



Acculturation as a survival instinct in Immigrant by Manju Kapur

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Abstract

Immigrant as the title itself suggests focusses on the lives of people who have decided to leave their homeland for one reason or the other. These immigrants constitute the Diaspora. The Diaspora undergo unique problems of identity crisis, which are different from the ones experienced back at home. The traditional concepts of marriage, relationships, dress, communication and food stand challenged in an alien culture and the process of assimilation of a new culture begins. Acculturation sets in to resolve the identity crisis and better acceptance of new environs is finally established.

Key words-immigrant, search for identity, identity crisis, acculturation

Diaspora is a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area. The word can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland. The word has come to refer particularly to historical mass dispersions of an involuntary nature, such as the expulsion of Jews from the Middle East. Recently, scholarship has distinguished between different kinds of diaspora, based on its causes such as imperialism, trade or labor migrations, or by the kind of social coherence within the diaspora community and its ties to the ancestral lands. Some diaspora communities maintain strong political ties with their homeland. Other qualities that may be typical of many Diasporas are thoughts of return, relationships with other communities in the diaspora, and lack of full assimilation into the host country..The term 'diaspora' signifies the political as well as individual consequences of cultural alienation, a strong sense of exile and a terrible reality of homelessness resulting in the loss of identity,

Manju Kapur writes about Diaspora through the character growth of two characters Ananda and Nina who have migrated to Canada for

career and marriage. We see all the psychological and physical impacts on their personalities as they encounter the cultural differences .They realize that some deviations from their home culture are advantageous while some are not. They conveniently adopt the process of Acculturation and assimilate conducive characteristics of their host culture while on the other hand they retain the positive aspects of their home culture.

Manju Kapur has delineated the experience of two people who have immigrated to Canada; they immigrate and become a member of the Indian Diaspora living in Canada. The immigration of Ananda who is a trained dentist is driven by a tragedy in his life. To help him forget the loss of his parents, his dentist uncle invites him to Canada. A doctor in Canada earns a lot of money. However, Ananda an Indian dentist had to pass the entrance examination for his profession in Canada. The examination fees are high and he has to earn the scholarship. Ananda starts living in the house of his uncle in a cramped place where he has to learn to do his own work. Ananda an only son in the family is not accustomed to do his own work. He was habituated

to being pampered by his parents. His Canadian aunt is cold as she is unable to understand the Indian culture of having a grown up nephew in the house. Kapur captures the painful gulf in familial expectations that separates the bereaved Ananda from his Canadian relatives. In their home, he misses the intimacies of Indian life, the communal meals, rich spices and vegetarian diet he is used to. In time, it dawns on him, "that being a relative did not bestow automatic rights, that being an orphan ceased to mean anything after you had eaten hundreds of meals at your aunt's table". Ananda's feeling of rejection fades; his understanding of Western manners grows, but his sense of shame remains.

At the end of one year, his uncle tells him to find his own lodgings and take a loan for his higher studies. The uncle explains that the cost of education in Canada is very expensive and so even his sons would have to procure their own loans and lodgings if they decide to study further. Following the Canadian practice of taking loans, he brought a beautiful practice, a car and an apartment for himself. He had nursed a wish to marry a Canadian girl but his problem evented this. So finally, he decided to marry a girl from a middle-class background. He expected the girl to be tutored in the Indian Culture of considering the husband as God. would not complain about his sexual problem. However, the Indian girl, Nina—he chooses to be his wife is educated and aware. After a period, she raises this topic with Ananda and Ananda's male ego is hurt when she suggests that he should see a doctor. Previously when Nina had asked him to visit a doctor with her for not being able to conceive, Ananda had avoided it for the same reasons that his inadequacies would be discussed in public.

His male ego fueled by the Indian Patriarchal traditions did not allow him to accept his sexual malfunction. Eventually the influence of the migrated land allows him to put aside his ego. Finally, he takes the sexual counseling treatment available in San Francisco. After his return, he is happy with his performance and now he dares to explore and own the white woman he had so wanted to seek. He starts with his secretary Mandy and

when she becomes too demanding; he dumps her and goes on a one-night spree by roaming the Night clubs in different avatars in Nina's absence. Thus, even though Ananda has been nurtured in the Indian culture he feels that the Canadian culture is emancipating and therefore decides to satiate his pent-up sexual energy. It had been controlled from the time he was a student. In his youthful days, his friends had enjoyed but he had to be lonely because of his sexual malfunction. His wife Nina discovers his rendezvous and decides to opt out of the loveless marriage.

