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## Unraveling the Gender Tapestry: An Evaluation of Male Character Depiction in Manju Kapur's Selected Novels

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### Abstract

The prevalence of women writers in contemporary Indian English fiction has often led to a concentration on the representation of women characters, their challenges, and their roles in patriarchal societies. Contemporary Indian English fiction predominantly focuses on women characters and their struggles within patriarchal settings. A few women novelists provide a sympathetic treatment to male characters. This study seeks to analyze how male characters are delineated by woman writers and addresses this gap by examining the portrayal of male characters in women-centric novels, specifically those penned by Manju Kapur, a renowned Indian author. In a literary landscape dominated by women writers, she stands out for her feminist perspective and empathetic portrayal of male characters. She has captivated readers with her insightful narratives that delve into the intricacies of human relationships and societal norms. In order to analyze the representation of men, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), and *The Immigrant* (2008) have been taken into consideration. While her novels often revolve around strong female protagonists, the male characters in her works play crucial roles, offering a nuanced portrayal of masculinity. The present article attempts to explore whether these male characters are presented with empathy and complexity or are relegated to stereotypical roles. Employing qualitative methods, the study aims to gauge the extent and nature of sympathetic treatment given to male characters in the selected novels.

**Keywords:** Stereotypes, patriarchal, multifaceted, challenges, progressive

### Introduction

Manju Kapur, a celebrated feminist author, has been recognized for her feminist themes, consistently places strong and emancipated female characters at the forefront of her novels, emphasizing their development and empowerment within patriarchal or chauvinistic settings. Her novels defy conventional stereotypes associated with male characters, presenting a diverse range of personalities. Unlike the archetypal strong, stoic male figure, her male characters often grapple with vulnerability, showcasing a more authentic and multifaceted representation of men. By breaking away from traditional norms, she challenges readers to reconsider preconceived notions about masculinity. Manju Kapur's novels offer a rich tapestry of characters that go beyond the boundaries of gender norms. By intricately portraying male characters with depth, vulnerability, and complexity, Kapur challenges societal expectations and contributes to a more inclusive and realistic representation of masculinity in literature. Through her storytelling, she prompts readers to question and reevaluate their own perceptions of gender, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of human relationships and societal dynamics.

This research contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in contemporary Indian English fiction. Manju Kapur's characters like Virmati, Astha, Nisha, and Nina are given ample room to grow and assert themselves. However, her portrayal of male characters appears less nuanced; they often seem underdeveloped or lacking in complexity, serving as relatively flat figures without much depth or dynamism in their lives. Regarding the portrayal of male characters in Manju Kapur's fiction Shweta Tiwari comments:

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The male characters of Kapur's novels affect the psychology of women but they do not fit in the mould of a hero. On the other hand, the women characters qualify as heroes because they directly or indirectly transcend the societal restrictions thrust upon them by the agents of patriarchy... Men in her novels are represented as chauvinistic and uncompromising who are eternally bewildered by the rebellious attitude of the women. The concern of the protagonists of Kapur's novels is not to seek equality with men but to reflect upon their situation essentially as women. (Tiwari 420 – 421)

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that only female characters receive thorough treatment in Manju Kapur's narratives. While her protagonists are predominantly female, Kapur delves into the lives of her male characters with notable depth and scrutiny. She presents them as she perceives them or deems them to be, perhaps to suit the purpose of her heroines within the context of the story. Whether it's Harish in *Difficult Daughters*, Hemant and Aijaz Akhtar Khan in *A Married Woman*, Yashpal and Vicky in *Home*, or Ananda and Anton in *The Immigrant*, each male character is portrayed with insight, persuasive power, a keen sense of analysis, and sometimes even a hint of critique.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the representation of male characters in Manju Kapur's works.
- To examine how she navigates traditional gender roles and challenges societal expectations.
- To investigate whether the same attention to detail and character development is extended to her male creations.

