

ACCULTURATION VS ASSIMILATION IN MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANT*

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Abstract

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* explores the marriage and family life of an Indian couple living in Canada. Before they were married, Ananda and Nina had been born and raised in their native lands with specific cultural traditions. With Ananda's graduation and Nina's marriage, their immigration to a foreign country forces them to adjust to a contrasting culture. Immigration changes immigrants' personalities as they become baptized by postcolonial ideology. The narrator emphasizes the struggles experienced by relocated immigrants by discussing the devastating ordeal they go through. These two couples were adopted cross-culturally in different ways, displaying acculturation in Ananda and assimilation in Nina. This paper investigates how assimilation transforms Nina into something totally different from what she had been before her marriage in India as a New woman, and how acculturation preserves Ananda as someone who lives a double standard life to the end.

Key words: Immigration, Cross-culture, struggles, acculturation, assimilation.

Introduction

Immigration of people becomes inevitable in the modern life. Immigration has happened under political, economic, social and cultural reasons. Most of the Asians are migrated to western countries for a better life and it's called Dollar migration. When people are uprooted from their mother land to a new land, they need to prepare themselves to adopt themselves to the lifestyle of the Newland. Acculturation is a process where the cultural aspects of the majority community are adopted without losing the traditions and customs of the minority community. Assimilation refers to the process where some of the cultural aspects of the majority community are absorbed in such a manner that the traditional cultural aspects get mitigated or lost. The novel *The Immigrant* focuses on the marital and familial life of the Indian couple in Canada. Ananda and Nina before their marriage have been born and brought up in their native boundaries with specific cultural habits. After their marriage, their immigration compels them to adjust themselves to the contrasting culture of a foreign country. Different cross-cultural adoption of the Indian couple Ananda and Nina in the novel highlight acculturation in Ananda and assimilation in Nina.

Analysis

Ananda, a dentist from Dehradun landed in Halifax, and as soon as landed in Western country, he had learnt that "all immigrants had to cook dinner, breakfast, lunch, and tea, snacks themselves according to their likes and needs and do washing, ironing, and bed making for their comfortable living" (20) A traditional Indian in him started changing into a Westerner by following the policy of "Do as Romans do when you are in Rome."

Ananda had to join a Dental School and had to pursue his course on educational loan as it was the custom followed in Canada. His uncle promised to give Ananda 100 dollars a month. However, Amanda's indinanness attuned him to his discomfort. His uncle always encouraged him to enjoy his life in Canada and Ananda too promised to do so. Ananda performed well in the dental college, and he broke all the taboos. Slowly but steadily indinanness in him gave way to Westernization in his way of thinking and living. He started drinking hot drinks and went even for dating with Sue, a Canadian friend. While making love with Sue, he could realize his inefficiency in sexual relationship with Canadian woman.

Ananda believed that an Indian woman through arranged marriage would put an end to his sexual trauma. Thus, he married Nina, a thirty-year-old Indian woman who worked as an English lecturer at Miranda House. On the bridal night, Ananda hid his sexual problem. With the help of his dental anaesthetic spray, he consummated his marriage. When she enquired about the medicinal smell inside the room, Ananda cheated and closed her mouth with a kiss.

Like the Canadians, Ananda too shared the household duties with his wife, insisted her to use Western attire and even compelled her to continue her education. But when Nina told him that their love making was not sufficient to make her pregnant, Ananda burst out: "Are you implying it's my fault we don't have sex more often? ...Unless I get a full night's rest, I can't concentrate the next day" (178).

When Nina demanded for a clinical check-up, Ananda replied that he did his best and he didn't want to sort out with Nina regarding his sexual shortcomings, though he had to admit that she was the one most affected. So he decided to go for a therapy secretly. He planned that he had to inform her of this only if it became successful. He decided to go for the therapy not only to satisfy his wife but also to go for sexual adventures with other white women. Immediately after his arrival from the sex therapy, they had successful sex. So as per his plan, Ananda expressed the truth to her. After his success in sex, he wanted to go for a gynaecologist's clinic for sperm test and started his sexual exploration, but this resulted in the loss of Nina from his life.

Nina, the female protagonist of this novel is the perfect mix of East and West as she had been to Brussels when her father was working there. When her marriage proposal with Ananda came to her, she did not want to rush into marriage with Ananda. She felt that her marriage was a big step in her life and if anything, untoward happened to her, she would be left with 'nothing' in the end. Her foreign craze made her accept Ananda as her husband and she started entertaining so many things in her heart about her marital life in alien country Canada.

