

# Displacement and Alienation in Manju Kapur's "The Immigrant"

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**Abstract** - All the creatures in this world are living together with the particular community where they belong. A sudden change in the belongingness or nation leads to many sufferings mentally. The moment a person thinks he is different or inferior to others the world becomes new for him. That newness makes him/her feel alienated. The feel of alienation brings depression, nostalgia and loneliness to that person. The displacement of a person gives him/her so many life experiences, and at the same time lack of integration. Loneliness gives a peculiar new world, in which the alienated person longs for the past days, their family, friends, etc. whom they want to be with forever. Manju Kapur, in her novel "The Immigrant" presents this theme through her major characters. It reveals the mindset of the victims which is the illustration of many people in the world. This paper is an attempt to highlight the portrayal of lifelike characters reflecting a sense of alienation.

**Keywords:** alienation, depression, displacement, loneliness, nostalgia, peculiar

## I. INTRODUCTION

Everyone in this world needs a good companion to share their happiness, sorrow, anger, victory, failure, etc. A person cannot live in this world all alone. If a person lives so, then he cannot be normal like others and may have peculiar characters. A person can get happiness both from outer world and also from his inner self. Happiness will make a person to live peacefully and energetically in this world. At the same time, when a person feels alone, he may hate this entire world and people living here. Unlike happiness, loneliness cannot be a longer part of one's life. An alienated person feels strange to this world and the world seems to be strange to him. The loneliness or alienated feel in a person will bring him stress and distress.

## II. ALIENATION

Alienation is a sense of loss in a known place or among the unknown people. In this widespread world, millions of people are living under one roof. Many people are happy being with friends, relatives, family, colleagues, etc. There will be supportive persons during problematic situations, helping persons, well-wishers who make them feel tied with a bond in their life. These things make them feel secured and protected. At the same time, on the other side, there will be people who are isolated from the family or kept isolated by family members. Sometimes situations make the people to be

away from all the relationship which make a person alienated. This renounced state leads to a state of depression, in which the person creates his/her own world with lonely thoughts.

## III. STATE OF ALIENATION

The state of alienation is very common in the life of immigrants, who leave their homeland and settle in a new land for studies, or job. People, in some cases, voluntarily move to a foreign country, leaving the family and home in the motherland, in order to earn more. This becomes a burden, when days pass and they start to long for their old days. There are a few people who are forced to enter into the new land with some commitments and they spend their days with the thoughts of the native in their mind and physic in the alien land. The critic Ajit Kumar says, "The psyche of the India immigrant fed on the mythologies of movement and exile is preconditioned to succumb to the sense of estrangement, alienation, non-belonging, and dislocation at the slightest pretext. Hence, physical displacement is only a catalyst that generally aggravates a pre-existing psychological and spiritual sense of loneliness."

In the novels of some writers, one can witness the above mentioned problems through the protagonists either hero or heroine. This may sometimes be the experience of the writers in their own life or the life of their closed ones. The writers have also pictured the lonely state of people in their own land. This is very pathetic because all the familiar things become unfamiliar for the loneliest one. There are also a few characters portrayed by the writers that the isolated state itself being the stepping stone for the future upliftment. A person who depends only on the family cannot adopt with the new culture, and people easily and this brings many changes in their life.

Loneliness is unpleasant and distressed experience. It also brings mental imbalance. A person's loneliness narrows down his social circle. It gives multiple thoughts to that person which leads to unsteady mind. In this fast moving world, many people cannot spend much time with their loved ones. Job, earning money, settling in life become the essential things in a person's life. Spending time together, showing love, care, affection, consoling words to the family members and loved ones get shrink nowadays. The age old people feel much lonely than others. At once they give marriage to their daughters or sons, they move away with their family and become visitors to their own home. So the old people feel alienated or lonely even though there is a big family.

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#### IV. THE IMMIGRANT

Manju Kapur, in her novel "The Immigrant", has presented the alienated feel through three characters – Nina, Ananda and Mr. Batra. They are interrelated in a family bond but still are away from one another. Their lifestyle, dreams, expectations are completely different. They cannot support and complete one another's feelings. The characters show a sense of loss from others. This gives them a new lonely world. The novel reveals this theme through the protagonist Nina and also through her mother and Ananda, her husband. The title of the novel itself shows what the story is about. The story of the novel is about the experience of the immigrants in a foreign country. Some may adapt to it and some may not. Most of the immigrants, who are very much attached with family in their homeland, will find difficult to adapt in the new land and will wait for the proper moment to return. The estranged state can be applied to the character Nina, the immigrant in the novel of Manju Kapur. As an Indian woman, she is closely tied with the family, in which Mrs. Batra plays the role of mother and father. After her father's death, they become helpless and Mrs. Batra brings up her daughter and later worries about her future.

