



AN INSIGHT INTO THE TRAUMAS OF THE IMMIGRANTS OF MANJU KAPUR'S AND BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S FEMALE LEADS

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ABSTRACT

Immigration is an amalgamated journey experience of oneself to another country. Migration separates one from their mother land towards an alien land, where it is marked by new culture and new adjustments. Immigrant psyche highlights the interface of the traditional culture within the culture of an adopted alien land and bring about a transformation in the inherited tradition and culture of the immigrant. The two novels taken depict an immigrant looking back to her mother country with pain and nostalgia and an immigrant who shares the common grievances of their experiences and loneliness to those the new settlers who are provoked by a firm urge for migration. The present article focuses on the experiences of Indian women migrating to alien lands after their marriage. Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* and Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife* are the best works to show the internal emotions faced by women on a new land. Nina, the protagonist of *The Immigrant* and Dimple in *The Wife* represent the pathetic condition of women in abroad. Both the protagonists fail to adjust in the new environment as they feel alienated from their culture and society. They almost become secluded from the normal life. Nina, brought up in Delhi identifies her potentialities and excels in Library science but misses her married life as her husband was being captivated by the western culture. On the other hand, Dimple misses her life and her husband as she was psychologically disturbed by the new-fangled Western thoughts and culture. Monetary approach towards the society has made the people to aim foreign currency rather than towards humanitarian approach. Manju Kapur and Bharathi Mukherjee had beautifully carved the shapes of the characters that even a normal reader feels the presence of their tribulations as the personal grievances.

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Manju Kapur is a feminist writer, who mainly focuses on the psychological feelings of women in joint family systems, typical attitudes of family members and the quest for identity of her female protagonists. It is quite alarming that Manju Kapur could pen down five novels centering the female characters, while it is quite difficult to produce women oriented movies. All the social activist movements preach about the rights of women, but Manju Kapur clearly shows the struggle for identity of the female in the technologically advanced modern period. Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* won the Common Wealth prize and a worldwide recognition. *The Immigrant* published in 2008 is her fourth novel. Her first three novels and fifth were set in the backdrop of North Indian cultures and in and around Delhi whereas her fourth novel is set in western country, where Kapur did her M.A in Halifax.

Nina, the protagonist of *The Immigrant* hails from a lower middle class family was brought up by a single parent. Though Nina stayed abroad in her childhood, she lost the memory of her stay as she returned to India at a young age after her father's death. Like all the other parents, Nina's father hoped for a bright future for her daughter, but failed as he had an early call from God. Nina's mother, a simple lady was not much aware of the future; of course as she had to stay away from her relations in India and could not economically or socially plan for their future. Nina and her mother were not accepted by their grandparents and started their battle individually. Nina completed her education at Miranda College and continued to teach in the same college. As she was a voracious reader her immense knowledge made her to excel in her profession. Nina's mother was much worried about her marriage as Nina was crossing her thirties. The novel opens with Nina's agony of her growing age. 'Friends and colleagues consoled her by remarking on her radiant complexion and jet black hair but such comfort was cold.' (Pg.1). The astrologer whom Nina's mother consults introduces them to Ananda's match, a dentist born Indian but settled in Halifax. Alka, the only sister of Ananda wanted to marry off her

brother, as she felt it was her responsibility as their parents had died in a road accident.

Ananda and Nina, who were having their own turmoil in their lives, were united. A late marriage, economic problems made the either side of the families to concentrate only on their marriage other than the psychological adjustments between them. Nina's mother was happy because she could at last fulfill her role as a mother by marrying off her to an NRI. Ananda had developed a problem in his sexual life but hid it to his wife. Nina knew the problem but as a typical Indian woman did not reveal it to her mother or friends. She set towards west to start her married life in Halifax. She had a bitter experience in the plane itself as she was questioned by the authorities in an empty cubicle like a prisoner. She shows her agony in a letter to Ananda.

Dear Ananda,

This is not your country. You are deceived, and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven when everybody 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 to feel like an illegal alien. See, see, see.' (Pg. 106, 107).

They spent a few days happily but later Nina started to miss her free and secured life of India. She felt isolated without anyone to share her feelings with; she missed her mother, Zenobia. A mechanical life with western food could not attract her. She had no other activity other than reading books or watching television. At last Nina enrolls in a Library and continued her education in Library science. Nina could understand Ananda's situation when she was invited to his uncle Dr.Sharma's house. 'So this was the scenario that lay behind Ananda's reticence. Her heart filled with tender hurt on her husband's behalf' (Pg. 133). She was not used to non vegetarian. Ananda doesn't say it to his friends or uncle when they invited her to dinner. They say she needs to adjust to the new culture. But naturally it takes some time for her to taste a new food which she was not at all used to for many years. Ananda could become a



Canadian soon as it was easy for him to adjust to the western ways. Nina had to change her dressing style to suit to the western style. Her old Indian sarees and dresses made her to look different from others in the new country.

