

## **Manju Kapur's the Immigrant - the Story of Dislocation and Cultural Conflict**

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**Abstract:** *Manju Kapur's The Immigrant is the story of Dislocation and Cultural conflict, is an Etic Diasporic Novel. It is about thirty one year old spinster, Nina, who lived with her widowed mother in Delhi. She gets married with Ananda, a NRI, Dentist and fly to Canada to start her new life. The paper here discusses how the novelist brings out the life of a married woman, with her husband alone to talk with, all alone in an alien land where Indian Culture and Individualism has often remained alien ideas. Marital bliss, women's role at home and the change of attitude is mainly focused. The loneliness and feeling of being uprooted rotates the character of traditionally brought up, Nina. Finally there is complete change in the personality and mentality of the protagonist and she develops a new dimension towards life and moving ahead.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, Loneliness, Frustration, Nostalgia, Uprooted, Transformation, Alien, Homelessness, Culture, Value, Identity.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Manju Kapur, the most prominent and popular contemporary novelist of Indian English Literature. She teaches English literature at Miranda House, Delhi University. She has five novels and an anthology to her credit till date. Manju Kapur deals with various themes such as Feminism, Diaspora, Social and Economic Forces, Gender relationships, and lesbianism. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* was published in 1998 and awarded the prestigious commonwealth Award for best first novel, Eurasia region. Her second novel, *A Married Woman* was published in 2002 and shortlisted for the Encore Award, her third novel, *Home* in 2006 was shortlisted for Hutch-Crossword Prize and the fourth novel, *The Immigrant* 2008 was shortlisted for the India Plaza Golden Quill Award and the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2010. Her fifth novel *Custody* published in 2011 has been bought by Balaji Telef.

“To live in an alien land,  
To suffer, tolerate discriminations  
the hatred of those eyes;  
this is the definition of homelessness”

- (Joyti Amar - 115:2001)

The term ‘Diaspora’ suggests one’s own room of language, culture, tradition in the host country. The adjective ‘Diasporic’ from Diaspora stands for every immigrant who has migrated to different countries across the globe seeking better fortunes. While commenting on Diasporic situation Julian Wolfreys makes it more explicit by saying:

“Setting of various peoples away from his homeland; often apporgated with the nation of the Jewish Diaspora in modern Israel, but extended in Cultural studies, Post colonial studies and Race theory to consider the displacement of people by means of force such as slavery”

- (Wolfreys 2005).

Diaspora aims to examine the dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identities. Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* is story of two immigrants, Nina and Ananda. The immigrant souls are always found to be divided. Manju Kapur chose Canada as the background for her novel, *The Immigrant* and discusses the Indian diaspora in Canada. The focus of the paper is how Manu Kapur's characters in her novel, in spite of their divided souls try to construct their identity as Indian Diaspora in Canada and also discusses about the treatment of diaspora. Manju Kapur exemplifies the Indian diaspora in three major parts in this novel which are: Indians as general mass living in Canada, Ananda and his uncle representative of male class, who are busy in their work in Canada.,Nina as a woman as a wife at home.

The novel can also be read as a text with two clear cut sections. In the former section, the life of unmarried Nina as lived in India in a conventional orthodox society has been presented. The latter section described in detail the life of married Nina. The story set in seventies and discusses the middle class Indian life; its life blood is the diasporic life in Canada. It is the story of Nina and Ananda. Ananda, a male protagonist determined to be a fully-fledged citizen of Canada. Nina is thirty one year old spinster, the novelist introduces her,

“Nina was almost thirty; Friends and colleague consoled her by remarking on her radiant complexion and her 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. Her spirit felt sixty as she walked from bus stop to the single room where she lived with her mother. Her heart felt a hundred as it surveyed the many years of hopeless longing it had known”(1)

Nina's mother wants her to settle somewhere in abroad saying, “If you are married an NRI or someone in the foreign services, you could live abroad nicely.”(11) This is what Indian dreams of. It is easy to built castle in the air, as the people go abroad with the view to settlement but reality is very harsh to swallow. 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. The consequences of the separation is that the migrant infuses Indian cognition in all beautiful things, that is, makes sense of all the pleasant experiences in terms of Indian structures. Apart from the intrinsic cognitive belonging, there is also a good deal of similarity, search and naming to establish affinity.

