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Projection of Self-estrangement in ManjuKapur's '*The Immigrant*'

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* focuses on 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. Her novels obtain an appreciable modernist meaning when dealt with in a way of considering the matter related to crisscross ideologies of cultural pedantic thinking. The women whose lives and struggles are deeply monitored under the tyrannical mechanism of a closed society are exhibited in the writings of Manju Kapur. Moreover her novels take into account the intricacy of life, that include various histories, divergent cultures and different patterns of values which are questioned and tackled by women in the context of socio-cultural conditions. 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 novel.

Key words: Immigrant, socio-cultural conditions, traditional culture and alien land cultures

Introduction:

Manju Kapur is one among the growing number of women writers from India on whom the carving of the hardship but strong women ultimately disintegrating the conventional boundaries has had an outstanding impact. The main content of her novels 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.

The Paper scrutinizes the story of Nina, the arranged marriage system, and sexual compatibility between individuals. 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.

Ananda leaves New Delhi after his parents lost their lives in a rickshaw accident. He is young, undaunted and aspiring to become a Canadian citizen and dentist, in the footsteps of his uncle, who already has got the status of a wealthy doctor in Halifax. Kapur seizes the agonizing polarity in familial expectations that disengages the deprived Ananda from his Canadian relation. The togetherness of Indian life, the communal meals, rich spices and vegetarian diet he misses in their home that he is familiar with. He also gets disturbed with the life style, his uncle and his family spends in Canada. As he reaches Halifax, Canada, he is foremost shocked to see the empty lanes in contrast to the crowded lanes of Delhi. In curiosity he asks his Uncle "*Where are all the people*" (18). The day he reaches Halifax he is being taught the life of Halifax and how everyone has to be self - dependent in the fast moving life of Canada.

The very next day he was taught to make breakfast and every step of life. While making bed he remembers the comfortable life and the custom of house maids in India and explains it to his cousins. "*In India we had a maid who did all this, I mainly studied*" (21). Most of

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the time Dr. Ananda's maternal uncle who himself is a well - established dentist in Halifax urges Ananda to be cosmopolitan like him. He states:

Look at me, I am a citizen of the World", In other words, every summer they went to Europe. In Rome, Florence, Paris Venice, London, Amsterdam, Munich, in art galleries, theatres and museums he exposed his family to the finest artefacts of western civilization (26).

Living in Canada Ananda's consciousness about his caste has to give his way. He belongs to a Brahmin family where "his body must never be polluted by dead flesh" (14). But the condition doesn't remain same when he is in Canada. He thinks a lot about it when it comes to food habit "as he boiled his vegetables and seasoned them with butter, salt and pepper, Ananda wondered how much his caste meant to him. His uncle pushed him gently towards the eating of flesh" (35), a sign to survive in the western country, Canada. In India guest is welcomed as God but it didn't happen to Ananda in Halifax.

Usually staying at maternal uncle's house is a normal tradition in India may be for studies or struggling for job. Very soon Ananda is made to realize that he has quit his uncle's home and stay independently. His uncle one day said, "that it was time for him to move to a place of his own. He had been around Halifax long enough to know the ropes" (29). He comes to know very quickly that regardless of his uncle's liberality, family in Canada is not as self-disciplines as of those in India. His staying as a paying guest allows him to meet Gary, who helps Ananda in adopting Canadian norms in order to survive. Gary introduces Ananda to Sue who becomes his girlfriend and this friendship reaches to bed where Ananda is proved to be dissatisfactory to Sue.

The only reason to get attracted to Sue and avoiding the Indian girls he met was as he felt "too Indian women meant he could never escape his country" (40). Later she loses her interest in Ananda and clings to Gary. Shifting and changing boyfriends is a common tradition in western culture and is not looked in a derogatory manner. She later marries Gary and has a successful and happy life with kids. He continues to stay with no girlfriend or prospective wife in the picture. Ananda's elder sister Alka, as a matriarchal responsibility, begins to take care of him. Her idea is to get Ananda settled down, as she is the only

married woman and the female relative of Ananda. She undertakes the role of a matchmaker and encourages and convinces Ananda to visit India to find a bride. Accordingly, after much encouragement, Ananda comes to India in search of a life-partner. On the other hand, Nina another important character of the novel is a thirty year old English lecturer, working in New Delhi, and staying with her widowed mother, struggles to make both ends meet.

