

## Cultural Displacement and Double Identity in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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### Abstract:

*While dealing with issue of immigration, the first thing that comes into one's mind is how an immigrant will manage in a totally new environment and culture? What are the problems ahead in their life? The question of their identity is a very important issue. Most of the contemporary Indian writers are dealing with this issue in different ways and Kapur is one of them. In my paper I have tried to show how the immigrants suffer in the new countries, as depicted in Manju Kapur's novel.*

**Key words:** Immigrant, Post-colonialism, Culture, Value, Identity

Manju Kapur teaches English literature at Miranda House, Delhi University. She has written five novels *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *The Immigrant*, *Home* and *Custody*. *Difficult Daughters* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia) in 1998. *Home* was shortlisted for the Hutch Crossword Book Award in 2006.

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* is story of two immigrants, Nina and Ananda. Nina, like Manju Kapur, teaches English literature at Miranda House. She was not married till the age of 30. Ananda, who lives in Canada, wants to marry an Indian girl, and marries Nina. Nina goes to Canada as an immigrant and her journey of life starts in a totally new

environment. At the end of the novel, she becomes a new woman, totally different from what she was before her marriage in India. Many factors are responsible for changes in any immigrant personality. Immigrants change their personality because they face pressure of postcolonial ideology; without changing themselves, they can't live in the developed country. They unconsciously follow the norms and cultures of colonizers and start forgetting their own cultures. Those immigrants who belong to those countries which were colonized in the past, even after their independence, follow the colonizers. The colonized behave in a way the colonizers have programmed them. They willingly accept the superiority of colonizers and their own inferiority. This is known as culture cringe.

The colonized or immigrants have a double-identity, which means that they start perceiving the world through the consciousness of colonizers as well as through their own vision, which is provided by their native cultures. Ananda is a perfect example of it in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*. One becoming a psychological refuse means that one is not able to feel at home even at his / her own home. Nina suffered in this way at her early time in Canada.

The immigrant suffers from social invisibility and feels inferiority. To end it, he / she starts dressing up like the Westerners. Nina goes to Canada with lots of saris but she could not wear them due to the colonial mentality. She starts wearing jeans instead of salwar-suit and saris. She gives up her own dressing style and accepts theirs.

An immigrant leaves his land for the new land where he gets a new identity. The immigrant suffers from the double identity: he wants to adjust his personality according to the new land's culture, but, at the same time, he wants to remain in the identity of his own culture. In this dilemma, he is unable to get any identity: even if he accepted the culture of the new land, his appearance remains the same as where he was born. He can't escape from the personality of his native place. He can go

anywhere, but his inherent qualities can't be change. He can gain new qualities of new cultures to enrich his personality, but his identity will not be pure or absolute. It will be a mixer of two or more cultures, it never can be natural, because one can change his getup, but one can't change one's fundamental appearance. An immigrant willingly wants to be parts of the new culture by changing his personality. He tries his best to change himself, but in the new world people may have some strange types of norms for an immigrant, therefore that immigrant is facing a conflict within his own mind to accept it or reject it. He compares it with his own norms, yet often he fails to get any solution or any concrete answer. This dilemma of acceptance or rejection of norms runs through his whole life in the new culture. His identity swings between two cultures. His identity becomes a mixture that is not fully accepted either by new culture or even by his own culture. He lives in a very strange type of identity: he thinks that he is accepted by the new culture, but, his acceptance in new culture always remains questionable. He fails to end up this dilemma and remains in double identity. Kapur in *The Immigrant* says...

These immigrants live in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided. (Kapur 2008, 120)

An immigrant thinks that new world has some expectations from him and he tries his best to fulfil it. He wants to confront the expectations of both the new society and his own family.