Ananda is different from husbands in India. Living in Canada, he knows that he has to share the housework. He helps in kitchen work even though his wife Nina was a homemaker. In the beginning when Nina was a vegetarian, he cooked vegetarian food for her. If Nina cooked, he later did the washing. He insisted that Nina start wearing western clothes because he felt that Indian Clothes look too decorative and eye catching. Thus, we see that Ananda has assimilated the Canadian ways of sharing housework. The process of Acculturation have begun to take roots in his personality. A stage came when Ananda fell so much in love with Canadian culture that he forgot sometimes that Indian culture also talked about the same values albeit sometimes in a different or better way.

Nina's experience was different. Nina was a forced migrant because her migration was not of choice but because of marriage. Therefore, Nina was apprehensive about her adjustment. Ananda who had already adjusted to the Canadian Culture was hopeful that his wife would also adjust fast because as a teenager she had lived abroad in Brussels where her father had been posted in Foreign Service. Nina also knew a little bit of French, which is the dominant language in Canada. So Ananda was confident that his wife who had a foreign name Nina and who even had a fair complexion unlike himself and who being a lecturer in English Literature knew English very well would find no problem in adjusting to Canadian Culture. He had observed on his visit to India that Nina did not have narrow ideas and had allowed him to hold and kiss her without any inhibitions and therefore Ananda felt that he had

made a right choice. Nina was also happy that she would not have to work. Her NRI dentist husband earned sufficient for both of them and if at all she decided to work it would be to fill her time. Presently she was happy to have so much leisure to herself. She ate drank and slept and was enjoying every moment. Both of them had decided to start a family. Therefore, when Ananda asked her if she wanted to work she declined. The soulless streets in Halifax had struck surprise for both Ananda and Nina. Nina had expected a larger house but consoled herself that this was bigger than her Jungpura house in Delhi and had better facilities. "Nina would not have thought there was so much to show in one tiny apartment" (I-111). On the first day, Nina had been unable to appreciate the Saab—the Swedish car but the next day in a good mood, she appreciated.

Nina's Canadian experience did not start too well as she was interrogated for a long time in the immigration. Nina had felt the whole experience greatly humiliating but Ananda commented coolly "Calm Down, Nina Calm down. This is standard." (I-109) The comment added by the author is very pertinent. "He was coaxing her into accepting and then forgetting what had happened. If they lacked the ability to do this, they would never be able to enjoy their new country. (I-109) On reaching Canada, Nina found out that Ananda had already become a non-vegetarian. Nina told Ananda that she would never be able to eat meat. Sorrowfully Nina "thought of the recipes that her mother had anxiously written down for her, the special pickle she had given her so lovingly ,that she had secretly carried these ten thousand miles"(I-112) When Nina went shopping with Ananda it was a wonderful experience. "The couple wheeled the cart down the aisles, past such colour and promise that Nina felt she would go mad with the bounties of infinite choice. (I-117). Super markets were not available even in the capital city of Delhi in those days. "The adult pleasure in wallowing in sea of material goods was entirely new to her" (I-117) The Author has given a very apt comment on the difference in attitudes of the two genders while adapting to a foreign land. When men make a trip to their homeland after their immigration abroad, they observe, "So corrupt, merit stifled such

malfunctioning of every civic amenity, where your last ounce of energy is spent in merely keeping the wheels of daily life oiled and running. For men this logic works particularly well. OK, let's be loyal to the country that has done so much for us."(I-121) 'Work is an easy way to integrate. Work engages the mind and prevents it from brooding over the respective merits of what has been lost and gained. Colleagues are potential friends. (I-121)This is the philosophy, which a male immigrant accepts and settles down. Women like Nina take a little more time. "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 even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm nor compensate, Then she realizes she is immigrant for life. (I-122) To fill her time, Nina 'writes frequently to her mother and Zenobia. Her letters are very cheerful. Her husband Ananda 'knows she is lonely but hopes she will settle down quickly. (I-122) She finds the cinema experience in Canada very different. As an immigrant she became used to comparing each and every thing with her life in India." How strange the halls in the west are, thought Nina holding on to a bag of buttered popcorn and surveying the miniscule number of people that made up the audience. Did they even make profit? At home crowds milled around film halls, the black market in tickets was brisk." (I-123) Nina would have liked to get up when Ananda left for his practice but Ananda refused. One day finally Nina decided to surprise Ananda by cooking meat for him. She started going on shopping sprees alone to the nearby Holincourt "Alone she could exhibit her third world self, no witness to the depths to which a former academic had fallen."(I-125) Slowly she began to get bored "Was it going to be like this, just her and Ananda?"(I-130) Nina encountered cultural difference in everything. Nina was shocked to find that people in Canada called her dark when she in fact was considered very fair in India. In India, she was among the ones having the prized fair complexion. Immigrants have to change their dressing style to assimilate. Nevertheless, the change is too drastic for females who are not

accustomed to wearing western clothes. Women are faced with 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. (I-150) As Nina came into contact with the people of the other group her process of Acculturations started. Acculturation is a process involving two or more groups, with consequences for both; in effect, however, the contact experiences have much greater impact on the non-dominant group and its members. The climate of Canada and its cold harsh weather forced her to abandon her salwar kameez and wear denim pants. The maintenance of her silk clothes was impossible and that was one of the reasons why she had to start the process of acculturation.

