *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur" the authors exemplify the transformative state of Nina thus:

Nina's displacement to Canada becomes a crucial factor in shaping her evolving identity. Scholars have noted that the immigrant experience in the novel exposes Nina to feelings of loneliness, cultural dislocation, and emotional isolation, which compel her to reassess her role as a wife and as an individual. This process of negotiating between homeland and host culture ultimately enables her to



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redefine her sense of self and autonomy (Kaur and Paul).

In this way, the experience of migration does not merely dislocate her geographically but also enables her to discuss her identity beyond the confines of patriarchal expectations. Thus, Kapur portrays Nina's journey as one in which marriage and displacement together become transformative forces that lead to the emergence of a more self-aware and independent modern Indian woman.

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