In the new country they work lengthy hours to get entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account. Years pass like this, ungrudged years because they can see their all sustaining dream of a better life coming true. (Kapur 2008, 120)

These expectations are not visible and are not imposed on anyone by society. It may be imagination of an immigrant who quickly wants to mix himself up within the new society. He

pursues this imaginary demand and makes a world of demands which is a reflection of an immigrant's mind. A question emerges about the validity of perception - is it right or wrong. Perception is arbiter between men and society and it's in accordance with the person's personality, culture and environment. These imaginary demands may be results of fear, fear about the new culture and the new people. Fear takes birth from ignorance about everything. The demands which are results of fear can't be right. Every imagination is based on some basic ideas that can be very minute but that is a unit within itself. That idea goes into the base of the structure of demands. May be in reality those demands don't exist. An immigrant may fantasize something and get frightened. An immigrant imagines that if he fulfils those demands then he may become part of the new culture. The immigrant makes these demands the parameter of his future success. If he fails to fulfil them, he breaks up and cuts himself from the family and the society. Indian immigrants who lived in Western countries for a long time, used to teach some Western imaginary demands on newcomer Indian immigrants like in Kapur's *The Immigrant*, in which Ananda's uncle and aunt told him about Western domestic norms...

Everybody had to do everything themselves. They both cooked dinner, but breakfast, lunch, tea, snacks, each one made according to their needs. Washing, ironing, bed making, similarly all on their own... the tightness in Ananda's chest increased. Not even one day passed and they were giving him rules to live by. (Kapur 2008, 20)

Colonizers' countries exercise their colonial power, maintain their white racist status discrimination, which Nina feels at the airport in Canada - although having a valid passport and visas, she is humiliated, discriminated and marginalised by the colonizer's country.

The immigration woman examines each page of her passport suspiciously. Nina's claim that she has married a citizen

needs to be scrutinized despite the paperwork. The colour of her skin shouts volumes in that small room. She feels edgy; she is alone with a woman who makes no eye contact, for whom she is less than human. (Kapur 2008, 106)

This type of behaviour is common with immigrants belonging to the colonized countries in the colonizer's countries. They don't show any type of respect towards them. Nina shows her anger in this way:

Rages fills her, why were people so silent about the humiliation they faced in the west? She was a teacher at a university, yet this women high school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her. Though she was addressed as ma'am but no respect is conveyed. (Kapur 2008, 106)

Ananda shows his colonized mind set by trying to justify whatever happened with Nina at airport. He fails to discriminate between moral and immoral. He justifies the pseudo-propaganda of the West which humiliated the immigrant from the colonized country:

Some people get into false marriages in order to gain entry, or stay on; they were just making sure that was not the case. 'If it never happened, there would be no need for such questioning.' (Kapur 2008, 109)

Nina asks him, "They wouldn't treat a European or American like that. Why me? Every paper was in order" Nina gives Ananda the perfect answer, "they did it because we are from third world."

Ashish Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1980) states two forms of colonization: one is the physical conquest of territories, while the other is the colonization of the minds, selves and cultures. The first mode is violent, transparent in its self-interest and greed; the second mode is that of the rationalists, modernists and the liberals who claim to have the responsibility of civilizing the uncivilized world. Nandy

comments on the colonization of minds as:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds. (Nandy 1980, xi)

An immigrant way of looking at the world is different from the others. Thinking of a person is affected by many factors such as environment, culture, traditions, gender, race etc. An immigrant mind always fluxes between two cultures. If an immigrant goes from a colonized country to the colonizers' country, turmoil runs into his mind because he is aware of the potential cruel treatment of the colonizers. As a result of that, he isn't able to accept them as friends and is incapable of communicating with them. He suffers from the inferiority complex due to belongings of a colonized country. Nina experienced it in Canada...

For the first time in her life she felt out of place. Wrong clothes, shoes, handbag, bag. May be in their eyes she was like the women sweeping." (Kapur 2008, 104)

Lack of friends force an immigrant to create an imaginary world of his own where he and his memories of native land live. He doesn't talk with the others so much, limits himself within his family, searching for the people who belong to his native place. In the colonized country he grew up in an environment made by colonizers. Colonizers imposed their ideology on them and made the colonized think like them. Colonized people lose their own ideology and accept that ideology as their own. Their mind fails to discriminate between the colonizer's and the colonized's ideology; they lose their own way of thinking. Originality and naturalness of their mind is replaced by an artificial and imposed mind set. Nina is puzzled about her

identity:

At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its convenience can no longer completely charm and compensate. Then she realises she is an immigrant for life. (Kapur 2008, 122)

Skin colour is a major issue for an immigrant. The black or brown skin colour faces racial discrimination in the colonizer's country. The West has imposed on the world his own concept of beauty in which the white colour is superior to others. Nina experienced it, at the Canadian airport, "The white people queuing for entry into the country look away, the coloured ones have pity in their eyes." She felt ashamed about her skin colour... "It is still strange hearing the word dark applied to her, in India she was among the ones with a prized fair complexion."