The title 'Displacement and Alienation' can be applied to Manju Kapur's novel "The Immigrant". The author Manju Kapur has skillfully presented this concept. The writer has written the story by giving various expectations to the readers. In the beginning of the story, Manju Kapur has made the readers to see the life of Nina and her unfulfilled desire about marriage at the age of thirty. In the next level, the worried situation is converted into the happiest with the marriage of Nina and Ananda. Soon the happiness changed into disappointment after displacement. The first displacement in Nina's life took pace when the family returned to India before sixteen years. The narrator says, "She could see that child returning unwillingly back to India, homeless, fatherless and dislocated, her destiny change forever [102]."

##### A. Nina

Nina has completed her M.Phil and works as a lecturer in a college in Delhi. Her job gives her a little relief but her age makes everyone, especially her mother to worry a lot. Nina's only company is her mother and her mother's only company is Nina. They are away from their relatives support. Nina and her mother are the two women characters who live in loneliness. Their state is because of the absence of Nina's father. Nina does not express her dream about life to anyone, since her mother becomes her world. She never thought of leaving her mother for anyone. But Mrs. Batra only thinks about her daughter's future and not hers. He does not aware of their future. She is glad to settle her daughter in Halifax. In that happiness, she forgets about her emotional state and her daughter's. One should not take any decision in happiness. Mrs. Batra selects Ananda, a doctor in Halifax, as a suitable partner for her daughter.

After marriage, the shifting phase of the protagonist from India to Canada through London is excited in the beginning. When she reached London, she thinks of Sweet Thames,

Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, etc. Later she moves to Canada from London. Here, loneliness holds Nina. She is enquired by the immigration man. The immigration woman examines her passport with suspicion. She does not like her introduction to the new world. In the displacement process, Nina feels alienated and lonely even before she reaches her home in the new land.

Nina and Ananda spend their days together in Halifax happily. In the words of Nina, '...the house is perfect, I shall be very happy here'. But soon 'Nina cries, feels homesick, sometimes adventurous, often forlorn. The minute she gets up she is at a loose end' [122]. Nina's displacement brings many changes in her. One among that is clothing. The author says, 'As immigrants fly across oceans they shed their old clothing, because clothes maketh the man and the new ones help ease the transition [150].'

##### B. Ananda

Loneliness sometimes will become a part of life when it is given by god. Loneliness when given unexpectedly will be the painful one. That will be a permanent memory thereafter. This results in a great change in the life of a person. The foremost problem is alienation. They cannot adapt with the new surroundings, relatives, and even friends. Ananda, the protagonist's husband is caught under such a trouble. In India he lost his parents in an accident, which is a heavy blow in the life of Ananda. His sister takes care of him later. But no one can replace his parents' place. He likes to have nothing in his life. Displacement in his life occurs at this stage. He moves to Canada, Halifax. There his uncle receives him and he accepts it. Soon, as an immigrant, he feels alienated in his uncle's home itself.

Unlike his life in India with his parents, in Halifax he is given certain rules to be followed in the second day itself. He cannot feel the belongingness with his own uncle's family. Each and every minute is difficult for him to spend in the new country. He is very conscious in not disturbing his uncle's family members. In his loneliness, he thinks about everything and cries. 'He was alone, all alone, with relatives who did not wake with the fall on his feet on the floor, the blood that joined them diluted with the waters of an ocean. The glossy magazine house felt cold and alien. Tears gathered and fell silently [19].'

Ananda cannot accommodate with the new place and atmosphere. There is no one for Ananda to share his feelings. He cannot depend upon his uncle for a long. So very soon he decides about his future. His life in Canada is a different one for him. Ananda tries hard to come up in life and joins in a dental school. He completes his DDS and his training. He lives as an individual for some years. The immigrants in the new land celebrate the Indian festivals by joining together, but still those celebrations cannot give them the smell of home. He celebrated Diwali and Holi festivals till last year in India with his parents happily. In Canada, those festivals become nothing for him. He enjoyed, but not wholeheartedly. Displacement in Ananda's life brings many changes in him.

Ananda and Nina's loneliness in life seems to be fade away when they come together in marriage bond. They both feel a sense of completeness on their marriage. But they fail to understand that that is an illusion. Ananda moves to Canada after the marriage leaving Nina with her mother because of visa problems. Loneliness surrounds Nina again. She waits for the moment to live with Ananda in Canada. Her travel to Canada is also alone. The very first experience towards Canada itself is pathetic and lonely for Nina. It is like an alert for her about her life in Canada. Ananda and Nina live in a separate house where no one is near to share her views except Ananda. Nina's all expectations and dreams are shattered very soon. She is all alone in the home.