#### Key Features of Manju Kapur's Male Characters

- **Breaking Stereotypes:** Kapur's novels defy conventional stereotypes associated with male characters, presenting a diverse range of personalities. Unlike the archetypal strong, stoic male figure, her male characters often grapple with vulnerability, showcasing a more authentic and multifaceted representation of men. By breaking away from traditional norms, Kapur challenges readers to reconsider preconceived notions about masculinity.
- **Complex Relationships:** One notable aspect of Kapur's portrayal of male characters is her exploration of complex relationships. Whether it's father-son dynamics, friendships, or romantic entanglements, Kapur delves into the emotional intricacies that define these connections. The male characters in her novels are not mere caricatures but rather individuals with their own desires, fears, and conflicts, adding depth and authenticity to the narrative.
- **Navigating Social Expectations:** In Kapur's novels, male characters often find themselves navigating societal expectations and traditional gender roles. The author sheds light on the pressure men face to conform to predefined notions of success, strength, and emotional stoicism. Through her characters, Kapur challenges these expectations, portraying men who grapple with their own vulnerabilities and insecurities in the face of societal norms.

- **Intersectionality:** Manju Kapur also introduces intersectionality in her exploration of male characters. She incorporates elements of class, caste, and regional identity, demonstrating how these factors intersect with gender to shape the experiences of her male protagonists. This nuanced approach adds layers to the characters, making them more relatable and reflective of the diverse realities within Indian society.
- **Evolution of Masculinity:** Kapur's novels span across different time periods, allowing readers to witness the evolution of masculinity in Indian society. From the traditional norms depicted in earlier works to the more progressive and open-minded attitudes in her recent novels, Kapur's exploration of male characters reflects the changing landscape of gender roles in India.

This article aims to critically assess the representation of male characters in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), and *The Immigrant* (2008) questioning whether they receive the same attention to detail and character development as the female leads.

#### Male Characterization in *Difficult Daughters*

Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, unfolds a narrative rich with intricate characters, notably exploring the male figures within the familial and romantic spheres. This paper analyses the portrayal of Suraj Prakash, the traditional patriarch, and Harish, the enigmatic lover and later husband of the protagonist Virmati. While Suraj Prakash embodies the archetypal conservative father, Harish brings forth a complex blend of British sentiments and unfulfilled romantic desires, contributing to the multifaceted tapestry of the novel.

**Suraj Prakash:** Suraj Prakash, Virmati's father, is depicted as a typical patriarch immersed in household responsibilities. His conservative nature, patronizing demeanor, and anxiety regarding Virmati's marriage align him with the archetypal family patriarch. While he values the joint family system, his portrayal lacks depth, rendering him a 'flat' and 'type' character. The familiarity of his traits diminishes his impact on the reader, as Suraj Prakash fails to stand out against the backdrop of common family patriarchs.

**Harish:** A professor and philosopher with British sentiments, Harish is an Oxford-educated individual whose uniqueness stems from being an only son. He is portrayed as a Complex Male Figure in this novel. He is contrasting sharply with Suraj Prakash. He is the male counterpart to Virmati. Despite having a wife and grown-up children, Harish's innate desire for romance remains unfulfilled in his married life. The intricacies of his character unfold when he falls deeply in love with Virmati, introducing an element of forbidden passion. His fixation on Virmati's symbolic gestures and the palpable romantic tension adds layers to his character, making him a more complex and intriguing figure. The novelist says, "*The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he numbered it in all its details even when his children had grown up*" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*). Harish's Oxbridge education and British attributes contribute to the complexity of his character. His connection with British sentiments, despite being an Indian, adds a layer of cultural

complexity. This dimension raises questions about identity, cultural assimilation, and the impact of education on one's worldview, providing readers with a lens through which to explore the intersection of Indian and British influences.

