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The Immigrant by Manju Kapur: A Tale Nina's Dual Identity Crisis

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Abstract:

Manju Kapur has painted the canvass of her fictional world with nuances of human feelings such as love, anger, jealousy, affection, joy, compassion, hatred and so on. *Difficult Daughters*, *Home*, *A Married Woman*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody*, *Brothers* all bring intricate complexities which come in the way of life of the different characters in narration. *The Immigrant* is the tale about Indians who migrate to foreign countries and to reestablish their feet in the foreign soil. Manju Kapur narrates the struggle of her protagonist Nina who put efforts to connect her roots in the foreign lands; her husband Ananda being male doesn't find much complexities in settling down in Canada but Nina with her delicate sensibility feels life to be very much unsettled and goes through much more panic when she has to restart her life far away from her motherland. Not being able to become a mother after wedding for quite a long time adds to her misery and her identity crisis becomes double folded being in alien land and being unable to become a mother. The present research paper focuses on Nina's double identity crisis showcased by Kapur in *The Immigrant*.

Keywords: Childless, Education, Foreign, Prejudice, Sensibility

Identity crisis faced by women has been a prominent aspect in Kapur's narration since her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* where protagonists struggles to assert her individuality and freedom during the freedom struggle of the country. In *A Married Woman* again the readers see Astha's anguish to come out of the stereotype identity of just a housewife. The artist in her strives hard to assert identity which is continuously marred by Hemant's rejection of it. In *Home* Kapur stresses the emotional turmoil of childless woman through the narrative of Sona; her identity crisis due to torment especially inside her family and home. Though she is an excellent housewife, a very good life partner, a caring daughter in law but her childless state negates her existence. In *The Immigrant* the educational advancement too does not keep Nina out of the clutch of identity crisis when she fails to conceive after her wedding with Ananda. Her foreign stay, highly educative state and NRI husband too can't help her to sort out her confused state. Nina's soul is far more disturbed as she suffers from double identity crisis being lonely in foreign land unable to become a mother.

The Immigrant deals with the life of an educated woman who faces double challenge coping with both individual and immigrant identities. Nina the protagonist of *The Immigrant* is a thirty-year-old unmarried English literature professor who lives in Delhi with her widow

mother. Nina, the professor, gets married to Ananda ; an NRI and dentist at Canada. After wedding Nina has to shift to Canada leaving both her mother and her job behind. In India, she has retained some of her individuality. As the title implies, the novel centers on topics such as identity fragmentation, geographical displacement, emotional and cultural confrontations, and so on. In a fashion similar to diasporic writers like Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri and so on Kapur illustrates the plight of Indian immigrants who are proud owners of NRI status but have shattered identities and disturbed souls.

Nina in *The Immigrant* is a protagonist with most advanced mindset. Herself a lecturer at Miranda College, Delhi, she is courted by Ananda for around six months, an Indian boy staying at Canada and practicing as a dentist there. Ananda's talks of life abroad give rise to new hopes in Nina's mind. His personality reminds her of her father. Nina when feels assured of his love for her agrees to marry him.

"No sooner did Ananda depart than Nina found her life empty. Two weeks and she had grown used to the pleasures of a romantic involvement. Away from him her own doubts seemed less substantial."

(TI 77)

And after marrying Ananda, Nina reassures herself that no more loneliness for herself as well as her husband. He also had been so lonely in the foreign land. Now they have got each other to love and share every shade of their emotions.

"All these years I've been so lonely. She pushed her hands though his thick soft hair, 'No longer.' 'No longer,' he murmured back. She loved her husband. She did."

(TI p.95)

Expectation of happy, satisfied and loving married life is shattered gradually for Nina. Her international wedding is an illusion that only brings disillusionment in the life of woman expecting immigration as a method of emancipation. Immigration brings no consolation in the isolation of Nina. Initially, spaciousness, natural beauty, lavish lifestyle, glamour of West, all appealed to her sensibilities to her heart's content. Gradually she feels satiated and soon her Indian spirit searches for Indian identity and culture in the foreign land. She joins some women clubs with women from Indian origin but in vain; she fails to connect with them. Nowhere could she get friendliness and satisfaction her heart desires. She suffers from identity disorder being suddenly migrated to a foreign country. The remark of Dr Beena Agarwal emphasizes the grimness of Nina's situation:

*"It is an illusion that only brings disillusionment in the life of woman expecting immigration as a method of emancipation. Immigration brings no consolation in the isolation of Nina because she migrates with her traditional values and the opulence of America suffocates her. It consequently affects the wave of their personal relationship."*¹ **-Dr Beena Agarwal**

Though Nina is far away from India but her heart's longings and desires are yet truly Indian. She feels like affirming at least her womanly identity by becoming a mother but she fails miserably to conceive. Nina has strong urge to become mother as earliest so that the bonding between Ananda and herself becomes stronger and their loneliness can be cured. Kapur here emphasizes the fact that even highly educated women find it difficult to accept their childless

state. Indian women's minds are so mechanized to become a mother, first thing after they get married. If unfortunately they fail to become one; they can't let it go and accept the fact. If there is a joint family then childless lady get tortured emotionally, mentally and sometimes physically too. But Kapur underlines the fact that women like Nina punish themselves even if there is no one to harass them. Critic Radha Chakravarty's comment is highly relevant here in relation to Indian women's deciding their own worth on this matrix. She aptly says:

*"In India, women's self-worth and value are usually dependent on their reproductive functions. This valorization of motherhood has its own built-in paradoxes: maternity is associated with a capacity for voluntary self-sacrifice which entitles the mother to her quasi-divine status."*²

-Radha Chakravarty

After wedding Nina too very obviously wants to become a mother. Kapur very beautifully gives hints of identity crisis a woman undergoes if she is not able to become a mother. Educational upliftment and all talks of modernization and woman empowerment prove false in such scenario and women are seen struggling hard to assert their identity as a mother. The social norm that women must give birth to children after marriage has also played a fundamental role in prejudicing people. Society continues to emphasize the importance of motherhood as a key role for women. Giving birth to children is a blessing whereas infertility is a punishment in the context of any social scenario in general and in Indian society in particular.

A woman's status is socially located inside the confines of her family, where she acquires it via childbearing. Procreation is institutionalized and justified by family. Thus, via motherhood and the offspring it produces, the cultural code of tradition is transmitted down from one generation to the next. Children are viewed as a strand that will tie the generation together, carry on the family's traditions, maintain the family business, and protect family assets. Nina, who herself worked as a lecturer, a dynamic persona who stays in a foreign land too can't spare herself from the pangs of identity crisis. Her misery increases doubly being alienated from her native country, native people and the plight of her inability to conceive a child worsens her grief. In an alien country she faces different issues together, displacement and longing for motherland, feeling of alienation all add fuel into the fire.

*"Kapur explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives: a young woman's life, already so pressured in professional and reproductive terms, becomes an even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture. The influence of progressive assimilation of western standards, of culture on the ethos of the urban community, especially at the higher levels of society, has given a possible thrust to the liberation of women from the shackles of tradition as reflected in the contemporary Indian English fiction. But a mere imitation of the West in this regard is bound to lack vitality and power, if it does not draw its life force from the main stream of our own culture."***-John E. Abraham**

Frustrated and hopeless Nina soon engulfs in an extra-marital affair with Anton who is her classmate at Library Course in college. She goes on outing with him, tries non-vegetarian food and even try sips of liquor with him. She feels light when she forgets her rigid bond of conventions which kept her lagging behind. On her next visit to India, Nina's bond with her own culture and values get strengthened and she decides to keep herself away from Anton. During

their classes Anton tries to coax Nina but she pays no heed to his sweet talks. She is firm on her decision. One day Anton rapes her under the pretext of having dinner with her and Nina finds herself completely lost. Nina realizes the importance of adhering to Indian morals, values and code of conduct after getting bitter experience with Anton. She realizes that her identity crisis cannot be resolved from getting in relationship with people like Anton. She will have to rethink on her own condition and find a way-out herself without being dependent on Anton, Ananda or anyone else. By the end of the narrative Nina is ready to find a way-out for her emotional turmoil.

Manju Kapur appears to be a great psychologist of human being who with her keen observation picks up the different layers of conflicts at various phases of human life very impartially. She is not only a chronicler but a commentator too. Today's grim scenario of the identity crisis of women is seen in her novels from different aspects; whether it is married life or unmarried one, whether it is Indian scenario or a global one, Kapur paints the scenario of identity crisis of women and shows the readers different nuances of it. Reading of Kapur's novels serves both the purposes 'delight' and 'instruction'. She incorporates various subjects related to feminine world in her narratives with such an ease that a reader doesn't fathom when s/he has grasped so many important issues relevant to the contemporary times in course of just reading a novel.

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