In the first half of the novel *The Immigrant* stays in Delhi in North India and in the latter half he is seen in Halifax in East Canada. The setting of the novel is in the seventies, during Indira Gandhi's regime in India and simultaneously Pierre Trudeau's as the head of Canada. During that time India was undergoing more social and political reforms. One of the reasons for Nina's decision to leave the country is the political and social climate in India at the time. Nina's move to Canada is considered in her best interest and a right decision for that time. The story covers the period of three years starting with the year in which Nina and Ananda meet and marry. It continues over approximately the first three years of their married life. 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).

Although, Nina leaves her country to escape "culturally subservient status of {her} home" (Gurr), yet the truth of assimilating to new life strikes on her like a heavy load that literally weighs her down. Never, even for

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a moment, during all these years at her home, she thought about 'who she was or what she was'. In his stay in Canada, Ananda is shown as person having two main points on his agenda throughout the novel. The first one is his attempt to acquaint more about Canadian culture as soon as possible. He thinks that it is possible only by becoming non-vegetarian, relishing Canadian cuisine, observing Christmas and Thanksgiving festivals, renaming himself in westernized way as "Andy", changing his outfit, his mannerisms and ennobling all Canadian things while negating the Indian ones. He also encourages Nina to practice the same, not for the reason of her homogenization in Canada but for the fact that she cannot be noticed as Indian. Second, his enthusiasm with his overhasty ejaculation makes him to worry always over everything that it is connected with, sexual performance, gratification, fertility and fidelity. He is bothered about his relationship with his wife and her feminist journey for the sake of her own self - discovery.

Nina's journey across the spaces shown in the story 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 novel 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. ManjuKapur, as a novelist is primarily interested in disclosing the problems of the newly emerging women and their identity. The major female characters of her novels denounce the male domination and the marginalization of woman. Nina too contributed her part in that way over here.

Simon de Beauvoir observes man-woman nexus quite uncomplimentary and disproportionate:

for-man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general: whereas woman represents only the negative, defined criteria, without reciprocity

The author conveys that this is an important shift in Nina's life wherein she imbues herself as a woman in the Canadian context, with all her previous temperaments

of being an Indian woman and an immigrant. It is not possible to any immigrant to give up completely the nostalgic feeling of his/her own country. She recalled the salespersons who came to their door to sell their products, the gardener who regularly watered their plants, the long rows of jhuggis in the nalla near to her house, in India. She used to pass her time eagerly by listening to the news reports on Kumbh Mela which happens after twelve years in India which for the devout Hindu is an extremely sacred event.

Today is the day of the MahaKumbh, the day the spiritual blends with the ordinary,... marching to the Ganga... two crore faithful will bathe in this river today...it is a bitterly cold morning, there is a mist and the sun has yet to rise, but nothing deters these pilgrims from the icy river" (172-173).

While hearing the news report some of the words echoed through Nina. She feels that she is a stranger to the KumbhMela like anyone else in Canada. She has never anything to do with the ritual of Hinduism as an educated, secular and westernized woman. However, the crowds, the pilgrims, the sadhus, the cold river, the morning mist and the piety are all resonating in her ears. *Somewhere they beat in her blood and now, in a foreign land, she was as guilty of exotic sing India the tourist posters in the TajMahal restaurant (173).*

Living in the Canada in the midst of western culture, the western culture gets absorbed in their blood vein. It is surprising in the Indian context that both seem inclined for extra marital affair or in a better sense extra marital sex. Nina gets a sex partner in Anton, a fellow friend in School Library and Andy gets Mandy, a white skinned secretary. Both enjoy committing adultery forgetting the commitment of loyalty at the time of marriage.

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*

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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).

The novel opens with the description of Nina, a young girl in her thirties waiting to be married. Her marriage is the topic of conversation for her mother and relatives. All of them are always worried about her unmarried status -who, whom and how it will happen? According to Simone de Beauvoir, marriage is not the only career option honorably to happen in a woman’s life:

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband or in some cases a ‘protector’- is for her the most important of undertakings. In her eyes man incarnates the other, as she does for the man; but this other seems to her to be on the plane of essential, and with reference to him she sees herself as the inessential. She will free herself from the paternal home, from her mother’s hold; she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master (1997: 445).

Conclusion:

Her life becomes more insufferable and she simply flies to university of New Brunswick for an interview. Poojatolani says: *Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for a pizza with friends.* The Paper further gives the message to all the Indians youth who are going to US,UK or other countries for making up their bright future. But they fail to realize the havoc the western culture creates in the life of

Indian immigrants. They are torn apart between East and West and lose the peace of mind and life.

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