



MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANTS*: DIASPORA EXPERIENCE THROUGH NINA – THE PROTAGONIST

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Abstract

In this Research paper attempts have been made to study Manju Kapur as a successful writer in sharing her Diaspora experience through the character of Nina, the protagonist of the novel 'The Immigrant'. Nina's marriage with Ananda, the NRI Dentist and her shifting to foreign land and the consequent results of the struggle she does for setting her new identity, are some of the issues discussed in this research paper. The struggle she has to do for her identity and the cultural displacement she experiences has skillfully been described in this novel. The post-colonial ideology plays a significant role in the changing the personality of the character.

Key words: migration, challenges, struggle, tradition, diaspora, post-colonialism

The literature is a mirror showing different shades of human life. In post colonial era so many Diaspora writers have been successful in describing the different shades of human life through their characters and Manju Kapur is not exception to this. Manju Kapur comes out as one of the well-known writer of English on the scenario of Indian women writers writing about women and their concerning problems. She is a retired Professor and the Ex-Head of the Department of English at Miranda House, New Delhi, she started writing as a movement protesting against the existing norms and codes of living for women in the patriarchal Indian society. She has the following novels to her credit *Difficult Daughters*, *The Married Woman*, *Immigrant*, *Home*, *Custody* and recently published *Brothers*.

Manju Kapur had been to Halifax, Canada and had experienced various problems as an outsider. She herself was part of the immigrant process when she studied at Dalhousie University in

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, from where she completed her Master of Arts in English. Manju Kapur described her women characters with minute details, struggling to discover their own identity under the strong patriarchal pressure. All her female characters go through a kind of tribulation between their mind and heart in order to find their identity and emancipation.

The Indian Diaspora plays a significant role in focusing the female character's experience in foreign country. Manju Kapur in her novel 'The Immigrant' also describes the problems faced by Nina, the female protagonist in her novel. The complications are caused by her dislocation and the nostalgia for her mother land. The struggle for setting identity becomes very difficult for her in foreign land. All such problems have been described by Manju Kapur in her novel 'The Immigrant' through the character of Nina.

Tradition is a set of laws defining value and moral for her. Nina conscious of the rules of the male dominated society, she takes it as a prejudice, violence against her body and mind, an exploitation and abuse of her body and rights. At the same time as Nina's mother desires to lock up her daughter in the age old tradition by forcing traditional values; Nina tries to displace herself from the social restrictions and dares to show an emigrant of Indian origin in Canada. Nina is an embodiment of devotion and sacrifice.

The novelist exhibits a mature understanding of the female psyche, in the depiction of the inner subtlety of a woman's mind. Nina is the puzzled and found herself in dilemma regarding the prospect and problem of marrying an NRI candidate. She is bothered by the thought of building a new home at ten thousand miles away in Canada and leading an independent life leaving her teaching profession at Miranda House. Like every young girl of her age and position she accepts the semi-arranged marriage with Ananda under the maternal pressure.

The feeling of love for his own country and culture is naturally evident in any immigrant who has fostered his early life in his native land and every person in his alienation in a foreign land wants to preserve his native lands culture by marrying a girl from his native land and Ananda is not exception to this. Ananda's proposal comes to Nina and the marriage is celebrated following a traditional method. It is followed by a court marriage too in order to stay away from any kind of litigation at the time of their immigration to Canada. Ananda with the help of his brother-in-law, a diplomat tries his level best for the smooth passage to Halifax. But, Nana's application for visa is unluckily rejected.

Actually, Nina has dreamt marrying an NRI and hoped for foreign life. She has to face the ground reality when she left for Canada after the three months of her marriage. Manju Kapur displays how Nina has to strive more for she becomes lonely due to Ananda's busy work schedule. Ananda's busy schedule and his lack of consideration compels her to discover the special challenges like other immigrant wives who face and lead the expelled life.

"The immigrant who comes here as a wife has a more difficult time, at present all she is a wife, and a wife is all 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 or compensate, then she realizes she is an immigrant for life."

(Immigrant 121-122)

Manju Kapur endeavors to project the negotiation Nina has to do while facing the problem of cultural differences in the foreign land. She is disturbed at the differences in food and clothing very much. She develops a feeling of uprooted. She transforms herself from being strict vegetarian to an omnivorous and progressively adapts *shalwar kameez* and western dress leaving her traditional *sari* behind. Nina takes a long time to give up her 'habit', 'style' and 'self-perception'. She resolves, "As immigrants fly across the oceans they shed their old clothing, because clothes make the man new and helps ease the transition," (150). She is very dissatisfied at this.

Manju Kapur is the woman writer who first dared to talk on such untouched problem of sexual inadequacy of male in her novel. Nina shows a common desire of a woman. She wills to be a mother like every married woman but her failure in conceiving a baby due to her husband's sexual inadequacy is very disturbing to her. Although Ananda never talks anything about his sexual dysfunction, Nina considers, "Sex was a form of communication, and if they could not communicate on this most basic level, what about everything else?" (183). Nina shows the trait of a common Indian woman and never complains of her sufferings in marital life to her husband and he too cannot realize the frustration and depression that Nina goes through. She realizes the painfulness of the process of adapting her husband and foreign culture.

Breaking the Indian tradition and not paying too much attention to her traditional marriage Nina falls in extramarital relationship with Anton, her classmate in library Science. According to Marxist Feminists, economic independence leads

women to their empowerment and liberation from the suppression of patriarchy. Nina knows the importance of economic independence and considers that it is the first step of a woman for her liberation.

Through Anton she realizes that good sex is the inalienable right of the people of North-America. It was her right too and "For the first time she had sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent", (260). This extra-marital relationship gives her a kind of contentment and continues for long time as it remained unobserved. Anton and she did not have a physical relationship. It was purely a gathering of bodies, a healthy give and take relationship. She does not give importance to others opinion as, "Her life was her own, she did not owe anybody any explanation". (270). But, the sense of insecurity exists in Nina's heart. In the foreign land, she requires the shadow of her husband who is the only protector of her life. Her own marriage did not protect her and finds that her classmate rapes her. Her adventure in sex leads to her disaster and ruin in life as she is unfortunately punished and raped by her admirer lover, "she collapsed on to the bed, as one of many differences less creatures in an uncaring city," (308).

Nina is totally broken with uncontrolled sorrow when she comes to know about the sad demise of her lonely mother. Being a single child of her parents she has to return from Canada to India for performing her regretful religious rites. The emotional attachment with her motherland and husband in a foreign, now becomes completely harsh. Considering this miserable event she finds "the bonds of her marriage assumed a different feel", Nina thinks as if she is betrayed by her ambition, "Her life was now completely her own responsibility, she could blame no one, turn to no one", (323). After being felt cheated, her thoughts about her husband being her anchor in foreign country has rapidly evaporated. She believes, "You had to be one's own anchor," (325).

Nina becomes more confident in leading her life in her own way. She develops the courage of a voyager to step out of the mindset the most immigrants

shaped in. And she meets courage and makes up her own mind to go alone. Nina rediscovers herself ceasing to be an Indian. She becomes a Canadian or Westerner in everything to a certain extent.

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