Nina wanted to have children. She was introduced to the La Leche League where young mothers and newly married were given counseling on motherhood. She even consults a doctor and finds that the fault was not hers but her husband refuses to accompany her to the doctor. The disturbances set their root in between the wife and husband. Ananda aware of his problem sets off to California to get treatment at Dr.Hansen. Later Nina realizes that he had not gone for the conference but went for the treatment. Of course it could bring about some joy in their life but could not make Nina happy with a baby. Nina becomes busy with her Library course and part-time job. Slowly Ananda gets attached to Mandy, his assistant and Nina to Anton, her friend at the Library course. Nina has good experiences in the Library field as she was naturally intelligent and the western education gave her a big platform to enrich herself in the relevant field.

Nina recognizes the truth about her husband when she returns from India after her mother's death. By this time she had completed her course in Library Science and was confident enough that she would be selected in an interview at the University of New Brunswick. She leaves her husband to enter into new horizons. She feels '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.' (Pg. 330). Nina, who came from a small family could realize the weakness of her husband. But as an educated woman she bears everything for the sake of their families. She never complains her husband about it, instead wants him to attend to the medical sessions. Nina, an Indian though in Canada never opens her mouth in her group of counseling sessions between Gayatri and her. Gayatri encourages her to speak 'Say anything. Anything that comes to mind' (Pg.226) , but Nina could say nothing except crying. May be her Indian attitude didn't allow her to speak about the things

which need to be buried in between a husband and a wife. Except Ananda's weakness he was a good partner to his wife. He wanted her to give a luxurious life. He took the burden of her higher education, was equally worried about her mother. But his Canadian attitude made him to drift apart from Nina, who was Indian in attitude in spite of staying for a few years in Canada. Nina also had an intimate relation with Anton, but Ananda never suspected her and feels proud when Mandy teases him about her. As Sushila Singh says her opinion on *The Immigrant* 'With this fourth novel of hers, Manju Kapur once again proves that she is a master delineator of the complex Indian life.' (337)*The Immigrant* rightly focuses on the sufferings of innocent Indian women, who face the realities in a new world with no one to support them legally or psychologically. Nina's observation on immigrants is true in this context. She says '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 they leave its borders' (Pg. 120).

Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* depicts the mental breakdown of a weak-minded young woman who becomes a victim for western culture and undergoes a traumatic experience of immigration from the structured society of India to the liberated society of New York City. The opening sentences of the novel introduce the protagonist and set the playfully ironic tone: "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads."She fantasized about young men with moustaches, dressed in spotless white, peering into opened skulls. Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love."(pg-3) Mukherjee's main protagonist, Dimple is simple, Bengali teenager girl whose mind is filled with useless ideas other than those associated with securing a husband. Dimple worries that she was ugly, about her thin lean body and tries hard to wheatish her complexion with creams, increase her bust by isometrics and finish her Bachelor of Arts



degree. But she fails in all the three things. She being brought up in an upper middle class conservative environment leads a protected life. As brought up in Indian Hindu traditional culture, she looks timid, docile and submissive in nature. Dimple's constant fight within the bonded and enchained middle class life aspires for want of freedom and love. Sometimes her depressed conditions hallucinated in her. "Sometimes when she entered the bathroom in the dark, the toilet seat twisted like a coiled snake (pg12) She feels that the aisle for 'freedom' is after marriage as imbibed in her psyche. She dreamt about being a good wife, docile wife conquering the husband enemy by withholding affection and other tactics of domestic passive resistance. (pg-9). So she starts awaiting marriage with all her fantasies fed by magazines and films. "Marriage would bring her freedom . . . Marriage would bring her love" (3). Dimple gets married to a guy of her father's choice, Amit Kumar Basu, and consultant engineer, waiting to leave to a foreign country. She is renamed as Nandhini as her mother-in-law felt odd of the name Dimple. She felt embarrassed with her identity as Dimple being taken away in her in laws nevertheless she learned to be like Sita (dutiful and docile). Mukherjee quotes like "Marriage alone teaches the virtues of sacrifice, responsibility and patience."(27) But her compromise with fate of life gets erased when she hears the news of their going to U.S, brings a ray of hope to her sullen life. Her mind is now filled with aspirations of moving abroad and plans ahead about her beautiful life there. She felt ill when she had realized her pregnancy. "She did not want to carry any relics from her old life" (pg-42) Dimple doesn't want to take anything that are remains of her distressed life. Her fantasy for new life made her to pack and unpack things. Her new concept of freedom which was alluring to her senses was hindered when Amit's dominance enthralled on her. Amit wants her to interact with people but is apprehensive about her becoming too American. On her first day of shopping, Dimple had a bitter experience in a shop when she asked for cheesecake where she gets stinking beef. She felt nostalgia of her mother land. "In Calcutta she'd buy from

Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis, she was used to many races; she'd never been a communalist. She was caught in the crossfire of an American Communalism she couldn't understand."(Pg-60) Mukherjee immigrant characters have a kind of self-excluding attitude, a desire to remain culturally and socially Indian in blood, isolated from American society even though financially supported income for better future from it. The immigrant group tries to maintain and impose a definite vulnerable cultural strangeness in an Indian woman i.e. they represent the combination of gender and ethnicity which is most prevalent among these settlers in foreign.