In this novel Ananda experiences such immigrant experiences. He was practicing as a dentist in Dehradun and he never thought that he will leave India. Although his uncle was practicing in Canada but he had no clue about his future. Because “From the moment of his birth Ananda had been surrounded by the ritual of his caste. Before he left home, his parents did their best to reinforce the practices of a lifetime. He was a Brahmin; his body must never be polluted by dead flesh. Low caste boys in the college hostel might try and tempt him towards non-veg, cigarettes and alcohol. Should he deviate from the pure habits they had instilled in him, his mother's heart would break” (14)

Ananda's parents died in road accident and after that his mother's brother forced him to come Canada because he has settled in Halifax for past twenty years. In India he will not be able to recover from this loss. In Canada he can make a fresh start because this country is full of opportunities. Ananda's sister came from Agra to see him off; 'Remember if you don't like it, you can always come back'.(18)

Ananda landed in Halifax on the 15th of August. His uncle received him and asked from him, “Why do you think that there is such a brain drain in India? he demanded. India does not value its minds – unlike here. Otherwise you think we are not patriots? But there even the simple task of daily life can bleed you dry.”(18) As Ananda walked in Canada he find empty spaces and he started thinking and comparing this with India. Ananda was used to the hustle bustle and crowd of India but there he was finding no crowd in Canada so he was feeling strange. ‘Where are the people?’ asked Ananda. 'Always the first thing to strike our countrymen', laughed the uncle. 'You'll get used to it'. (19)

During the breakfast his uncle and his wife Nancy taught him the manners prevalent there. Ananda again started feeling the home sickness. He was served Indian food but he pretended to like the western. There in the house of his uncle he has to make the bed. He explained to his cousin Lenny, 'In India we had a maid who did all this, I mainly studied'. (21) Every time his uncle Dr. Sharma

encouraged him to relish there in Canada but this immigrant psyche couldn't be left behind. Does he then suffer from nostalgia? The answer to that is 'No' and this is significant. Nostalgia implies a deep sense of loss and certain irreversibility - but here there is no loss, as things that are 'lost' he experiences all around him. Dr. Sharma forced Ananda to become a cosmopolitan, 'Look at me', Dr Sharma often said, pretending Ananda had a choice of where to place his gaze. 'Look at me. I am a citizen of the world'. In other words, every summer they went to Europe, In Rome- Florence, Paris, Venice, London, Amsterdam, Munich, in art galleries, theatres, and museums he exposed his family to the finest artifacts of western civilization. (26)

Ananda couldn't feel the fervor and frenzy during such festivals like Holi and Diwali.

'Ananda would have preferred not to know when Diwali and Holi fell. With his parents he had eaten special foods on fast days, prayed with them before the gods on Janamashtami, Dussehra, Diwali, Ram Navami, Holi and hundred other smaller occasions. There was no way he could replicate any ceremony on his own, he preferred complete rejection. (27) Ananda was wondering that his uncle was participating in Diwali with his children and he saw small images of Ram, Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman on a raised dais. Dr. Sharma explained to him all about this, "Twenty years ago there was no India club. I am one of the founding members. I realized that if I forgot everything of mine, then who was I? When the children came, it became even more important to keep in touch." (28)

Ananda performed well in the dental college and he broke all the taboos. He drank alcohol in the college. Now Ananda was feeling that he was changing. He was slowly entering in the new world after getting his degree. He has new jobs, new appointments and new duties. He also started thinking about his marriage but if he marries a local girl, would he be able to adjust himself? "If Ananda marries a local girl, he would find himself in a difficult situation. When one come to a new country, one has to come wholeheartedly otherwise one could be very miserable." His uncle wasn't telling Ananda what to do, all he was saying was that the boy should think about it'. (36)

In Canada a wife was to support his husband and she demanded equality but in turn they also shouldered many responsibilities. Dr. Sharma's wife had a special empathy for young Indian immigrants facing his own 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.

Nina's mother like all other Indian mothers is now relieved of the burden of her unmarried daughter. The Female protagonist Nina 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. Manju Kapur focuses on the NRI marriages where men and women both are uprooted and move to live in some alien land. Consequently both suffer from frustration, disappointment and nostalgia. Both are found engaged in their search for their lost selves. Ananda established himself as a dentist but the picture is quite dismal to Nina, as her teaching degree is useless in Canada. Moreover, their marriage fails to give them children. From here begins a woman's struggle for her existence. Her reading habit fails to keep her engaged and she like other aliens feels alienated and caught in the flux of eastern and western values. Once Ananda rightly called her as "the perfect mix of east and west."(85).