Harish's marriage to Ganga is portrayed as a source of dissatisfaction, where he functions merely as a husband without the fulfillment of genuine connection. The compromise within his marital life is evident, creating a dissonance between societal expectations and personal desires. Kapur skillfully captures Harish's discontent, painting him as a dissatisfied being yearning for something more profound. Despite marrying Virmati, Harish's dissatisfaction persists, particularly in his relationship with Ganga. The assertive and protesting nature of his wife leaves Harish in a state of continual unrest. It is observed how Harish fails to provide satisfaction to either Ganga or Virmati, epitomizing the struggles of a man caught between societal norms and personal desires. The article delves into Harish's yearning for an educated wife who can complement his intellectual needs. Ganga's inability to fulfill these requirements adds another layer to Harish's dissatisfaction in marriage. This exploration sheds light on how societal expectations regarding marriage and societal roles impact individual desires. In contrast to his lackluster marital life, Harish's encounter with Virmati sparks a resurgence of romanticism and passionate longing. The assertiveness in professing his love to Virmati is evident in his actions, symbolized by the tightening grip on her hand and trembling fingers filled with passion. The writer presents the intensive moment as, "*The grip on her hand tightened, and his fingers, trembling with passion, travelled persuasively up and down her soft arm*" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*). This forbidden romance becomes a pivotal aspect of Harish's character, revealing a complex individual torn between societal constraints and the pursuit of genuine connection.

Harish's role as a professor adds another layer to his character, further complicating the dynamics of his romantic involvement with Virmati. His acknowledgment of the incapability to rationalize his role as a teacher in Virmati's presence reflects the blurred lines between professional and personal boundaries. This portrayal aligns Harish with the archetype of a typical professor-lover, whose intellectual prowess is overshadowed by the intensity of his emotions. Harish's character is characterized by a dual existence – on one hand, he fervently professes his love for Virmati, attempting to dissuade her from marrying another, and on the other hand, he remains tethered to his wife Ganga. Harish confesses his love but refrains from marrying Virmati due to societal criticism underscores the conflict he faces in reconciling personal desires with societal expectations. This article explores the intricacies of Harish's character, analyzing his conflicting emotions, oscillating between his wife Ganga and his beloved Virmati. The marked duality in Harish's relationships highlights the challenges and constraints imposed by societal norms, leaving him entrapped in a complex web of desires and obligations. The article explores the significance of Harish's love letters to Virmati as a narrative device that unveils the hidden lover beneath the facade of a professor and husband. Through these letters, readers gain insights into the depths of Harish's emotions, providing a window into the inner workings of his conflicted soul.

Harish's character oscillates between two worlds, torn between his wife and his beloved. His inability to be true to

either woman underscores the challenges imposed by societal expectations. The latent desire in Harish's heart to break free from the wedlock and live a liberated life hints at the societal constraints restricting his pursuit of personal happiness. Ganga, despite being illiterate, astutely recognizes Harish's deep appreciation for beauty, drawing a parallel between him and the romantic poet John Keats. She describes her feelings "... *his face was absorbed in the beauty of sunset. His glasses, raised upwards, reflected the brilliant colours he was contemplating*" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*). Ganga observes his enraptured state while absorbing the beauty of a sunset, capturing the essence of Harish's Keatsian connection to the aesthetic world. The portrayal aligns Harish with the Romantic era's love for nature and aesthetics, enriching his character with layers of sensitivity.

Harish stands out among Kapur's male characters as the one who shares a feministic temperament, serving as a mouthpiece for the novelist herself. This unique characteristic sets him apart, as he embodies feminist ideals within a narrative predominantly focused on female protagonists. Harish's alignment with Kapur's voice introduces a feminist note that challenges societal norms and expectations. In the novel he says: "*Society which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughters. Society that decides that children — babies really — should be married at the age of two and three as we were. As a result, both of us needlessly suffer for no fault of ours. I cannot be an adherent to stultifying tradition after this.*" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*)

