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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene is set against a dark, textured background, creating a scholarly and historical atmosphere.

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**Havoc of Western Culture on Indian Immigrants: A Study of Manju Kapur's
*The Immigrant***

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Abstract

Manju Kapur is one of the most gifted and appreciated current Indian English Women Novelist. Her novels takes into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008), her fourth novel deals with the cultural conflict and the havoc the western culture creates on the lives on Indian immigrants. The story revolves with Ananda and Nina a married couple staying in Halifax, Canada. The novel deals with both caught in cultural conflicts and the western style they have adopted to lead their life. Trying to absorb white skin and culture in Indian mask ultimately leads to the breakup of their traditional arranged marriage. The paper will further explore the havoc created by western culture on Indian Immigrants which tear them apart between traditional and western norms.

Key Words: Immigrants, socio-culture, cultural conflict, diasporic consciousness, complexity.

Manju Kapur is one of the most gifted and appreciated current Indian English Women Novelist. She has joined the growing number of women writers from India, like Shashi Despande, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Shobba De, on whom the image of the suffering but stoic women eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had, a significant impact. In a culture where individualism and prated have often remained alien ideas and marital bless and the women's role at home is a central focus. These modern-day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes without adopting feminist postures. These modern-day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes without adopting feminist postures. Manju Kapur's novels acquire a

significant new meaning when read in the point of view of crisscross dogmas of cultural critical thinking. The life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society are reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Her novels further takes into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation.

Manju Kapur has five novels to her credit dealing with various experiences and an example of a whole range of attitudes towards the importation of tradition. Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is a tale of protagonist's struggle for career and identity against the dominant ideology of domesticity. Her second novel *A Married Women* (2002) is beautifully,

honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious turmoil. *Home* (2006) is the third novel, by Manju Kapur. This is fast moving story which makes an ordinary middle class family's life in Delhi where family norms are ignored by the new generation. The novel traces the painful voyage of the heroine Nisha from childhood into adulthood exploring Nisha's search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately to women in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional or physical security. *The Immigrant* (2008), her fourth novel deals with the cultural conflict and the havoc the western culture creates on the lives on Indian immigrants. Her last novel *The Custody* (2011) focuses on the break-up of a marriage and the long-term effects on all the people involved especially on children who are played like pawns in a game of legal chess.

Immigrants are usually caught between the traditional culture and the culture of the alien land. The *Immigrant*, by Manju Kapur as the title suggests, divides its fictional locales between India and Canada in the vexed context of globalization with far greater emphasis than any earlier Kapur's novel. The novel explores, through Nina's story, not only the arranged marriage system and sexual compatibility between individuals, but the clashes between western and eastern culture, the wrenching of family ties when people immigrate, and India's regimented class system versus the more relaxed social mores of the west. Unlike its

predecessors, the novel is only partly set in India. The central characters, Nina and Ananda, are both NRIs (non-resident Indians) drawn to new lives in Canada in the Seventies.

Ananda leaves New Delhi after his parents are killed in a rickshaw accident. He is young, ambitious, determined to qualify as a Canadian dentist and citizen, in the footsteps of his uncle, who is already a wealthy doctor in Halifax. Kapur captures the painful gulf in familial expectations that separates the bereaved Ananda from his Canadian relatives. In their home he misses the intimacies of Indian life, the communal meals, rich spices and vegetarian diet he is used to. He also gets disturbed with the life style his uncle and his family spend in Canada. As he reaches Halifax, Canada he is foremost shocked to see the empty lanes in contrast to the crowded lanes of Delhi. In curiosity he asks his Uncle "Where are all the people" (p.18)¹. The day he reaches Halifax he is being taught the life of Halifax and how everyone has to be self dependent in the fast moving life of Canada. The very next day he was taught to make breakfast and every step of life. While making bed he remembers the comfortable life and the custom of house maids in India and explains it to his cousins "In India we had a maid who did all this, I mainly studied" (p.21)².

Most of the time Dr. Sharma, Ananda's maternal uncle who himself is a well established dentist in Halifax urges Ananda to be cosmopolitan like him. He states:

look at me. I am a citizen of the world.' In other words, every summer they went to Europe. In Rome,

Florence, Paris Venice, London, Amsterdam, Munich, in art galleries, theatres and museums he exposed his family to the finest artefacts of western civilization(p.26)³.

Living in Canada Ananda's consciousness about his caste has to give his way. He belongs to a Brahmin family where "his body must never be polluted by dead flesh" (p.14)⁴. But the condition doesn't remain same when he is in Canada. He thinks a lot about it when it comes to food habit "as he boiled his vegetables and seasoned them with butter, salt and pepper, Ananda wondered how much his caste meant to him. His uncle pushed him gently towards the eating of flesh" (p.35)⁵, a sign to survive in the western country, Canada.

