

---

**Portrayal of Identity in Manju Kapur's *Brothers***

---

**1. Godari Mounika**

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

**2. Dr. Soundarya Joseph**

Associate Professor of English, Govt. Degree College (A), Begumpet

---

**Article Received:** 29/11/2025**Article Accepted:** 29/12/2025**Published Online:** 30/12/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.12.687

---

**Abstract:**

Manju Kapur's *Brothers* offers an insightful analysis of the bond between male siblings, shedding light on their navigation of societal pressures shaping their identities. This paper explores the theme of identity in Manju Kapur's novel *Brothers*. The character Virpal Singh Gaina's quest for identity serves as a poignant lens through which Manju Kapur explores the tensions between cultural heritage and personal aspirations. Through the character of Virpal Singh Gaina, Kapur skilfully portrays the struggle to reconcile cultural identity with individual desires raising the power of identity discovery. The novel set against the backdrop of Rajasthan's complex social landscape. This paper examines Kapur's portrayal of Virpal's inner turmoil, his relationships, and societal pressures that shape his identity, offering a nuanced exploration of the complexities of Identity formation.

**Keywords:** Caste, Identity, Immigrant, Loneliness, Humanity.**Introduction:**

Manju Kapur's *Brothers* offers nuanced character studies and thought-provoking commentary on Identity. The narrative revolves around the brothers struggles with their sense of self, caught between traditional familial obligations and modern aspirations. She skilfully portrays how their identities are shaped by their relationships with their parents, societal norms, and personal experiences. Her personal life includes her marriage to Gunanidhi Dalmia, with whom she has three children. She teaches English at Miranda House, University of Delhi, as a professor. She is a diaspora writer. Her experiences traversing different countries have significantly influenced her literary works. She pursued

---

her Master of Arts in English at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, immersing herself in immigrant life and broadening her perspectives.

Manju Kapur's literary repertoire includes six acclaimed novels, starting with *Difficult Daughters* (1998), which garnered the esteemed Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (Europe and South Asia) in 1999, *A Married Woman* (2003) got shortlisted for the Encore Award, *Home* (2006) made it to the shortlist for the 2006 Hutch Crossword Book Award, *The Immigrant* (2008) was a finalist for the Indian Plaza Golden Quill Award and the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2010, *Custody* (2011) has been optioned by Balaji Telefilms and the recent novel *Brothers* (2016) is a powerful depiction of the harsh reality of Rajasthani culture and society. The novel vividly portrays Rajasthan's traditional culture, showcasing the Rajasthani people's customs, values, behaviour, and beliefs, offering a glimpse into their conventional way of life. The conventional culture of Rajasthan is characterized by rigid customs such as child marriages, widowhood, and casteism, which significantly influence societal norms. This paper examines a character from the novel Virpal Singh Gaina's life experiences focusing on his struggles, transformations, and their profound impact on identity. Within the narrative, Kapur masterfully intertwines familial relationships, highlighting the struggles of lost identity and the quest for self-discovery through the character of Virpal Singh Gaina.

Virpal a Jat hailed from Lalbanga village, east of Ajmer, where life was simple and rustic. The villagers lived, ate, cooked, and slept on the floor, often sharing their space with cows. The village is fragmented along caste lines, with distinct communities like Jats, Rajputs, Bhils, Yadavs, Gujjaris, and Malis, each maintaining their separate identity. One day, while Virpal was watching the family cattle, he let them graze on some bushes that the Rajputs claimed as their own. A cow got seized and Lalsingh, Virpal's father, was attacked in the ensuing fight. Virpal was blamed for it, and he was abused and thrashed. Manju Kapur underscores the portrayal of a rigid hierarchy where violence is a tool of dominance, cascading from the powerful to the powerless upper castes to lower castes, elders to youth, strong to weak. His mother gently rubs ghee on his bruises, saying a boy shouldn't be this sensitive. She said we'll need to involve the panchayat to get the cow back; it'll be a lengthy process. Virpal shrugged off her hand and she left. Unmoving, he stays, as grounded as the earth beneath him, shrouded in loneliness.

Next day a visiting minstrel brought the news of Gandhiji's Dandi March to his village, and Virpal, inspired by Gandhiji, decided to go to Ajmer to take part in the struggle

as already Virpal had begun to feel lonely. It will take him three days to reach his destination. Virpal is only twelve years old when he takes this decision. Towards the evening of the first day, he started and walks across the fields until he reached a village. At the alien land he searched for the cultural Identity and took shelter at a Jat family. Here Manju Kapur clearly explains to a typical caste system and cultural Identity.

Virpal feels Dhanpal who is two years younger to him is the only one who will miss him. Dhanpal, his constant companion, trailed behind him to the pond, the fields, and wherever the cattle grazed. Virpal already felt a pang of loneliness, knowing Dhanpal would be hurt at being left behind. He vowed to call Dhanpal once he would work with Gandhiji and made something of himself, to teach his brother Dhanpal all he knew. Manju Kapur poignantly portrays Virpal's inner turmoil, conveying his deep sense of loneliness.

Virpal arrived at Martindale Bridge on the third day. Ajmer's alien streets hit him like a wave – dizzying lights, towering buildings, and suddenly he's on the pavement, blankly wondering what's next. Manju Kapur brings out the real and cruel face of the society through an hour later on this alien land he got lashed out by a stranger with shoe.

