

# Theme of Acculturation in Manju Kapur's the Immigrant



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**Abstract**—The paper discusses on the theme of Acculturation in the novel *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur. The theme Acculturation is the adaptation of the culture and beliefs of another group or country. In the novel *The Immigrant*, the major characters Nina and Ananda who are from an orthodox family undergo acculturation. Their marriage which is an arranged one begins with the motive of one for one, but later breaks because of their undue expectations and extramarital relationships. Their relationship came to an end when they failed to raise a family of their own. Moreover their ways of dressing, food habits and in ideas about marriage and family, both Nina and Ananda and their family succumbed to the western culture. Finally, they become the citizens of Canada with expectations of starting a fresh new life. Acculturation has relieved them from their bondage and freed them to live independently.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Indian marriage, Familial Relationship, culture, patriarchy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Writing in English has shifted its focus from themes like nationalism and freedom to themes like intercultural dilemmas of the immigrants. The immigrant writers reflect their attachment to their homeland and share their feelings of loneliness and alienation. Manju Kapur is one among the renowned Indian diasporic writers in English who focuses more on her characters in all her novels depicting their struggles in life. Manju Kapur is a writer and professor of Literature in Delhi University. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won her the Commonwealth Prize for First Novels in 1999 and went on to become a bestseller in India, United States, and England. Her other three novels: *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), and *Custody* (2011) were highly acclaimed and are successful among readers and critics.

This paper highlights the theme of acculturation as inferred from Manju Kapur's novel *The Immigrant*. Acculturation is defined as a process in which the members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group. Acculturation represents one of the major areas of

investigation in cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 1990, 1997; Ward and Kennedy, 1994; Ward and Rana-Deubay, 1999). Berry (1984, 1994) argued that there were two fundamental dimensions of Acculturation namely maintenance of original cultural identification and maintenance of relations with other groups. The strategies of Acculturation as given by critics are integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization. Ward and Kennedy( 1994)

Empirically proved that the people who underwent acculturation in a foreign land bettered psychologically and had fewer social difficulties. They also discussed about the acculturation stress upon individuals before being accustomed to the culture of the immigrant land.

In the novel *The Immigrant*, the major characters undergo acculturation. The major characters Nina and Ananda are basically from an orthodox family but, after getting immigrated to Halifax they slowly lose the unique code of their culture, and tradition and stick to the American culture. These characters undergo acculturation stress and finally win their battle psychologically. In the process of acculturation, the socio- cultural bonds seem to release them as independent individuals.

## II. INDIAN AND WESTERN CULTURE

What is culture? "Culture means a way of living and life." Thus, culture includes the way how we speak, conduct ourselves, celebrate festivals or holidays and express our beliefs in a religion and tradition. In India, culture includes the marriage system, religious beliefs and familial relationships. In *The Immigrant*, culture plays a major role in both the families of Nina and Ananda. Indian has rich cultural heritage and its culture is a mixture of diversities in customs, rituals, traditions, cuisines, architecture, sculpture and language which varies from region to region within a particular country. In various cultures women are considered as inferior to men and they as individuals are expected to remain attached with their families. They must honour and care their family more than themselves. Indian women usually are bothered about what the society might think and would deliberately kill their own needs and desires. In Indian culture, marriages are often arranged between two families and specifically the clothing are traditional depending upon the region and religion of an individual. In India guests are considered as gods, people welcome them with smile and joined hands. Here people also worship animals, statues, rivers, stones, trees, kids and so on. Moreover in recent days Indian culture is divided into traditional and modern.

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Indian traditional culture gives much importance to community and the modern try to imitate western culture. The culture depicted in the novel *The Immigrant* is the modern culture. The important festivals celebrated in India are Holi, Diwali, Eid-Ul-Fitr, Christmas, Baisakhi, Navarathiri, Muharram and Dusshera. The traditional dresses of Indians are saree, salwar with dupatta, dhoti, kurta and payjamas. There are 122 major languages in India.