In India guest is welcomed as God but it didn't happened to Ananda in Halifax. Usually staying at Maternal Uncle's house is a normal tradition in India may be for studies or struggling for job. Very soon Ananda is made to realize that he has quit his uncle's home and stay independently. His uncle one day said "that it was time for him to move to a place of his own. He had been around Halifax long enough to know the ropes" (p.29)⁶. He learns quickly that despite his uncle's generosity, family in Canada is not as self-sacrificing as those in India. His Staying as a paying guest he meets Gary. Gary helps Ananda in adopting Canadian norms in order to survive. Gary introduces Ananda to Sue who becomes his girlfriend and this friendship reaches to bed where Ananda is proved to be dissatisfactory to Sue. The only reason to get attracted to Sue and avoiding the Indian girls he met was as he felt "too Indian women meant he could

never escape his country" (p.40)⁷. Later Sue loses her interest in Ananda and clings to Gary. Shifting and changing boyfriends is a common tradition in western culture and is not looked in a derogatory manner. She later marries Gary and has a successful and happy life with kids.

Having no girlfriend or potential wife in the picture, Alka, Ananda's elder sister begins to take on her matriarchal responsibility to get Ananda settled down, as she is a married woman and the only female relative of Ananda. She acts as matchmaker and tries to persuade Ananda to come to

India to find a bride. Thus, after much persuasion, Ananda visits India in search of life-partner.

On the other hand we have Nina a thirty year old English lecturer in New Delhi, living with her widowed mother and struggling to make ends meet. The novel begins with the description of the mundane life of Nina who seems to have lost all opportunities of marital bliss. The traditional belief that a girl's ultimate goal is marriage overpowers her thinking and makes her feel empty. Though thirty she didn't accept for any "humdrum marriage" (p.3)⁸ Nina's search and longing ends with the introduction of Ananda made to her, a Canada based Dentist. Their gradual liking for each other and decision to marry brings in Nina's life the opportunity she has almost lost hope of. In marrying Ananda, an expatriate she seems to acquire a totally new identity. The story thus revolves around an Indian couple-- Nina and Ananda, and the issues that surround their arranged marriage, and Nina's transformation through

becoming *the immigrant*. Predominantly based on the concept migration through an arranged marriage, it discusses common themes of transnational habitus, cultural dilemma, identity and patriarchy. The story spans the spaces of the host country, Canada and the home country, India.

The Immigrant is based in Delhi in North India for first half of the novel, and in Halifax in East Canada for the latter half. The novel is set in the seventies, in Indira Gandhi's India and Pierre Trudeau's Canada. India at the time was going through much social and political reform. It is also because of this political and social climate in India at the time that the reasoning for Nina's move to Canada was considered in her best interest. The story starts in the year that Nina and Ananda meet and marry and continues to span over approximately the first three years of their marriage.

The migration policy climate in Canada at the time the story is set, was reflective of a burgeoning Indian immigrant cohort. It was around the 1960s and early 1970s that immigrants from non-European countries were allowed to migrate under the Skilled Worker class- an immigrant class based on the point system according to one's skill set (Walton-Roberts)⁹. However, Nina migrates to Canada under the family reunification class¹⁰ via marriage to her Canadian Indian-born husband. Soon after, Nina leaves India to join Ananda in Halifax and thus begins her life as an immigrant and a wife in Canada.

The word 'immigrant' symbolises a maladjusted migrant. The moment she lands at the Toronto Airport, she faces the

humiliation of being 'othered'. Through a note she conveys her dejection to her husband:

They stopped me at Toronto...They kept asking me questions...They were treating me like a criminal...They wouldn't treat a European or American like that...They did it because we are third world (p.109)¹¹.

Though Nina emigrates to escape the "culturally subservient status of [her] home" (Gurr)¹², but the truth of assimilation dawns on her like a heavy load that continues to weigh her down. "Never, for a moment, in all these years at home, had she to think about who or what she was. In Canada, Ananda is portrayed to have two main things on his agenda throughout the novel. The first one is his need to assimilate into Canadian culture as soon as possible by becoming non-vegetarian, enjoying Canadian cuisine, celebrating Christmas and Thanksgiving, changing his name to a westernized "Andy", changing his clothing, his mannerisms and glorifying all things Canadian while nullifying the Indian ones. He also tries to encourage Nina to do and be the same, not for the fact of her integration in Canada but so that she is not so noticeably Indian. Second, his obsession with his premature ejaculation leads him to constantly worry over everything that surrounds it, fertility, sexual performance and gratification, fidelity, and his relationship with his wife and her feminist journey through her own self discovery.