Nina because of her colour and belonging to the colonized country suffers a lot and she expresses her grief:

I am the wrong colour; I came from the wrong place...of all the passengers the only one not allowed to sail through immigration, made to feel like an illegal alien. (Kapur 2008, 107)

Kapur, in her characterization of Nina and her battle to adjust in an alien land reminds of 'Ashima' in Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, "From being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden."

According to the Western concept of beauty, women should be fair, clean, slim, low speaking and attractive in appearance and for men, they should be elegant, strict, rational and not emotional. This concept is imposed on the colonized by the colonizers. Ananda, a brown skin colour man gets compliments in India but in the West he looks like a black man. Sue remarks on Ananda skin colour: "I love the colour of your skin... We lie in the sun for hours to get a tan like that."

Ananda felt ashamed and here he experienced the colonizer's attitude towards the colonized:

This remark grated on Ananda, because he knew that even in liberal Canada an artificial tan was considered superior to natural brown. And if she really did like this his colour he did not want to reveal that all his life he had been considered too dark. Instead he reciprocated by telling her that in India, her skin would be loved." (Kapur 2008, 37)

An immigrant along with his skin colour faces discrimination on the basis of his language accent. Language is the part of anyone's personality, a medium of communication. An immigrant learns the language of the colonizer to communicate with them, but an acquired language can't give the feeling of the natural one and the accent will be different from the natives'. Immigrants face the general problem of accent and tone in their speaking in the Western world. Ashima Ganguly, of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, wants to confirm the health of her husband, who is in a hospital, on the phone; she utters five times her name, pronouncing every letters of her name.

An immigrant contributes and enriches the acquired colonizer's language by giving it new words from his native language. Immigrants mix up the acquired language with his native one and thus generate a new type of language. This type of mix-up of languages is called 'chutnification of languages' by Salman Rushdie.

A sense of loss is prominent in the novels which deal with the issue of immigrants. The immigrants live with the feeling that they have lost their families, friends and many more things. A sense of rootlessness overwhelms them: Nina "felt rootless, branchless; just a body floating upon the cold surface of this particular piece of earth", the same as Ashima in Lahiri's *The Namesake*,

Feeling lonely and displaced in foreign land. Ashima begins to realise that, being a foreigner... is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out

of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.” (Lahiri 2007, 49-50)

They tried to fight with it, feeling the loss not only at a physical level but at the mental one, too. This is a general human tendency, in which a man mourns more on the loss instead of being happy on gain. Nina in Canada lost herself in the memories of her mother...

Till Nina came to Canada she hadn't known what lonely meant. At home one was never really alone. The presence of her mother, the vendors who came to the door, the half hour gardener who watered their plants, the part time maid who washed and cleaned, the encounters with the landlady, all these were woven into her day. When she mourned her loneliness to Zenobai, it was a romantic companionate loneliness she was referring to, not the soul destroying absence of human beings from her life. She worried about her mother's lack of companionship after marriage.” (Kapur 2008, 159)

They console themselves by gathering materialistic things to fill the gaps of their life, but these materialistic things can't heal the loss which is done on the mental level. Immigrants do busy themselves in works, as Kapur's says in *The Immigrant...*

Work is an easy way to integrate. Work engages the mind and prevents it from brooding over the respective merits of what has been lost and gained. (Kapur 2008, 121)

Clothes give identity to someone and they reflect someone's personality, their habits, their likes, their mood and, most important, the self-awareness. In the postcolonial era, most of the colonized countries gave up their clothes and accepted the

colonizer's clothes. Most of the men of the colonized world have accepted the western clothes and gave up their traditional ones. In this way men are more colonized in their dressing in comparison of women.

