

ISOLATION AND DISLOCATION IN MANJU KAPUR'S IMMIGRANT

Ms. S. Jeevitha,

Head, Department of English, Sri Sarada Niketan College of Science for Women, Karur.

Abstract: The research paper is an attempt to study how in her *The Immigrant*, Manju Kapur aims to show the transformation of a character's identity from her immigrant cum diasporic existence to a 'new woman'. Change in cultural identity has its many facets and the novel in this regard is about the plight of an Indian woman- Nina. Nina's marriage to an NRI dentist Ananda, the numerous challenges during the procedure of immigration and the struggle to settle down in an entirely new country are some of the issues raised in *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur. At the end of the novel, Nina becomes a new woman, totally different from what she had been before her marriage in India. Many factors are responsible for changes in her personality. Immigrants change their personality because they have to be baptized by the pressure of postcolonial ideology. By highlighting the tribulations of relocated immigrants the narrator focuses on the disturbing ordeal through which they pass. Nina soon adapts to the new culture and the new life style. Nina's transformation from a docile wife to a liberated woman and denunciation of her emotionless bond with her dentist husband are the chief concerns of the novel.

Keywords : *Migration, Rootlessness, Tribulation Transformation, Identity Crisis.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The Indian Diaspora plays a considerable role in highlighting the complications of diasporic occurrence in literature. It aspires to scrutinize the disarticulation and the nostalgia for their motherland and estrangement caused by dislocation as well as a clash between generations and cultural identity. Diaspora is an ongoing genesis of an individual towards finding an entity for the exploration of self and this state of yearning has been very significantly described by the Booker Prize winner, Salman Rushdie:

Diaspora Literature engages an idea of a native soil, a place from where the dislocation occurs. It focuses on leaving homeland behind and surviving in the new state of affairs. The feeling of being in a foreign country, away from the mother land make migrants nostalgic and at the same time sensitive to the respective homeland. There is a wide-ranging stress on association and the interconnected sense of being in the right place. It illustrates the tale of assorted personalities who are not contented. They are unsteadily stuck in a mental block of nostalgia, homecoming, and incongruity. Diaspora prolongs the issues related to its uncertainty and vastness and writers read between the lines the numerous questions that are as intrinsic as migrations and displacements.

Exploring Diasporic Struggles and Emotional Alienation

Kapur talks about the ins and outs of her women characters, striving to find their identity under the strong patriarchal pressure. All her female characters go through a kind of ordeal between their mind and heart in order to find their identity and liberation: "Eventually lying in bed become boring, she must explore, she must examine her territory in private. Boldly she strode about in her nightie, the shape of her breasts visible, as was the shadow of her pubic hair. No servant, landlord, landlady, neighbor or mother was there to see. After years of night and day protection against the eyes of the world, it felt strange to abandon the shield that had defended her modesty".

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The Forms of Affirmation

The theme of *The Immigrant* is the experience of being out of place, of being in exile. The novel in essence focuses on the duality marring the lives caught in the contrary transactions between East and West with all its consequential maladjustments, missed prospects and the psychological ordeal characterizing immigrant lives hanging precariously between two dissimilar worlds.

Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. 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, 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 (334).

Gender, Migration and The Fragmented Self

This thought-provoking novel is a story of two immigrants, Nina and Ananda. Nina, like Manju Kapur, teaches English literature at Miranda House. She was not married till the age of 30 and the author tenderly depicts the wailing of Nina, a woman waiting for marriage, generated gradually lost their luster as the years went by and nothing changed. From where could fresh possibilities be unearthed on the eve of her thirtieth birthday? (3). She herself, although well educated, well-traveled, and financially and socially self-sufficient, assumed herself deficient as a woman for she was not a wife or mother as most women her age were. Everybody around her and every part of her body remind her of her unmarried status: And 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 (1).

Kapur writes on the similar lines as she has anticipated in her first novel *Difficult Daughters* where the mother of Virmati (protagonist) recommends her to get married as, "A woman without her home and family is a woman without moorings"

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(102).Ananda, comes all the way from Halifax to get an Indian bride, Nina. On one of the outings before marriage when they go out for dinner, Kapur turn out to be Nina's representative: "But she hadn't felt the spark of instant attraction. Was that so necessary in marriage?" (71)

The novelist very well depicts in her novel that the particular desirability for the NRIs has always been a fascination for the parents to create a blessed image of the Diaspora life for their daughters. Nina's future is forced on such misty optimism and imaginary assurance. So Nina also makes a decision to marry a person who lives on an unseen land. Nina goes to Canada as an immigrant and her journey of life begins in an absolutely new surroundings. Nina lands in Canada with thoughts of family but they are devastated soon. Slowly but surely Nina realized that how dependent and vulnerable she has become as an immigrant wife. Kapur voiced her thoughts very poignantly, "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, many hours. There will come a day when the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life" (122). Ananda is incompetent of satisfying her sexually, so she is not able to conceive. And whenever she comes up with any suggestion on the topic of the treatment for his problem of premature ejaculation, Ananda becomes unreceptive. She realizes that Ananda was aware of his problem and so, "this might be why he had come home to look for a bride. Was this the kind of man he was? Passing off shoddy goods to the innocent east? She did want to know this answer." (186).