As we know, Indian culture is varied when compared to the culture of the western countries. Western culture is advanced and open. The norms, beliefs, values, traditions, customs and practices of western countries are based on European culture. The languages of western are English, French and Spanish. The major religions are Christianity and Judaism. Their family set up is usually nuclear. Women and men are considered equal and an individual is not attached much to their family. They are expected to leave their home at the age of 18.

The people of western society are open-minded and give priority to making themselves happy. The love marriages are frequently found in these countries and many of these marriages end up as broken relationships and they are also allowed to have multiple partners. Regarding their dress they are given freedom to wear whatever they desire. People are frank and open and even in their young age they start to earn while learning. Their major concern is their health, where they prefer heavy lunch and light dinner. They use less oil and spices. These two cultures get transferred in the life of Nina and Ananda in the novel *The Immigrant* which is dealt under the theme Acculturation.

### III. ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is usually adjustment of the weak culture to the powerful or dominant culture. It is a process in which a person adopts, learns, and adjusts to some or great extent as per the values, rules, patterns and practices of new or prevailing culture in the society. It could obviously happen when they come in contact with one another. Acculturation as well helps an individual in adapting to the foreign culture.

Acculturation is also defined as the process of social, psychological and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society. It is the second culture learning process where individual learns other culture and modifies the culture he practices. Kramer refers to changes in each culture due to acculturation as co-evolution. Acculturation results in separation – where people are divided according to their race, ethnic or religious group, integration – where multiple cultures are accepted and appreciated, marginalization – where cultural exclusion is promoted or transmutation – where homogenous culture is promoted.

Acculturation also leads to negative health behaviour and outcomes called acculturative stress. It might be shown as anxiety or depression. The risk depends upon the degree of willingness to adapt. It also depends on how they depart from their own country and how they are received in the new country. Education, employment, financial resources, family cohesion, maintenance of traditional cultural values and high socio economic status serve as protection or mediator against acculturative stress. The change in food habits depends on the availability of the ingredients, convenience and cost and also

in the preparation, presentation, climate and consumption. This paper portrays the changes formed out of acculturation stress in the characters of the *The Immigrant*.

### IV. INDIAN MARRIAGE

Nina is from a strong orthodox background. In the beginning of the novel, Nina's mother is very particular to meet the astrologer regarding the marriage proposals as she is worried about the growing age of Nina. Though Nina never believed in astrology she strictly follows her mom to know about her future as she knows that she can no longer postponed her marriage. The major part of her life in the novel, Nina is a pure vegetarian who has never tasted meat. Nina also keeps herself away from the male bodies when,

“Male bodies pushed themselves against her, and she leant firmly into to woman on the seat to her right,...” (*The Immigrant*, P. 9). These lines again show how Nina is brought up as a cultured girl even though she loses her virginity in her college days and carefully conceals from her mother to maintain her family's culture. Moreover, Nina's mother is also religious as she always wanted to observe the Tuesday fasting for the sake of her only daughter's marriage.

“Her devotion to her mother and her willingness to consider an arranged introduction proved her Indian values” (*The Immigrant*, P. 85) Nina carries her Indian values to Halifax with her western influences in tastes, reading, thoughts, manner of speech and lack of sexual inhibition. Though Ananda is from an orthodox family, he expected his wife to be Indian in character and western in taste. “He was a Brahmin, his body must never be polluted by dead flesh” (*The Immigrant*, P. 14). Ananda's mother is very particular about his sanctity though he has ruined by consuming alcohol in his college days. The sin is kept as a secret from his parents to save the integrity of his culture.

The families of Nina and Ananda believed in arranged marriage with rituals at the AryaSamaj Mandir. Their marriage is typically conducted in Indian tradition with Deep rose Kancheevaram for the bride and silk dhoti- kurta for the groom. There are slogans in Sanskrit by the pundit which is translated by the Astrologer. After marriage Nina leaves to the West carrying the pain of leaving her mother and the uncertainties of future.