The article explores instances where Harish exemplifies feminist leanings. Whether through his supportive stance towards Virmati's desires or his acknowledgment of the limitations placed on women in society, Harish becomes a vehicle for expressing feminist sentiments. His recognition of the constraints faced by women contributes to the broader feminist discourse embedded in Kapur's novel. Harish's character challenges traditional norms by proposing the idea of co-wives to Virmati. His unconventional stance is revealed as he persuades Virmati to marry him despite his existing marriage. He says, "*Co-wives are part of our social traditions. If you refuse me, you will be changing nothing. I don't live with her in any meaningful way*" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*). Harish justifies his proposal by citing social traditions and expressing dissatisfaction with his current marital situation. This aspect of Harish's character introduces a layer of complexity and defiance against societal norms, contributing to the thematic richness of the novel.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur skillfully crafts male characters that, while embodying certain archetypes, present varying degrees of complexity. Suraj Prakash, the traditional patriarch, reflects common familial dynamics, while Harish introduces a nuanced exploration of unfulfilled desires and cultural identity. The juxtaposition of these male figures adds depth to the narrative, highlighting Kapur's ability to weave a tapestry of characters that mirror the intricacies of human relationships and societal expectations.

#### **Male characterization in A Married Woman**

In *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur skillfully navigates the complexities of marital relationships through the contrasting characters of Hemant and Aijaz. The dissatisfaction, frustrations, and indifference of Hemant underscore the



challenges within traditional marital norms. Aijaz's wisdom and understanding provide a glimpse of an alternative, suggesting the potential for emotional connection and fulfillment beyond societal expectations. The exploration invites readers to reflect on the choices individuals make within the context of marriage and the pursuit of meaningful relationships.

**Hemant:** In the novel, *A Married Woman*, Hemant is depicted as a professional man who, despite his success, harbors dissatisfaction and regret over returning to India from America. His chauvinistic attributes surface as he expresses a desire for a traditional Indian wife who fits into the mold of his family life. His discontent with working conditions in India and his desire for a specific type of wife reveal the clash between modern aspirations and traditional expectations, adding depth to his character. His dogmatic traits become apparent when he expresses a preference for marrying an innocent, unspoiled, and virgin girl. This desire reflects societal expectations and stereotypes about the ideal wife. Hemant's character serves as a vehicle through which Kapur critiques traditional gender roles and the inherent biases within marital expectations. He is portrayed as a practical individual, indifferent to world affairs, protests, and revolutions. His focus on the tangible aspects of life, such as work and material concerns, contributes to his inability to connect with his wife, Astha on a deeper, emotional level. Manju Kapur reflects the plight of Astha in the following words, "*When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that reason it was soothing to be with*" (Kapur, *A Married Woman*). Through the quote, "*a man who noticed nothing*," the writer encapsulates Hemant's lack of awareness and attentiveness to the inner life of his wife, emphasizing the emotional void in their relationship.

Hemant's character is portrayed as primarily focused on physical intimacy, highlighting his role as a lover of body rather than her soul. Astha's frustration with his singular focus on sex becomes evident, leading her to confront him about the emotional void in their relationship. His inability to comprehend her need for emotional connection reflects a limited perception of love, reducing it to physical gratification. His disapproval of Astha's artistic endeavors and her pursuit of a teaching job highlights his chauvinistic attitudes. He frowns upon her tantrums, belittles her profession, and shows little regard for her aspirations beyond the conventional roles assigned to women. Astha's desire for love and emotional connection is met with Hemant's dismissal, further exacerbating the emotional dissonance in their marriage. She is compelled to respond, "*Then what? Do I have to give it just because you are my husband? Unless I feel close to you I can't — I'm not a sex object, you have others for that*" (Kapur, *A Married Woman*).

