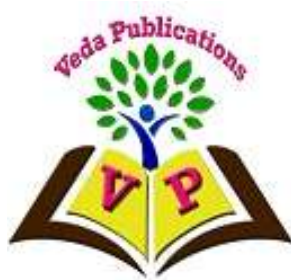


**ESTRANGED IDENTITY IN *THE IMMIGRANT***

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Indian literature in English has journeyed a long way to achieve its glory and grandeur through its various forms like poetry, prose, drama and fiction. In the realm of fiction literature has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels. The genre of fiction encompasses the entire gamut of life and society, its expressions, beliefs, and aspirations. The fictions treatment of life and its problem are realistic. It is realism that distinguishes novel from the earlier prose romances. The novel does not provide escape from life and its problem, but rather a better understanding of them. It also reflects the very spirit of the age in which it is written. Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides matching the pace of the world. They are bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the rich soil that they bring out to the world.

Keywords: *Immigrants- Quest for Identity- Adjustment- Post colonial world.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008) deals with the cultural conflict and the havoc that western culture is creating on the lives of Indian Immigrants by tearing them apart between traditional and western norms. She is one of the most accomplished and highly acclaimed contemporary Indian English Women Novelists. The main content of the paper refers to marital bliss and women's role at home, particularly in the culture where Individualism and prated are often considered as alien ideas. Contemporary women authors are now communicating themselves candidly and courageously on multiple themes without adhering feminist perspectives.

Immigrants are usually caught between the traditional culture and the cultures of the alien land. *The Immigrant*, by Manju Kapur as the title suggests, divides its fictional locals between India and Canada in the vexed context of globalization with far greater emphasis than any earlier Kapur's novel. However, the conflict between western and eastern cultures, the twisting of family cords when people leave for a foreign country and India's unvarying class system in contrast to the more slacken social customs of the west. Different from its predecessors, the novel is only to a limited extent set in India. The major characters, Nina and Ananda are both NRI (Non-resident Indians) engaged to new lifestyles in Canada in the seventies.

The novel begins with the descriptions of Nina's mundane life that appears to have forgone all the chances of spousal bliss. The conventional notion that a girl's ultimate goal is to marry someone subdues her line of thought and prepares her to feel empty. Though thirty she didn't accept for any "humdrum marriage" (3). Nina's search and longing ends with the introduction of Ananda made to her, a Canada based Dentist. Their steady living for each other and their resolution to marry brings change in Nina's life. It is an opportunity for Nina as she has almost lost her hope. She gains totally a new identity by marrying Ananda, who is an expatriate. Thus the story is concerned with the Indian couple - Nina and Ananda, the difficulties that are associated with their arranged marriage, and Nina's conversion into the role of an immigrant. Primarily the paper is

constructed on the idea of migration through an arranged marriage. It also explores common themes like multinational habitus, cultural predicaments, selfhood and patriarchy. The paper extends across the spaces of the host nation, Canada and the home land, India.

The migration strategy and custom climate in Canada at that period of story setting, was indicative of a proliferating Indian immigrant category. It was almost over a decade from 1960s to early 1970s that immigrants from non-European nations were licensed to migrate under the 'skilled worker class - an immigrant class based on the point system according to one's skill set' (Walton -Roberts) However, Nina's case is different as she migrates to Canada under the category of 'family reunification class' because of her marriage to Canadian Indian-born husband. Immediately after she leaves India to meet her husband Ananda in Halifax, consequently begins her life as an immigrant in Canada.

The word 'immigrant' represents an unstable migrant. The moment she gets down the flight at the Toronto Airport, she faces the discomfiture of being 'othered'. By sending a note she conveys her misery to her husband. "They stopped me at Toronto...They kept asking me questions... They were treating me like a criminal... they wouldn't treat a European or American like that... They did it because we are third world" (109).