In Indian culture, marriage is a question of adjustment as mentioned by the mother of Nina in the novel. (quote) Indian marriage always says that a woman should forget all the negatives of her life and view only at her positives and must lead a life of compromises adjusting her husband. Nina is also pushed to such circumstances where she tries to make some compromises yet breaks down and finally, flies like a free bird. Altogether the concept of family is binding Nina and Ananda together but after the death of her mother she quits the institution called marriage and goes in search of a new place, new friends and a new family. In an Indian marriage a person is allowed to spend his/her whole life with someone whom they don't even know and the Indian family system is based on patriarchy in which men hold supreme power.

In the family of Nina and Ananda we can witness patriarchy which is obviously shifted to the marriage of Nina and Ananda. So Nina feels that the Vehicle of patriarchy has shifted from the life of her mother to her. The truth of marriage is revealed to Nina by Beth that helps Nina to come out of her shackles and take the first step towards autonomy.

## V. FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP & RESULTS

Though Nina and Ananda are typical Indians, sunk in Indian culture, the West attracts them and leads to acculturation. It is Ananda who is first fascinated towards western ideals. He goes there as his uncle wait to assist him in his profession. Slowly he learns that family has a different meaning in Halifax. Family there in Halifax is being independent, living without the support of other family members. Ananda gradually gets accustomed to this principle and learns to live a live independently. He also identifies that privacy is the important issue in Western culture. Culture takes a new word in his dictionary as "caste taboos". So, he starts to compromise culture to eating flesh and tasting sex in life. Because sex does not mean commitment in west, so he has a relationship with a white girl and sex with as many as he could. According to Ananda his uncle who is a citizen of Halifax is a 'fraud' because he dresses his women in saris and savour vegetarian foods only on the day of Diwali. It is of course celebrated as a remembrance of their forlorn culture. The celebration of festivals is called as hybrid as they act as Indian for a day and westerner on all other days. He is hesitant towards the act of marrying a Christian white woman as it is against his Hindu culture. In the same way when Ananda changes his name as Andy to make it more westernised, Nina is not able to accept the Christian name as she feels alienated. In Canada, Ananda is thought as a cultured man, a Canadian whereas a traditional Indian girl is considered backward if cannot speak properly in English. That's why he cautiously selects his wife.

Nina who has an aversion towards the body smells of male has now surrendered herself into the hands of adultery to Anton a white man. When she realises all her culture is corrupted she starts to taste meat. She also cares much for her health visiting gym to keep her fit. Saris and Salwars are long forgotten as Nina tries to resemble exactly like that of the westerner. There is a new definition given to marriage in Halifax "Couples do things together in this country" (*The Immigrant*, P.143). Men and women are supposed to work together to maintain their family. Likewise, in the life of Nina and Ananda they start to work for each other both in the home, and at office to struggle hard to glue them as one family. Indian marriages are believed to be based on the lies and in the novel there comes a discovery of these lies which make it worse. In Indian marriage standards there is one for one culture. The novel starts with the acceptance of Ananda to have one wife but when he is able to execute his masculinity he starts to explore many white females. Nina also stays sincere to her husband but when she realises the secret life of her husband and the lack of love in her life. She goes for extramarital affair with Anton the white man. When there is this discovery Nina takes a bold decision.

After marriage the couple are expected to have children within a year or two. This idea stresses Nina out of her mind when she is found infertile at the age of thirty- five. Their yearning grows more when they are expecting children to cement their life. Marriage in an Indian's life is expected to

bring change in the novel, it brings change in mind and heart and also Ananda's love towards his wife.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The theme Acculturation has helped Ananda to realise his capabilities and has assisted him to reshape his life. Similarly, when Nina is caught between tradition and marriage she is delivered from her chains through acculturation. Finally, both Ananda and Nina turn to be the Canadian citizens though longing and yearning to be Indian at heart. As there is no getting back for the immigrants Nina finally sticks to the advice of Ananda "In Rome do as the Romans do" (*The Immigrant*, P. 267). The country has freed the emotional need of both from the yoke of matrimony and social sanction. Thus Acculturation has lead both Nina and Ananda to have psychological stability and assist them to drive away the social difficulties.

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