The novelist explores Hemant's narrow definition of love, wherein he associates it solely with physical intimacy. The novelist's depiction of his reactions during lovemaking emphasizes his focus on the physical aspects of their relationship, leaving emotional needs unaddressed. His reluctance to engage in courtship outside of sexual encounters contributes to the emotional vacuum in their marriage. Hemant's constant disagreement with Astha's pursuits and his deliberate hindrance of her professional and

personal growth deepen the chasm of temperamental incompatibility. The analysis emphasizes the emotional dissonance within their marriage, revealing the impact of societal expectations and traditional gender roles on the dynamics between husband and wife. His character is marked by dissatisfaction with his work and the challenges faced by his company. Rather than addressing these concerns constructively, he vents his frustrations on Astha, holding her responsible for their predicament. The quote, "*Obviously, I am worried. Different unions compete for power over the workers, and we get caught in the middle, everybody suffers but who sees that?*" (Kapur, *A Married Woman*) reveals his tendency to scapegoat Astha for his professional woes. This behaviour highlights the strained nature of their marital relationship and his failure to communicate effectively.

Hemant's character in "*A Married Woman*" serves as a poignant reflection of the challenges inherent in navigating societal expectations within a marital relationship. His limited perception of love, chauvinistic attitudes, and reluctance to support Astha's aspirations contribute to the emotional dissonance that defines their marriage. Kapur's portrayal invites readers to contemplate the complexities of love, gender expectations, and the pursuit of individual fulfillment within the context of traditional marital norms.

**Aijaz Akhtar Khan:** In contrast to Hemant, Aijaz Akhtar Khan emerges as a character with wisdom, ideas, and an understanding of human nature. A history lecturer and theatre activist, Aijaz is portrayed favourably by the novelist emphasizing his commitment to theatre activism and his sympathetic nature. The novelist portrays his character, "*Of medium height, his body compact. His face was clear delicate luminous brown of freshly rained-on earth. His lips were a darker brown than his skin, and his eyes were black and narrow... He must be vain of his hair, knowing how attractive the grey made a young face look.*" (Kapur, *A Married Woman*) His involvement in street theatre reflects a commitment to social issues and an engagement with the world beyond personal concerns. Aijaz's contrasting qualities serve as a foil to Hemant's character, highlighting the potential for fulfillment and connection beyond traditional marital norms.

Peepilika, deeply in love with her beloved and future husband, advocates for him to her mother, highlighting his intelligence, sensitivity, and social consciousness as qualities that would make him an excellent spouse. As a lover and later as a husband, he demonstrates great empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the values inherent in their relationship. Despite initial reservations due to his Muslim identity, Peepilika's mother begins to warm up to him as she gets to know him better, ultimately finding herself inclined to like him. "*Besides, Aijaz had been so sweet to her mother, coaxing her from her prejudices, never seeming to mind her oblique reference to Muslims, four wives, large families, instant divorce, inter-community marriage, the religion of babies from such unions.*" (Kapur, *A Married Woman*)

Astha's plight is depicted through her feelings of being a "*woman of straw*" when with Hemant, suggesting a sense of emptiness and lack of emotional fulfillment. Aijaz's contrasting nature with Hemant is highlighted, showing Aijaz's understanding and care for Peepilika, which stands in contrast to Hemant's self-conceited and indifferent

behaviour toward Astha. Despite Aijaz's enormous personality, the observation is made that his role in the development of the novel's plot is meager, and he shares the fate of male characters in novels by female authors, serving as complements to the female protagonists rather than centralizing the theme. The contrasting description of Aijaz as a man who notices and understands adds depth to the exploration of marital discontent, introducing the possibility of genuine connection and emotional resonance. The character is portrayed as having a broadened view of the world due to education and actively participating in societal issues, ultimately meeting a tragic end during the Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir dispute.

Harish and Hemant, as portrayed in Manju Kapur's novels, represent diverse facets of male characters within the context of marital dynamics. Harish challenges societal norms with his unconventional proposal, questioning the institution of marriage, while Hemant embodies the clash between modern aspirations and traditional expectations. Kapur's nuanced exploration of these male characters contributes to the richness of her narratives, offering readers a thought-provoking examination of love, marriage, and societal norms.