Ananda goes for a therapy but without Nina and that upsets her more and a desire to do something in foreign land grows more. She proposes to do job in library but Ananda asserts that it is not easy making it in a new country. She makes an effort to have a baby but she is not able to conceive. After several attempts and appointments with doctors, she makes up her mind again to be independent. She didn't care so much about having a child now. These walls, this room, were inimical to it. She wanted to be outside; she had had enough of inside. Slowly she left the apartment block, and started walking. The sky was grey; a few brown leaves still clung to trees otherwise bare. (172)

Raised in a patriarchal world, Nina very well understands that some adjustments are needed to make a marriage work, "Marriage was a social institution, she reminded herself. A certain amount of pretence was necessary for its successful functioning" (285). Therefore, after giving a second thought to her relationship with Ananda, she determines that, "I'm going to try really hard from now on; this marriage is the main thing in my life, she vowed as the quick one got over" (295). Nina wanted stability in her life and she knew that the institution of marriage does not give any assurance of happiness and satisfaction, "In India husbands were not expected to meet one's

entire needs. Here it was all man-woman-relationship-love-fulfillment..." (296). But she soon finds out that Ananda is not a reliable man and is deceiving her, "The hair explained much—the distance, the silence, the ticket for two months in India, his strange indifference interspersed with tenderness, the shifty look that skittered about her. She didn't blame him. His body spoke when his tongue could not" (324). The Ananda's infidelity re-set her notions about her marriage:

So marriage was based on more than one person's lies. Discovering this made it worse. Her transgressions had been against a faithful person husband, her constant understanding that any exposure would cause ruin and grief. The yellow hair put paid to all that. (325) Unable to get adjusted in a new country, Nina yearns for her life back in Delhi, "She longed to breathe the foul air, longed to sit in a scooter rickshaw and have every bone in her body jolted" (179). In order to divert herself from her monotonous life, she joins a course where she meets Anton. Both of them are drawn towards each other and her love affair with Anton relieves her and sets her free. Nina felt vivacious and felt as she had lived. "Who can feel guilty about living? Judging from the evidence and sexual therapy centers, every citizen in North America regarded good sex as their inalienable right. It was her right too" (260). In this new-fangled place, away from her native land, she feels liberated "Her life was her own; she didn't owe anybody any explanations" (273). For Nina, marriage to Ananda was the basis of her life in Canada and she is conscious of it. She tries to get satisfaction through her extramarital affair with Anton but she soon gets disheartened as she realizes that Anton was simply using her.

Kapur unveils Nina's mind, "Rage 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" (108).

All those persons or state of affairs which had been her anchors lingered on no longer. She comprehends that one had to be one's own anchor. You had to be your own anchor. By now there was no escaping this knowledge. Still she had been trained to look for them and despite all that happened, she had not got over the habit...loneliness, heartache, denial, all grist to the mill (325).

The Psychological Impact of Migration on the Individual

Manju Kapur unambiguously portrays a picture of the problems faced by the immigrants, "Certain Indians become immigrants slowly. They are not among those who have fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death threats, nor among those for whom the doors of their country slam shut the minute do they leave its borders." (24) "They aspire for a fulfilling and a contented life but gradually undergo emotional suffering and a strong feeling of nostalgia overpowers them. "... I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife"? (237). Well aware about her disturbed mind and life, Nina starts afresh. "Nina noticed her status had risen, both in her group and in her

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place of work ... getting a degree that would affect the makeover of her Canadian identity". (247) Rushdie very aptly puts this situation in his words, "Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools." (Imaginary Homelands)

Many factors are responsible for changes in any immigrant personality. Immigrants change their personality because they live under the pressure of postcolonial ideology; without changing themselves, they can't live in a developed country. By highlighting the tribulations of relocated immigrants the narrator focuses on the disturbing ordeal through which they pass:

As immigrants fly across oceans they shed their old clothing because clothes maketh the man, and new ones help ease the transition. Men's clothing has less international variation; the change is not so drastic. But those 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. The choice is hard and in Nina's case it took months to wear down her resistance. (152)

Kapur remarkably highlights the dilemma of immigrants who are trapped in a web of double-identity, "these immigrants live in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided." (120) Ananda's visible attraction towards the white skin does not change even after his marriage. When he marries Nina, who does not match his idea of a white skin partner, he tries really hard to transform her so that she would look more westernize and less Indian. One becoming a Psychological refuse means that one is notable to feel at home even at his / her own home. Nina thus gives words to her feelings and conveys to Ananda: "This is not your country. You are deceived and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven where everyone loved you. This woman is looking for a reason to get rid of me. I am the wrong colour, I come from the wrong place. See me in this airport, of all the passengers the only one not allowed to sail through immigration, made me feel like an illegal alien" (107).

II. CONCLUSION

Gradually, Nina adapted the strange ways of the West and at the end of the novel; she becomes a new woman, totally different from what she was before her marriage in India. "The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the Western world" (334). Thus, confidently Nina treads the path of liberation, "When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and more. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again" (334).

III. WORKS CITED

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