

## IN PURSUIT OF THE SELF: MANJU KAPUR'S THE IMMIGRANT

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Abstract : Manju Kapur's "The Immigrant" is a tale of the sufferings and emotional dearth that most Indian migrants undergo. Educated Indians in search of a better life style and upgraded living standard travelled to distant lands and found that although apparently everything seemed glittering, but underneath there was a great hollow surface which was not easy for anyone to sustain. Manju Kapur's "The Immigrant" is set in the backdrop of post-colonial independent India and has a lot to say about such migrating souls and their dilemma.

Keywords: Struggle, suffering, colonial, uncertainty,

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Manju Kapur's "The Immigrant" is a tale of the sufferings and emotional dearth that most Indian migrants undergo. Indian English novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri found themselves as a lost entity in the alien land and the feeling of rootlessness is all pervasive in their works. The feeling of nostalgia and loss broods too large in their works. Many educated Indians in the colonial time found the European countries more promising than their own motherland. In search of a better life style and upgraded living standard many travelled distant land and found that although apparently everything seemed glittering but underneath there was a great hallow surface which was not easy for anyone to sustain. In the 19th Century when the colonies had put their roots firm in India, The average Indian was happy to accept any second-hand service. And the intellectual and educated took this opportunity in the European Countries after the Independence in 1947.

Manju Kapur's "The Immigrant" is set in the backdrop of this post- colonial Independent India and has a lot to say about such migrating souls and their dilemma. The great struggle and suffering that Nina - the main female protagonist face in relocating herself in Canada is the main theme of the novel. And the sacrifice one has to do to find a suitable husband is worth noting. Nina as a child has seen all good days with the father's transfers to all the European capitals in the capacities with life under the protected wings of father was worth living. The places were very exciting with parties, good food, drinks, and picnics but this life style has a very short history in Nina's life. Everything came to a that after her father's death. She found herself in a very conservative and a monotonous routine life with no good surrounding and people around. Her journey from a luxurious residence to her grandparents' house and to a rented single unit at B-26 Jangpura Extension was nightmarish. Her last school was, "The International Academy in Brussels where she left her real spiritual home" (5) to Lorento convent at Lucknow. It took seven long years for Nina to migrate from Lucknow to Delhi to do English Honours at Miranda House, followed by a post graduate



degree from the university, to end up with a lecturership at her alma mater. Struggling to meet her ends and give a fuller life to her mother was the only dream that Nina could afford at thirty. Marriage and a family of her own was a far-reaching dream to fulfil in this life with no support either to her mother or to Nina. Her mother only longed to give Nina her real home which she deserves the most of course. Life's frustration was at its peak and had perfectly matched to her inner turmoil with all spinsters around to add up to her discontent. The mother had been constantly nagging to see her settled before her death but Nina couldn't dream of anybody in her life with such a shabby surrounding and the bliss of conjugal life. Marriage was all a widow mother could wish for a thirty-year-old daughter and that too an arranged marriage was the only way for Nina. In turn she showed little interest in finding a compatible and little more adjusting husband for herself.

Life was to take a better and a brighter life this time for Nina; Ananda a dentist from Halifax-Canada comes her way through an acquaintance and Nina agrees to marry him for her mother's sake. Dwindling between the agreeing and disagreeing she asks for some time to think about her future. Adapting the new change and adjusting according to the demand of time and circumstances was the only mantra that could work. But Nina's anxiety for a change and her unwillingness to accept a new life with a total stranger that too away from home, mother, and friends was a difficult thing to accept. Nina needed some more time to brood over for she was not sure, she says: "I'm not sure, Ma, it is such a big step and so far away. It means leaving everything; job, friends, you. If anything happens, I will be left with nothing." (75)

She had tasted the fruits of all European countries with her father's posting and concluded that migration could not be a way of life. It can give only temporary fulfillment but permanency has its deep root in one's own land. The lost feeling was deep rooted in Nina's mind right from her childhood as she found her father migrating from one European nation to another. Her mother's insisting on her Marriage was based on a lost ground for she had no answer to her daughter's future queries. The only solution she could provide to her daughter was that if nothing goes well, "You can always divorce him". (75) With great optimism she wanted Nina to get married to the migrant, the only solution she could offer for her daughter, and that marriage would give her all required experience and maturity. Whereas Nina's apprehension had no answer, "Why marry than?" (75) Forced by the circumstances she gives up worrying about her mother and plans to take her away once she herself settles.

The inherent lost feeling was deep rooted in Ananda too. In his visit to meet Nina, he was reminded unpleasantly of his parents' death it to accident seven years ago. The incident forced Ananda to leave his flourishing practice at Dehradun - India and migrated to Canada under the cares of his maternal uncle leaving his elder sister and her family back home. But his sister's insistence to him to get married and settle made him come all the way from Canada to India. "When would his life be sorted out, when would he have someone of his own?" (47). He was glad he had not told anybody But his mind was full of doubts as he knew things were different in Halifax, should his hopes be dashed, the distress would only be his. Ananda's visit took a fruitful turn as Nina accepted him at the very sight. For the first time he found his own land showering all bliss on him. He was rather surprised to find himself accepted.