### Male Characterization in "Home"

In Manju Kapur's third novel, "Home," there is an absence of a dominant male character with individuality. Instead, the characters seem to represent archetypal figures related to the theme of family narratives, with Yashpal and Vicky leaving a considerable impact but lacking the stature of protagonists.

**Yashpal:** In the novel "Home" Yashpal is portrayed as the eldest and responsible son of the family, demonstrating a strong sense of care for other family members and a commitment to keeping the family integrated. His dedication is evident in his hard work for the family's welfare, taking care of his own wife, and managing household responsibilities diligently. Yashpal's realization at an early age that his future lies in joining the family business reflects a practical and responsible approach. His prioritization of the family business over traditional academic pursuits suggests a pragmatic outlook, as he sees no reason to delay his involvement in the family's economic well-being for what he perceives as the less practical pursuit of formal education. Yashpal is portrayed as an ardent lover, a large-hearted and sympathetic figure who cares not only for his family members but also for his nephew Vicky. He persuades his wife to adopt Vicky saying, "The boy is orphaned. He needs a mother's special attention. Let him be your child" (Kapur, Home). He is conscious of his daughter's progress in business, displaying pride and pleasure in her achievements. He "turned his thoughts to his daughter's business, where lay uncomplicated pride and pleasure" (Kapur, Home). However, despite his positive attributes, Yashpal's role is described as predictable, embodying the archetype of the typical father in Indian society, a flat character who exists in the story without decisively moving the plot.

**Vicky:** On the other hand, Vicky is portrayed as the black sheep of the family, demonstrating ingratitude, selfishness, roguish instincts, and callousness. Instead of recognizing his maternal uncle Yashpal's efforts to provide him with an education, he rejects the value of school and blames it for

his perceived shortcomings. He says, "I don't know. School is good for nothing. You can't make money with it, I don't know why I even have to go. May be because all of you do, but my school is bad, and yours is good" (Kapur, Home). His character is described as unruly and portrayed with bitter sensibilities, challenging the conventional expectations associated with familial relationships. His ingratitude and selfishness heightens when he announces to his uncle, "Don't talk to me of my own blood. In this world you can trust nobody. One day I will run away from their house and shop. I will show them" (Kapur, Home). He is portrayed as a character with aspirations for independence, but his actions reveal a pattern of ingratitude, selfishness, and callousness. His dream of owning his own shop reflects his longing for freedom and autonomy. He envisions a future where he is in control, dealing with customers and enjoying the thrill of persuasion and seduction. Vicky's ingratitude and selfishness reflect when he explicitly rejects any familial bonds, expressing a lack of trust and a desire to run away to prove a point. This attitude demonstrates a disregard for the family's support and generosity.

Despite living under the family's mercy, Vicky makes unjustified demands, including claiming a share in the house. His demands strain the family's patience, leading even the sympathetic Yashpal to question his entitlement. All the members just can't help thinking, "... he had struck like a leech to this family, and was going to draw a bucket of blood he left... He had bitten the hand that fed him" (Kapur, Home). The metaphorical comparison of Vicky to a leech emphasizes the ungrateful nature of his actions. The family ultimately decides to get rid of him when he departs, paying him off to sever ties. The whole family get rid of him only when he departs. They feel, "Vicky took his disgraceful self, his possessions, his wife and son, and moved out. He was paid six lakhs in black and four in white by the builder – not one of his relatives could bear to actually hand him the money" (Kapur, Home) The reluctance to hand him the money highlights the emotional toll of Vicky's behaviour on his relatives.