The marriage bond between Nina and Ananda brings more loneliness in Nina's mind. Her days with her mother, her friend Zenobia, her college job, everything disappear from her sight. Her life in Canada is what she never imagines. In Canada, she is alone throughout the days and there is not even a soul to give her company. Nina spends her time reading books – "Day after day passed without her speaking to anyone but Ananda." Nina has no one to care her in the whole city. She never felt this extreme loneliness before marriage. She says, "If only I were in house, I could have somebody I could talk to..." At a certain point, she learns to live alone and goes out alone and adapts to the loneliness. Her thoughts for his homeland increase. When she sees 'Kumbh Mela' in TV, her thoughts move deep into her native. Longing for home makes her to think strangely. Later she cannot involve herself with others even when she gets chances.

### C. Mrs.Batra

Mrs.Batra too experienced displacement some years ago in her life. Nina's father had believed in the bright future of the family. His sudden death collapsed everything. "The dreamer died leaving his dependents with nothing. The ground cut from beneath their feet, they had no choice but to move to the grandparents' house in Lucknow [5]." Their return from abroad was not the happiest one. She brought up her daughter alone as a single woman. She worried a lot about her daughter's marriage in the beginning. As a mother she has many responsibilities to find a suitable partner for her daughter Nina. Patel says, "Marriage of a daughter is not a matter of ceremonial celebration for the Indian parents but a practice rooted in traditional ritual, more of a moral and social responsibility. They feel relieved, mentally as well as morally." She completes her responsibility as a mother, and at the same time she becomes alone after Nina's marriage.

There is no family member to care her and finally Alka, Ananda's sister, gives her company. But still she feels lonely and thinks about Nina always. She does not want to disturb her by moving to Canada with her daughter. She convinces her daughter saying that she is happy at her home and no need to worry about her. By heart, she feels alienated. Her happiness returns when Nina visits her after two years, but that too lasted for two months only. At the end, she dies in her house surrounded by no one to look after her. Nina goes alone to Rishikesh to immerse the ashes of her mother in the river

Ganga. After this, there will not be any reason for her visit to India. Except her friend Zenobia, the only soul awaited for her arrival is her mother, and now she too does not exist.

### V. IMPACT OF ALIENATION

Alienation caught Nina even when she is with Ananda's uncle's family. When she meets Gayatri, an Indian woman in Canada, she cannot speak out anything and she cries. Her tears show how depressed her mind is. In the overcrowded world, Nina finds no one and nowhere to belong. She is the symbol of lonely bird.

Nina, in the novel "The Immigrant", tries to one with the western people, their culture, language and all. Still she couldn't find herself with the people in Canada. Till she was in India, she never felt this loneliness and alienation, as she always given company by her mother, her friend Zenobia, colleagues, vendors, gardener, landlady and other neighbours. But in Canada no one is around except Ananda, who tries to spend his time apart from medical practice. In the peak of alienation, Nina writes her mother and Zenobia often informing everything. She feels rootless in the alien land. She could see everything around her very beautiful. But nothing gave her that homely comfort. She tries to have her own feet in Canada, but no one to guide her correctly. The critic Rohidas says, "In Canada she was alone and she was emotionally, financially, and socially depended on her husband. That was the only mistake in her life which she is being blamed of barrenness [99]."

Nina's loneliness occupies a vast space in her life. In Canada she belongs only to Ananda and none other. Ananda's love, affection and care do not sweep away her loneliness. He too becomes strange at a particular time. This strangeness and loneliness make her to think of her country she left with longing. Soon she realizes her state and decides to stand on her own leg. She joins in Library Science course and completes it within two years by overcoming more difficulties. When she comes to know that Ananda is betraying her, she moves away from his life. Gauri Shankar Jha says, "Solitude implies segregation from society and concentration on self; on the other hand it also implies rejection by the society and the consequent seclusion [46]."

Life will always give multiple changes and chances. Whenever changes come, chances will be awaiting to give better life. So a single emotion cannot hold a person for a long. Alienation too disappears at the moment the victim starts to accept the situation, surrounding and the people. By diverting mind and thinking their favorites, the victims can escape from loneliness and change their life into a colourful one. The author has proved it at the end of the novel by giving a twist in the life of the protagonist. Her thirst for reading and love for libraries give her a new life that she never imagined.

### VI. CONCLUSION

Displacement and alienation go together hand in hand when a person fails to get the attachment. Loneliness is a common feeling experienced by everyone in the world in one or other way. Some

defeat it and some defeated by it. In both cases, the solution will be the home, family, friends, favorite hobbies, etc. Alienation not only brings a negative change but also a positive one. The author Manju Kapur has also presented the immigrant psyche through her main characters.

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