Marriage although provided what Nina was waiting for and the life she once lived. But the feeling of disappointment came very soon when Ananda could not fulfill her desire on the very first night. Being well bred by time and tide she consoles herself with a renewed hope and vigour to start afresh.

Nina's journey from tradition to modern surrounding was a great turn in her life. Her efforts to retain her original self in the flux of time against the odd circumstances were more difficult than to change with the circumstances. Migration for her was nothing more than a life of luxury and comfort to the life at Delhi with full of struggle and dearth. After arriving at Halifax- her own home as her mother has always wanted; she tries to console herself in the existing circumstances only to find herself lonelier than ever before. The lost feeling engulfs her once more. Days together passed on without speaking to anyone but Ananda He tries to settle her down with much ease and affection that any husband would try for his newly wedded bride. He even allows her to take any suitable job in order to kill time. "Till Nina came to Canada she hadn't known what lonely meant." (161)

Nina differs in her thinking, she wanted a family: a complete family, a child was her wish. Ananda holds completely different views about life, family and career. He wanted to settle down first and then plan for a complete family. Ananda was not in a hurry. He was not prepared either mentally or physically to have a baby. She often saw a shadowy figure around her and her concern to become mother grew stronger. This added more to the lost feeling of Nina. His physical incompatibility turned to be the major source of Nina's new worry; as if her life and anxiety are synonymous to each other. According to one of her friend's, Sue's advice, she joins La Leche League, an association of nursing mothers. These nursing mothers could be of great help to Nina. Some of them really faced problems conceiving, and had undergone many treatments and precautions to get the desired results. But this did not lessen her anxiety but rather aggravated it. The mothers around her started finding reasons for her not conceiving. This almost left her with no desire for sex. Although infertility was not a woman's problem but it was she who bore the brunt of this particular deficiency. Amidst such situation even the sight of a pregnant woman or a baby hurt her and the pain of not bearing the fruit became more and more killing. Alone, in the room, her fertility was in question, she soon realized that she should give some more time to herself to overcome the anxiety so that she can conceive. Amidst chaos and dilemma, she forces Ananda for a baby. And it was more important to find a solution than blame Ananda.

Ananda calmly explains to Nina that he has a host of medical fraternity to consult if need be. But would not take any suggestions coming up from the nursing women' association on how to conceive. This makes Nina more obdurate. He finds himself more impeccable by asking Nina to settle down first than they can think of a child. Consulting a physician was the only possible initial step that they can take. But according to the nursing mothers' suggestion it was too early to consult a physician. But for Nina it was the baby that can settle her not only in Canada but in her life with Ananda. Whereas he was well aware of his deficiency and Nina's constant nagging irritated him. Ananda finally decides to consult a sexologist at California, without Nina's knowledge.

In the meantime, Nina takes a part time job at the library and in order to continue she also decides to take a degree in Library Science which Ananda actually wanted her to do in order to settle in Canada. They both wanted to make each other happy but differed in their method of achieving it. Their differences led them to choose their own way. "Once you have this experience may be you can apply for something full time."(237)

He was happy that Nina could finally agree for settlement with a baby. She had accepted the fact that something was better than nothing. A new beginning with renewed relationship seemingly where they both had what they wanted but not what they desired. For Nina, Ananda was her world and for him it was exactly this that he longed to create for her and himself. "Above all I want us to have a solid relationship, with us sharing everything. You are all I have in this country, you are the reason I am here." (211)

The novel depicts the total atmosphere of uncertainty in the lives of not only the main characters but the minor ones too. Zenobia, Ninas soul mate, a friend very close to her heart is also seen menacing over the lost feeling. Zenobia's parents ensure a respectable second marriage for her. But she finds comfort in her pain and loneliness. Her loneliness becomes an integral part of her life which she doesn't wish to do away with. Second marriage at the cost of her independence? Her independence was worth the pain of loneliness. It has now become a part of her existence and she felt more comfortable being lonely than getting exposed to the dictates of the life partner which she had already chosen to do away. The struggle is on the same level. Nina as a librarian comes to know many things and the actual Canadian culture, the family structure and the values the country and its people hold. Unlike India where women are the passive sufferers of the ill meted on to her, she comes across a bra burning feminist group. This group worked to establish women and their individuality without the interference and advances of their men in their lives. The main aim of the group was to make woman independent and fearless.

Feeling of landing in an alien land had taken all the Indian culture and values out of Nina and Ananda both. Nina finds solace in the company of Anton, her library school mate. She establishes sexual relationship with Anton during their study tour to Ottawa to overcome her frustration and fulfil the sense of being alone, when Ananda was away for sex therapy in the name of his official work. Ananda feels confident enough after his sex therapy and enjoys his male libido with the white skinned girlfriend who in turn feels lucky to have Ananda, an Asian doctor whom she would never give up. Their changed lifestyle and switching to the non-vegetarian food of pork, beef and beer only gives a hollow feeling to both of them but also an intense sense of guilt. Nina soon realizes how aimlessly she landed in Canada. The foreign surrounding forces her to surrender completely not only to Ananda - her husband but to the other male also so as to suit the Canadian lifestyle. A paradigm shift in the lives of the immigrants is seen. The urgency to move to alien land and the struggle to adjust themselves with the natives is what Manju Kapur has tried to convey through Nina in "The Immigrant".

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