Vicky's behaviour towards his wife Nisha reveals his callous nature. He does not remain kind and considerate even to his wife who is with him in all the facets of life, and remains uncomplaining all the time. Engaging in sexual acts against her will, coercing her into masturbation, and threatening her silence showcase a lack of empathy and consideration for the emotional well-being of others. He in returns questions, "Why was his wife like this? First she made him feel he was not a man, then when he asserted himself like the man he was, she started objecting. Truly women were a curse" (Kapur, Home). The representation of Vicky as a complex and problematic character adds depth to the narrative, exploring themes of familial bonds, independence, and the consequences of ingratitude. His portrayal by Manju Kapur exhibits her keen observation of real-life characters usually found in the families. However, his villainy and callous temperament represent the flat characters of fictional literature.

### Male Characterization in The Immigrant

In Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*, Ananda and Anton emerge as prominent male figures, with Anand being Nina's husband and Anton her lover after marriage. However, like Kapur's other male characters, they are not portrayed in a positive light.

### Ananda

Ananda stands out as the initial character across all of Kapur's novels to embody diasporic sentiments. Following his relocation to Canada, he grapples with a complex mix of emotions, including a newfound surge of patriotism alongside a profound sense of emptiness. The experience of alienation becomes palpable for him as he yearns for the familiarity of his loved ones left behind. The writer has expressed his feelings, "*The truth was that the whole long summer Ananda was very lonely. Weekends were the worst, and he had much time in which to relive his parents' death. His isolation pressed upon him and numbed his capacity to break his solitude*". (Kapur, *The Immigrant*) Ananda, in particular, is depicted as someone willing to engage in hard labour to achieve his goals, stemming from his background of academic dedication. His pursuit of a dental course in Canada reflects this dedication for achieving his goal as he "*had been dyed in a lifetime of study, and such habits were not difficult to return to. The dental course was rigorous, but he welcomed hard work*" (Kapur, *The Immigrant*). Through Ananda, Kapur explores the perspective of an NRI and his attitude towards India post-emigration. He shows no concern for the concept of brain drain and feels no obligation to his native country, expressing the belief that India doesn't adequately value its intellectuals, unlike Canada. He grapples with a persistent sense of bewilderment throughout the narrative, stemming from the complexities of his life circumstances. His struggle with sexual dysfunction casts a shadow over his ability to connect with others in meaningful relationships, leaving him visibly frustrated whenever he attempts to do so. The intricate layers of his existence weigh heavily on him, leaving him utterly perplexed. His resentment towards Nandita, his ex-girlfriend, stems from her direct acknowledgment of his issue. Meanwhile, his relationship with Sue, his new girlfriend in Canada, only exacerbates his self-reproach and overwhelming feelings of inadequacy in that aspect of his life. The novelist states in this regard:

In his more despairing moments he liked to imagine he was indelibly marked by a tragedy that had imperceptibly seeped into his blood, bones, and muscle. He who had never failed at anything was now failing in this most fundamental act, an act which even the poorest, meanest, most deprived peasant in India performed with ease. (Kapur, *The Immigrant*)

In his marriage to Nina, Ananda finds himself confronted once again by the specter of sexual dysfunction, which casts a long shadow over their relationship. Despite being supportive, assisting her, and cooperating with her in her endeavors, he remains emotionally detached and bereft solely due to his issue. As a husband, the persistent sense of failure gnaws away at him, ultimately tarnishing the fabric of their married life. When he perceives Nina growing somewhat distant from him, he senses that the foundation of their marriage is teetering on the brink of collapse, solely due to his problem. He thinks, "*The green numbers on the clock changed steadily. The arranged marriage had not, after all, been the perfect solution. The canker of failure had entered the house and forced his back to the wall*" (Kapur, *The Immigrant*). The words of Shweta Tiwari are also noteworthy in this connection:

Ananda only focuses on the act of sex with Nina in order to establish himself as a virile man which makes it a mechanical and futile exercise resulting in Nina feeling even more forlorn... On the other hand, in order to satiate his male ego and overcome the distress of his physical inadequacies, Ananda seeks pleasure with many women. (Tiwari 424)