All immigrants want better life but realization that east is east and west is west and never shall twain meet. Like other immigrants Nina also feels isolated. She has lost her home and her job. She cries, "I miss home - I miss a job - I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?"(237) Nina's feeling of loss takes her to a group of women who work on feminist principles. Her distress resulting to wail before Beth, "everything is very strange", she said in rush, "I used to be a teacher, in fact I taught for ten years before I came here. And now I do nothing. I have not even been able to conceive. Am I locked into stereotypical expectations? I don't know."(232)

After her marriage with Ananda, Nina goes alone to Halifax and her first experience at the Toronto airport has been very unpleasant various questions by the immigration women which she thought were all irrelevant. To Nina, her first experience to this new world was unpleasant. She being a teacher was used to respect but here a different yardstick is used to judge her. She feels humiliated. Kapur vividly describes her mental state. She writes,

“Rag fills her, why were people to silent about the humiliations they faced in the west? She was a teacher at a university yet this woman, probably school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her. Though she was addressed as ma’am, no respect is conveyed.”(106)

Nina’s hostility and her fight against all odds take a convincing conclusion. To get acquainted with people and to become familiar in her surroundings Nina starts to wear jeans and t-shirt. Even though, she is not comfortable in her western outfit but she does not give up the new trend and arrival. Just to make friends and for her survival she mislay her identity and most valued culture. Home bird Nina faces multiple problems in the new environment. Even after changing her outlook she is not able to convince people and gain respect. Before marriage she was identified as lecturer but things are different in new place. She is no more a lecturer; she is identified as Nina Sharma and not by her individuality. Sue, suggests her to come out of her non-working and disrespectful status and encourages her to join two year Library Science Course. But this economic independence introduces Nina to many other inner conflicts.

Although Nina was enjoying her life in Canada. She was thinking that she is away from rows of juggins near her house, without sanitation, water or toilet facilities in India. She started remembering how she has to go to the bus stop and she has to lift her sari. She was thinking if those poor persons are migrated to Canada they can live there peacefully because of open spaces. The novelist has described immigrant psyche not only through the eyes of Ananda and Nina but through the interest of Mandy, with whom Ananda has extra marital relations. “She wasn’t even curious, she had never said, like so many people did, that India was a place she had always wanted to visit. Occasionally she realized she thought people lived in trees among tigers roaming the jungle, these impressions he never bothered to correct. (283)

Nina too was not satisfied with her married and she had extra marital affair with Anton. At this stage she started thinking about India where husbands were not expected to meet one’s entire needs and there was no force on man-woman relationship, love-fulfillment. For an immigrant, it is very difficult to balance between two cultures and he or she keeps swinging like a pendulum from one culture to another from home country to immigrant country.

Manju Kapur completes this novel with this Nina’s statement, “Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience .Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach yourself to the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back. ... When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again’. (334)

## 2. CONCLUSION

“Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.

It is unheable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between, The self and its true home: it’s essential sadness can never be surmounted.”

- (Edward Said, 173:2001)

Thus, it is evident from the afore-mentioned discussion that Manju kapur has brought forth the diasporic issues in the circumference of this piece of novel and she has interwoven the theme of Diaspora throughout the novel. Life of immigrants and their problems in adopting is clearly pictured in this work but she does not suggest any solution to the problems faced by the immigrants rather she leaves on the reader to chisel out with it. They don’t find a way to fight against all the odds and stand firm without flaw. Instead, they take it as an opportunity to be a part of the new world. They live to survive; their survival is based on their changing attitude. She has not valorized the life in the new

world but she simply differentiates between the life in the homeland and in abroad. It is true that individual gets in trouble after immigration but gradually with the mingling of the new culture, it also opens up new routes and new ways of thinking which assist in development and advancement and ultimately it depends upon the attitude of the person how to tackle with the obstacles that come in between from migration to settlement. When Nina realized her mistake she bravely decides to begin a new life. Her change of attitude, acceptance of the truth and quest to please the people around her gets her ruin. When she realize the mistake or the identity she has lost in aspiring the new, for identity has made all the difference in her life. I conclude this paper saying, that the concept of diaspora continues till there is a change of attitude in every immigrant.

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