Immigration involves compromise, and sometimes it is the obvious – almost clichéd – cultural differences in food and clothing that Kapur focuses on. At other times she teases out the subtler signs of adjustment, as when Nina objects to Ananda's friends calling him Andy, noting the telling difference between the injunction, "call me Andy" and the untruth, "My name is Andy". Andy, Nina insists, is not a Hindu name. In other Diasporic novels, the wife is shown to be barely educated with no knowledge of English and therefore it is a more difficult process for her. However, Nina has been an English teacher and therefore in this respect and in the respect of knowing the basic nature of western etiquettes she is at an advantage than other wives. After Nina started wearing jeans, she was asked by her husband to call him Andy instead of Ananda, which Nina found too invading. Slowly Nina began to feel the lack of people in their lives and the fact that she had been unable to conceive made her depressed. Back in India, she was companionless but here in Canada in spite of her marriage, she did not have a soul to share her emotions. In India, Marriage meant broadening of relations but in Canada, she was snatched of even the companionship of her mother without compensation of other relations. Finally, Nina decided to take up some job but continuing her teaching job was not possible as in Canada you required a PhD and a few publications before she could even apply for these jobs. Ananda

suggested a school job. However, Nina was not interested in teaching school children. As she was already associated with books through the Halifax library, she decided to pursue a career in library science. She easily got a scholarship for her education and the experience of learning in a foreign university was unique and enriching.

Nina was frustrated from within because she was never satisfied in her sex life with Ananda. Ananda was not ready to go to the doctor for the same. So when a certain classmate Anton in her library science course made advances towards her, she did not resist. What had initially made her like Anton was his sense of humour and his ability to talk and dissolve her loneliness. This basic urge to talk to someone initiated her affair with Anton. Here I would like to comment that Canadian experience had an emancipating influence on her. Had she been in India surrounded by friends on all sides who could share her problems she might not have felt the need to associate herself with a stranger just for companionship. However, in Canada she was companionless. Her husband looked after her materialistic needs but ignored her sexual and emotional needs. Ananda developed a wall between him and his wife with his insecurities.

Nina stopped conversation because if Nina brought up any topic Ananda would sound irritated. Therefore, they had stopped sharing that camaraderie which was evident in the beginning. Hence, Nina at a high risk of jeopardizing her marriage decided to find her happiness outside wedlock. However, even Anton made it clear that he was not emotionally involved with her and he had a wife to go back to. Therefore, in the vacation of her course she was again lonely with no company. Here it is wise to note that Nina could have the luxury of trying another route to her happiness out of wedlock because she was living in Canada. Had known faces surrounded her at home, it would not have been possible for her In India. She would have had to think twice before opting out of her marriage After the death of her mother. when she had completed her library course, she decided to find a job in some other city. Canada had given her confidence to live alone. Her mother was her only emotional tie left in

India for whom she had to continue her drama of a false marriage. With her death, she decided to take the bold step to live life alone. She observed that she had been uprooted from her life once and she had started her life in Canada. The acculturation process gave her confidence that she can survive another major change in her life. She had adapted to her migrated land and she felt that she could do it again. When Nina had married, she was a tentative immigrant but her stay in Canada taught her to be mentally strong, learn to overcome loneliness and be emotionally independent.

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place because of contact between cultural groups and their individual members. Acculturation follows migration and continues in culturally plural societies among ethno cultural communities. Adaptation to living in culture contact settings takes place over time. Occasionally it is stressful, but often it results in some form of mutual accommodation. Acculturation has become one of the largest domains of research and application in recent decades. Acculturation happens when groups of individuals from different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. Acculturation is the term given to the changes in everyday practices, attitudes and beliefs that take place when two relatively isolated cultures come into contact. This is a complex process. Cultural adaptations are seen in language dominance, dress preference, food and leisure pursuits, topics of conversation, attitudes to religious worship, marriage partner selection, child rearing and the balance between work, home and family life may all change. Thus, we see Ananda and Nina evolve from a totally Indian psyche to the amalgamation of both cultures in their personalities as a strategy for survival in their adopted land and culture. and take decisions which might be an anathema in their own cultures.

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