"Meena put her feet upon the coffee table and gave Dimple household hints: wash saris in the bathtub, throw them in the dryer, fold them in half and use spray starch. "But if the washing machine is in the basement of the building, let Amit do the laundry." Dimple laughed at the suggestion. "I'm sure he wouldn't do the laundry! He hasn't washed a hanky in his life. I wouldn't let him." "You want to get mugged? Women in *this* building – not me, touch wood – have been mugged in the basement. If you want to get killed and worse things, then go do the laundry yourself. Don't listen to me. I tell you these people are *goondas* [thugs]." "But why would anyone want to mug *me*?" "It's all the rare beef they eat. It makes them crazy." (Pg 70-71)

Meena's past experience, a replica stipulation of the literal dangers of assimilation, presents physical isolation with the stranger in alien land not only ensure a way of maintaining individual physical safety, but also as a collective norm to ensure cultural and religious purity as Indianess.

When Dimple was offered a job, Amit interferes and declines it. "One breadwinner in the family is quite enough," said Amit, looking for Dimple's agreement."(61) Being isolated in the alien country and without opportunity for exposure to outside world falls in disillusion and adversely affect her relationship with Amit. She is doomed to her world of fantasies hiding her yearnings from her



husband. Lack of communication between the two stifles and chokes Dimple's voice and disintegrates her sensibility. She gets attracted towards Milt Glaser 'the exotic other', who makes her feel good but she fails to decide anything as her twines are in her husband's hands who lets them loose according to his own ego. Naturally the husband becomes an adversary when he is not as per her fantasies. She symbolically struggles a lot for adaptation. Continuously forced to search an identity makes her feel insane when she is obliged to satisfying her husband or her herself. "Life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself. Amit had no idea how close she had come to betraying him completely and not just paying the price for too much fear and loneliness."(Pg-211) Her insecurities due to indisposition of character take refuge into trouncing her real emotions from everyone. "She was much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow without feelings."(200) Her dilemma is that whether she wants to become fully American or not, but at the same time find the life sickening there. The harsh reality of violence torn American society shatters her daydream world and so do her nerves. Dimple thoughts of being isolated, alienated, nostalgia, culture conflict and identity crisis become trapped in disillusion in life made her turn into a psychopath and finally she stabs Amit seven times thus setting her free from the chained life of imprisonment. The point of suppressing feelings and how adversely it affects one's behaviour eventually resulting in "conflict" is corroborated by eminent psychologists, Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey in their book *Theories of Personality: The denial does not mean that the feelings cease to exist; they will still influence his behavior in various ways even though they are not conscious. A conflict will, then, exist between the interjected and spurious conscious values and the genuine unconscious ones.* (Hall and Lindzey 289)The self consciousness is an intricate part of Dimple's personality which proves to be self destructive as the decision to kill Amit is not a planned one but because of frenzied state of mind sometimes spontaneous.

Thus unable to fulfill the perceptions and desires as well as the destruction of one's self identity gained power over the perspective thinking which happened for an immigrant in the foreign land.

After a close examination into the characters of Manju Kapur's Nina and Bharati Mukherjee's Dimple the readers feel that the immigrants are not comfortable in foreign countries. They need the support of their family members to adjust in a new place, failing their life is becomes distress. Nina, an educated and well-read woman could somehow substantiate her life with education, but Dimple who was leading a fantasy and aimless life chose the most brutal form to search for independence. Nina had no satisfaction even in her family life, whereas Dimple was happy with Amit, as he could satisfy her in their marital life. Dimple had her parents, but Nina lost her mother as well after her marriage. Dimple had a chance to become a mother, but poor Nina moved around the doctors and counselling centres, begged her husband to accompany her to the doctors without any of her fault of becoming a mother. Nina had better adjusted than Dimple. But both of them lost their husbands, one killed him and the other left as he was not loyal to her. Dimple and Nina faced the torments, but only Nina had chance to survive in the west even after her separation from her husband, but Dimple's sustenance is a million dollars question as she has to face the guilt throughout her life.

The novels *The Immigrant and The Wife* bring out the sensitiveness hidden in Indian families. The two novelists were very careful in delineating the characters while focusing on the native cultures. One may follow Bengali tradition or North Indian culture they ultimately crave for their self-identification. If it is not achieved any real woman can be turned out to be like Nina or Dimple. Manju Kapur and Bharati Mukherjee could successfully trace out the distress woman face for identification through their protagonists. Be it East or West, women strive for their own independence, if it is not achieved we have to come across characters like Dimple and Nina. Unfortunately the great social reformers had thought of women and brought about many reforms but none



could change the status of women in the male-dominated society. In most of the families we see women becoming the victims of male-dominated society or patriarchal societies. Though women are equal to men in all fields, be it education, business, space or technical field still her status is continued to be the same in the society. So the Indian feminists writers are moving heaven and earth to keep the Indian women on cloud nine, free from all the stumbling blocks.

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