In the beginning of her Canadian life, she was an Indian in her way of life. She never touched any food other than vegetarian and dressed like an Indian even in the midst of all the immigrants from other Asian

countries. But in course of time, Canada's cultural space made her to have a change in dressing. The emptiness of Canada made her long for a baby, which could fill the vacuum of her personal life. When Ananda hesitated to go for clinical observation, the social space of Canada made her feel easy to go for a gynaecological consultation. Thus, she was expanding to Halifax in ways that made her less dependent on her work.

The openness of the Western culture made her freely discuss sex with Ananda which was not possible in India. Bu Ananda did not want to discuss with Nina about his sexual shortcomings, though he admitted that she was the one most affected without genuine sexual relationship which would make her a mother. As a result, the distance in their marital and conjugal relationship grew between them. At the time of Ananda's secret visit for sex therapy, Nina's frequent visit to the local library earned her a part time job which she felt a home out of home. When Nina joined in a women's group, Ananda was not amused instead he advised her to choose the best from the West, and not blindly follow any and everybody. As he detailed his objections, anger submerged Nina, "Why shouldn't I join a group? When in Rome, do as the Romans do'...'I need to find my feet in this country. I can't walk on yours" (213).

Nina discovered that the only thing she had to rely on was herself and she had an urge to change herself to emerging situations and keep going. Therefore, she rejected Ananda's invitation for a consultation with a gynaecologist. She didn't even feel happy about Ananda's sperm test result. Instead, she joined in Library degree course in HRL, out of her performance in the personal interview for admission, and her admission was assured with scholarship and a guaranteed job anywhere in North America. Thus Nina was taking the first step towards establishing her individuality.

In the Library School, Anton, another student immigrant from America, became the best friend of Nina. In the company of Anton, Nina completely sank into Western culture. Nina practiced smoking, drinking, eating meat and even adultery with Anton as she didn't have sexual fulfilment with Ananda. Adultery didn't make her feel guilty, but she realized that it made her understand the dominance of woman in her. Her individuality was more important than anything in her life. Thus, "Her first lover had taken her virginity and her hopes, her second lover had been her husband, her third had made her international". (261) But When Nina found that Anton's importance for his wife was much greater than for her, she resolved to cut him off. As a result, she was raped by Anton; therefore, she left him once for all.

The death of Nina's mother broke Nina's last tie with her homeland. It made a little difference inside her psyche, so when she came back to Canada, she thought of Ananda as the only anchor in her world. But he too gave her a shock through an evidence of blond hair on their bed. At last, Nina found that she should be her own anchor. So, she decided to distance herself from the dependent life with Ananda and began her search for identity in an alien land. Separation in India might have been difficult for Nina, but it was quite easy in the cultural space of Canada.

Both Ananda and Nina enjoy Canada's educational, economic, political and cultural space by getting education with scholarship, financial self-sufficiency, rental ease and social acceptability. These spaces make few immigrants to assimilate with new culture whole-heartedly according to the social condition of the new

land and feel like the true citizen of that land like Ananda's uncle or make few immigrants to accept assimilation as a precondition to establish their identity in the new land like Nina. The existential and expatriate realities transform her into a highly empowered and liberated woman.

Conclusion

The metamorphosis of people like Ananda is proved in his actions that he is a half Indian and half Western in his way of living. Ananda, like many Indian men, accepts acculturation as their policy of survival in the new land. He is able to adjust himself to western demands in his lifestyle, but he learns to satisfy his inner demands as an Indian. He can be both Western and Indian at the same time. In encouraging Nina to have a change in Western type of dressing, eating non vegetarian food and pursuing education, he acts like a Canadian, but he keeps himself a true Indian at heart in spending money and savings. But at the same time, in their sexual life, he wants to keep her always under his thumbs and he has the ideology that only men have the right to go astray from the conjugal limits set by the holy bond of husband-and-wife relationship. Whatever he feels and does as an Indian, he makes use of everything for his good and never bothers about assimilation and integration into the host culture. Kapur's *The Immigrant* beautifully brings out the metamorphosis of two immigrants from the same native land in two different ways, one absorbs into complete assimilation and the other in a dilemma between assimilation and alienation.

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