



THE CULTURAL ALIENATION IN MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANT*

Dr. Ashok Jadhav

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Arts and Commerce Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Ambajogai,

Dist. Beed, Maharashtra, India

Abstract:

Manju Kapur has contributed greatly to the Postcolonial Indian English Novel. She explores the status of the culturally alienated women. She strives to disclose the problems of the Indian women who try to establish their own identity in the tradition-bound patriarchal society. It was not easy for the Indians to uphold their individuality either at home or abroad in the postcolonial era. Manju Kapur's novel, The Immigrant deals with the postcolonial problems of cultural alienation, displacement, immigration, isolation and reminiscence faced by the Indian woman in an alien nation. The quest for cultural identity is one of the most prominent and noteworthy features of this novel. The story revolves around an Indian couple Nina and Ananda. It focuses on issues that surround their arranged marriage and Nina's transformation as an immigrant. The novelist explores the appalling life of the immigrant who has been forced to adjust himself/herself in adverse social, cultural and economic situations.

Keywords: Alienation, dislocation of culture, displacement, immigration, isolation, migration..

The Indian English Novelists have exposed socio-cultural, economic and political changes through their writings. From generation to generation, the people migrate from one nation to another nation. Immigration is primarily concerned with the settlement of the people beyond the boundaries of their homeland due to socio-cultural, economic and political reasons. The ever-increasing population accelerated the pace of migration all over the world. After acquiring independence, many nations confronted the problems of racial discrimination and immigration towards the countries from which they have just been freed. In almost all the cases the immigrants face a clash of divergent cultures and feeling of alienation. The desire to elevate their status or to acquire the economical stability tempts the immigrants to embrace the incongruous culture of a strange land. Manju Kapur focuses on the theme of cultural alienation, immigration and racial discrimination in her novel, *The Immigrant*. The resolution of Ananda and Nina to migrate to a new place persuades them to merge and adjust themselves to the alien culture. At the beginning, Ananda and Nina find it very difficult to settle in alien land and acquaint them to foreign culture. Their immigration to Canada distances them from their own cultural identities and contentment.

Nina was the victim of patriarchal social set up in India but after migration to Canada, she has to fight against alienation, impatience and the Western culture. Ananda is a recognized dentist but the condition of Nina is very miserable because her degree is not accepted by any Canadian teaching institute. Being childless Nina feels lonely at home. She is surrounded by the unfamiliar faces belonging to alienated culture to which she couldn't embrace fully. She has lost her home and her job. She cries, "I miss home – I miss a job – I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?" (Kapur, *TI*, 237) Nina strives to adapt to the surroundings in the alienated cultural milieu. She cannot breathe freely in the situation in which she has been pulled by her husband. She is stunned when she is sexually beleaguered by her friend Anton but later she develops physical relationship with him.

She has lost her self-respect and looked down at herself for moving to such displaced land. She could not resist herself from blaming her husband for her distressed situation,

This is not your country. You are deceived and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven where everyone 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 me feel like an illegal alien (Kapur, *TI*, 107).

Nina has to struggle against the tradition and convention to put on mask of alien culture on her face. It is not easy for her to come out from that cobweb. There is no one to support her in an alien land. She does not show her own perception and it seems to be one of the fundamental causes to bring about changes in her attitude. She experimented with the Western clothes. She would like to transform her in new way. But her dilemma is obvious in her decisions. Maithra rightly says,

The psyche of an immigrant constantly interacts with the traditional culture of the natural home and the culture in an adopted alien land and brings about a change in the inherited tradition and culture of the immigrant. Cultural disparity which the immigrants are subjected to is dealt with primarily in this novel. Immigration compels them to adopt the contrasting culture of a foreign country breaking down the native boundaries. Migration no more leads to separation but may be seen as rebirth, reinvention in a new place, city, country marked by a new culture. (Kapur, *TI*, 403)

The mind of an immigrant would constantly be occupied by the conflict between conventional culture and the adopted culture in an alien land. *The Immigrant* can be read as an exploration of the globalized and hybrid identity assumed by increasing number of educated Indians. It can be said that migration does not lead to separation but may be seen as an incarnation, reformation in a new place in mind, body and heart which is marked by a new culture. For Ananda and Nina, their displacement is not only geographical and cultural but spiritual too and that ultimately makes them loses their own selves. Nina does not want to lose her identity which she has made for herself. Ananda tries his level best to blend his culture to the culture of Canada. The alienated culture distances him from the surrounding. All his efforts to merge his identity in the identity offered by the alien land identify him as an immigrant who has been exposed to the unconcerned experiences of cultural alienation and displacement. Ananda acknowledges his acceptance of the cultural diversity; “This was the country to live in, despite the cold, the darkness and the never-ending winter” (Kapur, *TI*, 27) It simply reveals an anticipated disclosure of an immigrant harassed by the cultural alienation and displacement in a foreign land.

Though the immigrants like Ananda and Nina, live in an alien culture; they are very much connected to their conventional and cultural identities and they are also nostalgic to their respective homelands. They always try to keep a separate space for their cultural identities of native-land in their minds. Nina and Ananda are not ready to separate themselves with their own customs and traditions. Kapur has best exemplified these things through her characters. The novel ends with a message that truly represents the case of immigrants, “The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the Western world” (Kapur, *TI*, 334) The displacement of an individual from one place to the other and in the process the individual’s attempt to adjust to something alien is always an exigent task in contemporary global scenario.

The Indians migrated to Canada willingly modify their names. Most of the Indians have eagerly modified their names to merge in the Canadian culture. Ananda becomes Andy after certain period of time. Anton changed the name of Nina as Neen. Gayatri Gulati is addressed as Go-Go in the group of women, which was joined by Nina. The new names and appearance in the new cultural background render them new identity. They feel more privileged in the alien culture, “Immigrants psyche shows the interaction of traditional culture within the culture of an adopted alien land and bring about a

transformation in the inherited tradition and culture of the immigrant” (Kumar, 27). Their modified names harmonize to their changed attitudes in the Canadian culture.

To conclude, Manju kapur has brought forth the predicament of the immigrants who have been placed in an alienated culture in an alien land. She has also tried to blend together the theme of cultural diversity throughout the novel. Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* explores a fine blending between Canadian and Indian cultures. The novel shows a harmonious mixture of cultural interaction. The cultural exchange and assimilation seem accessible to every individual. It is not a forced but a willing acceptance of other cultures. Such spontaneous assimilation does not force any individual to leave his/her native cultural conventions and customs. Manju Kapur has explained how Nina and Ananda have to adjust themselves to the Canadian surrounding keeping their own selves aside. They have to incline towards the alien culture and consider it as an opportunity to involve themselves among the world population. Gradually, they start to annihilate the distance and differences between their native culture and the culture of the adopted land. Their subsistence would be prolonged if they keep them on incorporating with the alienated culture. Ananda was able to acquire the needed adjustment with the alien culture in Canada but Nina suffered at the beginning to attain the required alteration in her personality. Changing time has changed Nina's outlook towards the alienated culture. The situation teaches her how to deal with the problems that occur from migration to settlement. It is true that individual gets in trouble after immigration but gradually with the mingling with the new culture opens up new routes and new ways of thinking which help the individual to progress and reach his/her destination.

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To Cite the Article: Jadhav, Ashok, “The Cultural Alienation in Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant*”. *Literary Cognizance*, II-2 (September, 2021): 20-22. Web.