This leads to him engaging in an affair and physical relationship with his receptionist; nevertheless, he is plagued by feelings of guilt. The comparison between Mandy and Nina frequently occupies his thoughts, and he perceives "*Mandy encouraged him to be wild, free, uninhibited, playful. With Nina he was his mother's son, his sister's brother, the good husband, playing out a role he had been trained for since childhood*." (Kapur, *The Immigrant*) Ultimately, Ananda and Nina are separated, and in her absence, Ananda comes to the realization that he feels more at ease with a Canadian partner. He entertains the thought, "*maybe he could have sex with white women once his older self was housed, safe and secure*" (Kapur, *The Immigrant*). Eventually, he manages to overcome his problem, but the marital happiness and sense of belonging continue to elude him. He becomes an emblem of a failed husband, with the narrative primarily centered on Nina, leaving Ananda to falter in emerging as a dominant character within the story.

**Anton:** Anton depicted by Kapur as a figure wielding power over Nina, is characterized with a figurative whip in hand. He embodies the stereotype of a non-Asian individual who is drawn to Asian women, finding them "warm, intelligent, and empathic." Similar to Vicky, a Canadian acquaintance, he is portrayed as an opportunist driven primarily by lust. From the outset, he sets his sights on Nina for sexual gratification, and Nina, longing for love, is easily captivated by his deceitful displays of affection. Crafty by nature, Anton knows how to manipulate women to suit his desires. Nina, starved for affection, falls prey to his cunning and subtle feigned love. Anton's utilitarian nature is evident as he toys with Nina's emotions, using her for his own pleasure. Even Nina eventually realizes that their sexual encounter was nothing more than a transaction of physical bodies, devoid of any genuine emotional connection. She reflects her concerns, "*... purely a meeting of bodies, a healthy give and take... He hadn't wanted this to develop into anything serious*" (Kapur, *The Immigrant*).

Anton's true bestial nature is laid bare when he rapes Nina, displaying a complete lack of awareness of the emotional devastation he has caused. Following the assault, there is no indication of remorse or sorrow for his actions. As the novelist describes, "*His pants were up and he was ready to face the world, having raped a woman he had slept with for six months*" (Kapur, *The Immigrant*). For Anton, it seems that his motto is either mate or rape, particularly when it comes to interactions with Indian women. In the story, his role is merely to provide fleeting pleasure to Nina's desolate soul and her frustrated sexual life. He fails to grasp her emotions or recognize the significance of his presence in the narrative. Without contributing substantially to the plot, he exits the story just as quickly as he entered.

### Conclusion

Manju Kapur's delineation of male characters in her works reflects a consistent attitude. Through her exploration of

male protagonists, she probes into the complexities of masculinity, societal expectations, and the evolving roles of men in Indian society. They are depicted as archetypes, existing within the narrative to either complement or influence the lives of the female protagonists. Her male characters are often depicted with flaws and vulnerabilities, challenging stereotypes of masculine strength and stoicism. She explores the emotional landscapes of her male protagonists, delving into their insecurities, fears, and desires. Through their experiences, Kapur highlights the universal humanity of her characters, regardless of gender. Many of her male protagonists struggle to reconcile traditional roles and expectations with evolving societal norms. They grapple with notions of duty, honour, and masculinity, often facing conflicts between their personal desires and societal obligations. Much like the male members in a family, they play a necessary role in balancing the narrative equation. Through the portrayal of her male characters, Kapur reflects the broader social and cultural changes taking place in India. She critiques patriarchal structures and examines the ways in which they impact the lives of both men and women. Her male characters navigate shifting power dynamics within families and communities, grappling with issues of authority, control, and agency. However, with few exceptions, the majority of these characters embody various chauvinistic traits prevalent in society. Kapur's perspective on these male characters is informed by a deep observation and study, delving into their innermost selves. She presents them as they truly are, without embellishment or the addition of individualistic attributes. Her portrayal refrains from glorifying them, instead offering a candid reflection of their nature and societal roles through the lens of a woman's perspective.

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