Nina's journey across the spaces shown in the paper is that of striving for realizing her selfhood as a woman and as an immigrant in Canada. Ananda's journey is quite similar to that of self - discovery especially when he attempts to find a solution to his overhasty ejaculation. The paper ends with the note of Ananda discovering a solution to his sexual worries and Nina detecting her new identity by moving around as an immigrant in Canada. Nina in due course finds out about Ananda's disloyalty and decides to go away from married life and begins her life afresh in the province of New Brunswick. It is primarily interested in disclosing the problems of the newly emerging women and their identity. The major female characters in this paper denounce the male domination and the marginalization of woman. Nina too contributed her part in that way over here.

The paper promoted this viewpoint that a



woman is never considered as an independent person as she has always been assigned to a inferior and marginal position in our society.

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man and she is simply what man decrees... she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex... absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiates with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential (1952:1-2).

Nina migrates to Halifax in Canada, which is a small east coast city with a lesser Indian immigrant population instead of the big metropolitan cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. If she has to relocate to any other city her lifestyle and identity would have been shaped up in a different manner. Since there were habitual Indian communities in these cities, maybe she would have sustained on her Indian traditions, food and clothes more intensely being contended to be Indian in the midst of Indian community while experiencing indistinguishable adjustment issues in Canada. Or it may be because many of these communities are not belonging to the same social class as her, she is not in a position to relate and thus feel detached and moderate to her fellow immigrants.

Two important aspects that can be observed in Nina's case here, that is prior to her arrival and after her arrival in Canada. One is her clothes and the other is that she is a vegetarian. Coincidentally both these aspects find their way of change when there is a shift in Nina's transnational habitus towards a complete western way of living. She reaches Canada with her traditional wear, saris and salwar khameez, etc. The fact that she wears these clothes for her daily as well as social occasion gives much distress to Ananda. She strictly follows her Indian habitus thinking that by wearing such traditional clothes one can continue to be an integral part of one's own identity here it is of an Indian woman. Not a word of appreciation from her own husband, but everyone else in the story commends her traditional attire as 'exotic and beautiful' and a most suitable complement to her may be exotic 'Indian' feature and looks.

The references to clothing are countless all over the novel, consequently designating an important sign of identity for Nina, how it associates her to India and how she is recognized by others.

She took out her saris and stroked the intricate woven surfaces. Benarasi, Kanjeevaram. Orissa patola, Gujarati patola Bandhani; she had fancied carrying all parts of India to Canada in her clothes. She spread the brightest one on the bed, and gazed at the magic of the green, yellow and red Gujarati weave (112).

When it comes to food habitus Nina is shocked to know that Ananda has changed into non-vegetarian leaving back Indian cuisine back to India itself. After her arrival at Halifax, "*She thought of the recipes her mother had anxiously written for her*" (112), that is of no use to her in Canada. Nina thinks that vegetarianism is the essential element of their culture and supposes that food binds them to the memories they have about India. The author also gives much importance to this. The process of cooking and eating the Indian food in the novel exemplifies the model consumption of that which Indians prefer to have.

Turmeric...red chillie.. onions and garlic... releasing sweet sharp smells... cumin and coriander... these smells and imagined sights travelled across the world from north India to western Canada to kick her sharply in the stomach (139)

The sense and feeling of immigrant has a deep impact on Nina's psyche. She feels that Indians leaving the country as immigrants slowly because "*they are not among one those who fled persecution, destitution, famine slavery and death threats*" (120). The paper disclosed the pungent surveying of the various dilemmas of the Indian immigrants is commendable. She opines:

Certain Indians become immigrants slowly.....immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided. In the new country they work lengthy hours to



gain entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account. ... As far as citizenship is concerned, a divided heart means that the immigrant clings to his status. Feeling that to give up his passport is the final break in the weakened chain that binds him to his motherland. ... Forget the smells, sights, sounds you were used to, forget them or you will not survive. There is new stuff around, make it your own; you have to (121).

To adjust to the new environment she further complains -*"Forget the smells, sights, sounds you were used to, forget them or you will not survive. There is new stuff around, make it your own, you have to"* (121). Arriving at alien land as an immigrant and as a wife becomes more difficult for Nina to manage the situation. Alienation and insecurity surrounds her. Consciousness of immigrant haunts her. Nina explains the situation:

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 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 or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life. (121-122).

