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**MANJU KAPUR'S THE IMMIGRANT: A VOYAGE OF
 NINA'S PREDICAMENTS**

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur who stands as a voice of women through her feminist writings, presents character of Nina, who strives for her own liberation and attains a voyage of self-identity in the foreign country, Canada. Her failure in a love affair obligates her to live lonely in Delhi. Nina has to marry forcibly with an NRI dentist living in Canada. Nina who is born and brought up in Indian Culture, shifts to Canada with her husband where she becomes unsuccessful to cope up with the Culture of Canada. In short, Nina falls into the dilemma of her traditional mindset of Indian middle class society and her solitude, disappointment growing into the western culture.

Key Words: *Western Culture, immigrant feelings, predicament.*

Nina, the central character of this novel, shifts to Halifax, Canada, after marrying Ananda, who is a dentist by profession. She has to resign her job of lecturer in Delhi which is in true sense, her loss of individuality. Nina's educational qualification proves to be worthless in Canada which entraps her as unemployed. They even fail to produce a child which stands as a big reason for their broken relation. Though she is fond of reading books, she fails to escape from her feelings of alienation. Hence, she gets indulged into the dilemma of east and west. Ananda labels her as "the perfect mix of east and west." Manju Kapur, too, writes that, "Her devotion to her mother and her willingness to consider an arranged introduction proved her Indian values, while her tastes, reading, thoughts, manner of speech and lack of sexual inhibition all revealed western influences." (P: 86)

Due to her experiences as an immigrant, Nina learns the fact that east and west have tremendous differences which can't be equal. This fact ruins her dreams about a foreign country as well as married life. This is an ordinary picture of an immigrant who can be seen as alienated due to the entrapment of outlandish people and surroundings as well as new culture. Nina feels, "I miss home I miss a job I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?" (237). Hence, it becomes essential, like that of other immigrants, to Nina also that she must adopt the foreign culture to be at a safer side. But due to the problems of gender or racial discrimination most of the immigrants fail to adopt any other culture and Nina too, experiences the same. Kapur writes, "Rage fills her. Why were people so silent about the humiliations they faced in the West? She was a teacher at a university, yet this woman, probably school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her. Though she was addressed as ma'am, no respect is conveyed (108). Despite of having all papers in order, she is treated badly just because she is an Indian whereas "They would not treat a European or American like that" (111). She even writes to her husband Andy as, "This is not your country. You are deceived and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven where everybody 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 to feel like an illegal alien." (108).

Though Ananda who tries to assimilate with Canadian culture under the name of westernized 'Andy, gets the same brutal experiences. Kapur writes about Ananda as, "Weekends were the worst, and he

had much time in which to relive his parents' deaths. His isolation pressed upon him and numbed his capacity to break his solitude.” (35). Ananda evokes his past memories when he was in “India whether at home or in the hostel he had always been surrounded by people, his life open to inspection, comment and group participation” (35). It even becomes the need of Ananda “to 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” (123). Still, Ananda and other immigrants like him remain in dilemma of cultures. At one hand, they understand their need of assimilating into a foreign culture and at other, they can't forget and escape from their roots. Still, Men can keep themselves engaged into work but for a woman who is jobless it becomes much difficult to survive and assimilate into a foreign country. Manju Kapur writes, “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” (124). All the materialistic charms in Canada fail to give her the feeling of ease at home. “She longed to breathe the foul air, longed to sit in a scooter rickshaw and have every bone in her body jolted” (179). Hence, she feels 'rootless', 'branchless' due to her mental instability. Her pitiful condition has been described by Kapur. She describes, “The minute she gets up she is at a loose end. Languidly she approaches her homework, dishwashing, bed making, cleaning, stretching every task out, slow, slow. She keeps the radio on, listening to music, advertisements, the CBC and its take on Quebee separation and Pierre Elliott Trudeau” (124). Nina even fails to acclaim the love-making scene in a movie hall due to her orthodox Indian mindset.

As Ananda has been westernized in Canada, Nina too tries to follow his footprints. She tries to pass her time with reading books which eventually proves worthless. She starts wearing jeans and eating meat. She even gets connected with a library course where she finds herself entrapped into an illicit relationship. Initially, she hesitates about her deeds to which soon she confronts more confidently. She feels, “That she like, she had lived. Who can feel guilty about living? Judging from the evidence, and the sexual therapy centers, every citizen in North America regarded good sex as their unalienable right. It was her right too” (263). Her act of extramarital relation and her view about it is contrastive to her traditional mindset which is a sign of her efforts to assimilate with a foreign culture. Same like Nina, Andy too is engaged in an extramarital relation with Mandy where he too finds himself in unrest. In this way, men in immigration adapt themselves to the new system yet it is true they fail to change themselves completely because they come with old world values (285). In the due course of time Nina too, discovers Andy's illicit relation and thinks that their marriage “was based on more than one person's lies” (328). However, this feeling gives him a sort of relief from the feelings of burden created due to her own extramarital relation. She enhances her social acquaintance but finds all that as impermanent. Kapur describes, “She thought of those who had been nice to her, wayfarers on the path, nothing permanent, but interacting with them had made that stretch easier. Colleagues at HRL, the woman's group that encouraged her to be angry and assertive. Beth, Gayatri library school; the sense of community was there, warming but temporary everything temporary” (333). True “that is the ultimate immigrant experience” (333)

Ananda refuses Nina's celebration of Diwali and Holi in Halifax but becomes nostalgic about the memories of celebration of such festivals in India with his friends and family. He even satirizes his uncle as a hypocrite who allows his women to wear Saris and eating vegetarian food only on Diwali. In a way his uncle tries to be an Indian for a day and westerner for the rest of the year. He even exposes his purpose of celebration as “To give the children some idea of their background of course, otherwise how will they know our customs?” (28). Therefore, he shows his inability to escape from roots. Nina finds many cultural differences between India and Canada. Dating is an odd thing in Indian custom whereas arrange marriage stands absurd in western culture. Nina strongly supports this Eastern system of arranged marriage which is a foolish act in Canada. To Anton, it's stupid to confine yourself to one person for your whole life' (261). 'What about adventure, what about experiencing differences? Nobody owns anybody” (261), comments Anton. Nina supports Indian tradition and says, “Many people prefer it (arranged marriage) actually. It has

the advantage of social and family sanction, you are not alone to deal with your problems, it is more convenient to fall in love after you marry than before” (222). She continues that, “The parents, the main arrangers, look at the whole thing dispassionately, taking into account family background, likes, dislikes, income, everything. Often these marriages are greater successes than ones made on the basis of emotion” (222).

Like any other Indian woman Nina longs for her own child but in the due course of her westernization, she learns to live for herself and sets herself free from a conservative thinking of motherhood etc. Though Nina tries to assimilate herself with western culture, she longs for India and Indian culture. When she listens about the Kumbh Mela, held in Allahabad every 12 years, her inner self recalls her memories about India. Kapur writes, “From so far however, the crowds, the pilgrims, the piety, the cold river, the morning mist, the sadhus all called to her. Somewhere they beat in her blood and now, in a foreign land, she was guilty of exoticising India as the tourist posters in the Taj Mahal” (175).

Thus, it can be seen that Nina has undergone through an utter cultural dilemma being Indian who is living in Canada where she finds herself fluctuating between her traditional mindset and westernized routine life.

Works Cited:

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