Not everyone opens their doors to strangers. If someone does, they're the embodiment of humanity, one such person is Gaur Sahib. The character introduced as a strict Brahmin, who expects a social change. His views on social change are diametrically opposed to Gandhiji's. Gaur Sahib, being a Brahmin, believes in alternative paths to safeguarding the nation. He's involved with the Bharat Jagrit Sabha, a nascent organization. The Bharat Jagrit Sabha, a nascent organization he's part of, preserves Hindu tradition and teaches young men to be proud of their heritage. Their bodies are strengthened through yoga, Surya namaskar, archery, kabaddi, and a vegetarian diet. Manju Kapur excellently portrays the humanity through the character of Gaur Sahib. He saw the boy on the pavement without asking anything about the boy, he takes Virpal to his home which is there at a gully in Naya Bazar without considering about the caste discrimination of the boy.

For the first time in his entire life, Virpal found himself stepping into a Brahmin's home. He quietly sat on the floor. He hears the stove's hiss and pump, the thali's scrape as dough's worked, sounds that fill his quiet space. Four thick hot rotis with a blob of white butter slowly pooling in the middle are placed before him, accompanied by a small bowl of dal, green chillies, and spicy mango chutney, yet he lost in his thoughts and eats with little appetite. The grandeur of Gaur Sahib's Haveli left him awestruck. The marble floors, cement

---

walls, ornate pump, and the unexpected hospitality, everything felt surreal. Gaur Sahib's wife has little hesitation to consider that boy still they provide food and shelter to Virpal. It is decided that boy will sleep on the roof, so he can neither escape nor harm them, it is safe and contained. Manju Kapur explores the culture and Caste of conventional Rajasthan where the boy is not allowed to sleep in Gaur sahib's house. Later they asked about the boy's arrival to Ajmer. Virpal reveals his wish to the couple that he wants to join in Gandhiji's movement. Gaur sahib countered Virpal's wish, insisting on providing him with proper education and arranging decent accommodation instead.

The following day, Gaur Sahib took Virpal to the temple, but the priest refused to let the boy stay there. The boy wondered why he was being refused; what was his identity that made people turn him away? Virpal wondered his caste was the reason the Brahmin wouldn't keep him and the priest refusal. Here Manju Kapur clearly explores that some groups of people are still treated as untouchables, showing the decay in societal values and humanity. After a long time, the priest accepted the boy to stay there based on a condition that is the boy would stay in one of the outhouses, cook his food, and run his errands for the priest when he came back from school. Virpal is ready to do any work for his living to create his own identity on the alien land. As an Immigrant he stays at the temple's outhouse lonely.

Virpal's struggles are about to get tough in the coming days. He continues to working after his school time. The priest's wife watched him with suspicion as he shopped, weighing each item with care. Her eyes narrowed at every potato and tomato. Manju Kapur poignantly portrays the anguish and suffering of Virpal Singh Gaina about his Identity. He's thinking about his Identity back in his village. Never had he been insulted like this before; no one in his village would have dared treat him this way. With the everyday insults and humiliation, he thinks about his own identity at his own village and planning to escape from that place to his own village where he never bears such insults and humiliations. He longed for his Identity. When the time came, he opened up to Gaur Sahib about wanting to go back home. Gaur Sahib insisted him to stay there and continue his studies. Here Manju Kapur portrayed Gaur Sahib as a man of Humanity. His respect for Gaur Sahib stops him. So, he continues to bear this insult, the accusations and occasional beatings just for Gaur Sahib who took care of him when he came to that alien land and till caring about him. Virpal settled back as his lonely routine but, He feels lonelier than before. Manju Kapur brings out the experience of loneliness of the boy who has never feels the loneliness before,

---

When Virpal flopped in 8th class for the second time, he told Gaur Sahib, "Studies aren't my thing, I want to join the Civil Disobedience movement instead." Gaur Sahib insisted him "first you stand on your feet, after that what you do is your responsibility" (67) and found Virpal a job in a shop near to his house. Shopkeeping came naturally to Virpal. There Virpal found his Identity as a shop worker and as an immigrant to that place he would live in the space behind the storeroom. Every week the shop owner gave him eight annas. Overjoyed Virpal with his first pay he bought a box of sweets for Gaur Sahib. When Virpal had earned five rupees, he sent a money order to his home. Manju Kapur skilfully explores the Identity which Virpal found himself as a shopkeeper after many struggles.

A year later Gaur Sahib fell ill with a heart attack. Virpal takes care of him; every evening day he visits him and serves him. Manju Kapur presented a token of gratitude from Virpal to his guru, Gaur Sahib. To Virpal "nothing in the city would have any meaning if this man removed his hand from his head. His desire to offer civil Disobedience vanished. Let Gaur Sahib live, he would serve him for the rest of his life, serve him as Hanuman has served Lord Rama" (68). Every evening he went to Bajarangarh to offer prayers to God Wishing Gaur Sahib a speedy recovery. Soon Gaur Sahib dies. Virpal spent the next few days Scouted around for the perfect place to set up a shop. He found a location on the city's outskirts, where the city's development was arising. He opened his shop from eight morning to till ten in night. His monthly income rose steadily, and created a new Identity as a shop owner. Manju Kapur depicts the struggles of Virpal and his search for Identity from a village runaway boy to a successful shop owner.

Manju Kapur's characters often serve as a reflection of society, addressing various social issues. This paper explores Manju Kapur's portrayal of Identity crisis through the small character of Virpal is different from other characters in the novel. Manju Kapur skilfully portrays the real and cruel face of caste system through the society of Rajasthan, India. She explores a perfect touch of humanity in depth in the character of Gaur Sahib. Manju Kapur has presented the value of humanity. Kapur highlights Virpal's quest for Identity, showcasing the challenges he faces in finding his place in the society and Identity.

**Works Cited:**

Kapur, Manju. Brothers. Penguin Random House India. 2016.

Lizy, V. and Kanishkaa, S. "Exploring Fraternal Dynamics in Manju Kapur's Brothers."

International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, vol. 6, no.1, 2024, pp. 1-7.