To overcome such situation she starts thinking of doing job. Though she was teaching in Delhi University the qualifications was not sufficient to teach at Canada. She joins Library School so that she can do job in Canada. Slowly and slowly Nina starts enjoying life in Canada. She starts changing her food and dress habit and confined to those which can suit Canadian life style. She realizes that it is in her control to keep herself happy. It is on her own that she can find the answers to her selfhood.

Consequently Nina freed herself from the patriarchal restrictions; she faced through the various processes in her life in Canada and changed her identity: the ability to choose her own career through

education, the ability to decide whether she wants to have children, her sexual freedom, her change in dress and image, and eventually her decision to leave her husband.

The immigrant's psyche indulges in a continuous interaction with the traditional culture of the native home and the adopted culture of an alien land. It ushers a reconstruction in the inherited custom and culture of 'the immigrant'. Cultural diversity which the immigrants are concerned with is primarily dealt with in this paper. Immigration necessitates them to embrace the contrasting culture of an unknown land snapping down the native boundaries. Moving to a new country no more causes separation but may be perceived as rebirth and reinvention in a new place, city, and country noticeable for their new culture. The belongings of the past never be discarded but continues to stay even when someone approaches it to explicate and consider the alien experience.

Twenty first century is witnessing the influential role of Globalization. In the recent times every concept or idea is judged and appreciated for its universal value on the global platform. Migration of the people to a foreign country is easy because of eased transportation but the conditions are hard to adjust, far from one's native land. The home and identity are two important things every individual's life. Though people are living in an alien culture, they are very much connected to their roots and to their respective native lands. They keep a separate space for their native-land in their minds. These people are not ready to compromise on their own customs and traditions. Indians are there in all over the world like, USA, UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa, West Indies, etc. These Indians, who are living outside India, have established mini India in their home. They follow simultaneously the Indian calendar to celebrate all Indian festivals and partake in cultural practices. Bill Ashcroft and others comment on this diaspora: *"Diaspora, the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, is a central historical fact of colonization"* (2004:68-69).

Thus, This paper dares to break certain conventional attitudes that are never questioned in our society. The last three decades witnessed Indian women writers-novelists and poets, who are writing



in English as well as regional languages, have shown a tremendous courage in dealing with the formerly prohibited and forbidden topic of female sexuality. Through many twists and turns which explore this space and reveals the myriad impediments that are firmly rooted in the family system, such as uprising against the age-old tradition, the search for selfhood, woman's rights and the politics of marriage. Nina's decision to forge an identity of her own away from her husband reminds us of the protagonist's words in Kamala Das's - "*I Shall Someday Leave: I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon you built around me with morning tea, Love words flung from doorways and of course Your tired lust*" (150)

Her realization that "*when one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home*" (334).empowers her and we see in her a newly gained confidence, courage and identity. Viewed from the angles of the gyno critics the narrative of the novel is authentically feminine.

Like Showalter, the renowned feminist author Helen Cixous also subscribes to the view that writing is of the body and that a woman doesn't write like a man, because she speaks with the body. She advocates: "*woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing*" (320). Kapur has indeed, written with her – 'self'.

The Post-Independence era has witnessed the emergence of a large number of novelists whose works offer - interesting insights into the many ways in which the standard authentic notion of language has been subverted (Ashcroft, et. al, 2004:68-69).

CONCLUSION

The present day multicultural societies are a result of extensive Diaspora that has taken place over the last 200 years and now more so with the advent of globalization. Immigration of the Indians to US, England, Canada and Australia in the 20th century was mainly a personal choice either for academic pursuit or for economic gain but their acceptance in the alien lands has not come without contestations. The inhabitants of these countries have always reacted differently toward these immigrants, isolating them and resisting their assimilation into the main stream. The immigrants have always faced a close contesting culture which has always been followed by their attempts to adjust or engross, either to be known by

a separate identity as a racial group or be assimilated.

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