As immigrants fly across oceans they shed their old clothing, because clothes make the man and new ones help ease the transition. Men's clothing has less international variation; the change is not so drastic. But those women who are not used to wearing western clothes find themselves in a dilemma. If they focus on integration, convenience and conformity they have to sacrifice habit, style and self-perception. (Kapur 2008, 150)

Indian women face difficulties with their clothing in the West. "Nina's clothes demand local dhobi, the corner presswallah, not washing machines." The West weather not being good for Indian women's clothes, these are forcefully changed for the western clothes and women try to adjust in them. Nina feels the changes after wearing the jeans.

In all the time wearing salwar kameez no one had accosted her. Now in jeans, she is accessible to the whole city... may be in time she will get used to her belly jutting out, get used to thick stiff material between her legs. (Kapur 2008, 152)

Name is part of human identity and it reflects the culture, tradition, religion, region, race and gender of any person. Lots of things are related with names. It not only gives specific identity to someone but also provides definite recognition within any specific society. Every name is pregnant with lots of meaning and the meanings of names are related to God or some myths of any region. Due to the postcolonial impact on the mind of colonized people, these shortened it or changed it, to mix up in the new society. That new name will have some different meaning which reflects that culture in which it is converted but that man can't change himself by changing name. By changing the name, he is cutting his roots and will become rootless. That man loses the identity which was given to him by his native

culture. He betrays his culture, tradition, religion and race by changing his name. The new name will be a distracted name and it will give the scattered identity to that man. The changed name can't change the skin colour and personality, although it gives a man a psychological relief that the new society will not face problems in pronouncing his Westernized name. Changing name shows the colonized mind set of someone in which it's believed that only Western names are impressive and others' names are not. Nina brooded over when Ananda told her to call him Andy.

She had refused. It was foreign, Christian, Western, and not to use the word Andy in her own home would be carry alienation in her bedroom...Andy is not a Hindu name. (Kapur 2008, 154)

Another form of colonization is colonization through ideology. It's not by the military or physical level; it's on the psychological level. They colonized third world and other new emerging country by changing their ideology, by imposing their languages and literature. Macaulay's minutes of 1835 is usually cited as evidence that defended the introduction of English Education in colonial India.

A single self of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India or Arabia. Macaulay's valorisation of English literature at the cost of indigenous literature is taken as a paradigmatic instance of canon formation. (Gandhi 1938, 144)

English literature has been doing this task from at least two or three centuries without any interruption. "Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation." Colonized people seem much more familiar with the English writers instead of their native one. Nina is looking much more acquainted with English writers' works but in the novel there is not any mention of any writer from India; she doesn't show any type of familiarity with

the Indian writers, which she is showing for Western writers. She kills the emptiness in her life by reading English writers' work. It reflects that she is partially colonized in her choice of choosing some particular texts, but her criticism of Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* shows that she is aware of Western feminism and Indian feminism.

Nina said she loved *The Second Sex*, but she couldn't identify with much of it. It was too-too-western. All that stuff about being objectified, the emphasis on the body, grooming, beauty, sexual attractiveness, she couldn't connect to this kind of consumerism. (Kapur 2008, 220)

Globalization is a new type of colonization which is started by Western countries and increased at present time by MNCs. Globalization has made a world in which the whole world is following Western norms and culture, their way of living. MNCs are making third world countries economically colonized. Globalization creates a demand of international labour and business opportunities, which has always received the outsider with a feeling of deep rancour and dislike hatred in their own countries. The reason attached with it is the severe competition between natives and the immigrants in the class structure of the host countries. This highlights the denial and the inability of the immigrant to enter host countries and be socially accepted.

The same thing we find in Kapur's *The Immigrant*: Ananda, who departs from his own land, does not own his own, but is charmed under different colonial domination. Ananda's decision to move out of his land to new land, his adopted land is seen in all its incarnation, as security, safety, and the construction of an identity.

In India he would be constantly remained of his loss, whereas if he wanted to make a fresh start, this was the country filled with opportunities. He sent one through the post; admission forms for the Dalhousie University Dental School. (Kapur 2008, 17)

The immigrants face problems of languages, custom, cultures, tradition, values and attitudes. They face discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, clothes, festivals, personality and on many more things. Due to the colonial impact they lost their own ideology and accepted the West as their own, living with a double identity and consciousness. There is a need of a serious discourse on the issue of immigration, its impact on colonized countries, and, most importantly, on the immigrants who suffer a lot.

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