While Nina's journey through the story is that of struggling for finding her identity as a woman and immigrant in Canada,

Ananda's journey is also that of self discovery through finding a solution to his premature ejaculation. The story does end with Ananda finding a solution to his sexual issues and Nina finding her new identity through her journey as an immigrant in Canada. Nina eventually finds out about Ananda's infidelity and chooses to leave the marriage and start her life anew in the province of New Brunswick. Manju Kapur, being a novelist primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging women identity. The female protagonists of her novels protest against male domination and the marginalization of woman. Nina too has done the same over here.

Simon de Beauvoir finds man –woman nexus quite unsymmetrical and uncomplimentary for – —man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined criteria, without reciprocity. Manju Kapur supported this idea that a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position in our society. —Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees.....she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex.....absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential.¹³

Nina moves to Halifax in Canada, a small east coast city with a very small Indian

immigrant population instead of the big metropolitan cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Perhaps if she were to move to any of those cities her habitus would have been influenced differently. Since there were established Indian communities in these cities, perhaps she would have held on to her Indian traditions, food, and clothes more vehemently being comfortable to be Indian in an Indian community while facing similar adjustment issues in Canada. Or perhaps, because many of these communities were not predominantly of the same social class as her, she would not be able to relate and thus feel disengaged and indifferent to her fellow immigrants.

Two important aspects that shape Nina prior to and when she arrives in Canada are the clothes she wears and the fact that she is vegetarian. Coincidentally both these aspects also change when we see a shift in Nina's transnational habitus toward a more western way. She arrives in Canada with her traditional wear, saris and salwar kameez. Much to the dismay of Ananda, she wears them as part of her daily wear as well as for social occasions. She holds on to her Indian habitus by wearing her traditional clothes and considers this an integral part of her identity as an Indian woman. Apart from her own husband, everyone else in the story finds her traditional clothing exotic and beautiful and an appropriate complement to her exotic "Indian" features and looks. However as the story progresses, it is noted that in order to fully adapt and function in the winters of Halifax, she must eventually resort to wearing western clothing suited for Canadian winters. She hates the way

western clothes make her feel and look, and feels a part of her identity as an Indian woman slowly slipping away. The references to clothing are numerous throughout the novel, therefore indicating an important symbol of identity for Nina, how it connects her to India and how she is perceived by others. "She took out her saris and stroked the intricate woven surfaces. Banaras, Kanjeevaram, Orissa patola, Gujarati patola, Bandhani; she had fancied carrying all parts of India to Canada in her clothes. She spread the brightest one on the bed, and gazed at the magic of the green, yellow and red Gujarati weave" (p.112)¹⁴.

When it comes to food habitus Nina is shocked to know that Ananda has changed into non-vegetarian leaving back Indian cuisine back to India itself. After arriving at Halifax "She thought of the recipes her mother had anxiously written for her" (p.112)¹⁵ which will be of no use to her in Canada. To Nina vegetarianism is the core of their culture and believes that food connects them to the memories of India. The author also places much emphasis on this. The act of cooking and eating Indian food in the novel symbolizes the shared consumption of that which is Indian. "Turmeric...red chillies...onions and garlic...releasing sweet sharp smells...cumin and coriander...these smells and imagined sights travelled across the world from north India to eastern Canada to kick her sharply in the stomach" (p.139)¹⁶.

The sense and feeling of immigrant has a deep impact on Nina's psyche. She thinks that Indians become immigrants slowly because "they are not among one those who

fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death threats" (p.120)¹⁷. She further explains:

These immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided. In the new country they work lengthy hours to gain entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account (p.120)¹⁸

To adjust to the new environment she further laments - "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" (p.121)¹⁹. Arriving at alien land as an immigrant and as a wife becomes more difficult to manage the situation. Alienation and insecurity surrounds her. Consciousness of immigrant haunts her. Nina explains the situation:

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. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life (p.121-122)²⁰

To overcome such situation she starts thinking of doing job. Though she was teaching in Delhi University the qualification was not sufficient to teach at Canada. She joins Library School so that she can do job in Canada. Slowly and slowly Nina starts enjoying life in Canada. She

starts changing her food and dress habit and confined to those which can suit Canadian life style. She realizes that if she wanted to be happy, and it was on her own that she would find the answers to her identity. In her attempt to escape these issues and to find herself she joins a co-counseling feminist group. It is interesting to realize that the group is made up of predominantly white Canadian women, who have come together as a supportive measure against patriarchal constraints of the white, male, dominated Canadian society of the early seventies. It is in this forum that she is able to confide her problems and she realizes through various exercises and reading that she perhaps does not want to be confined with children at this stage in her life. She realizes what is more important is that she would instead like to find her own feet by finding a job of her own. The author portrays this as an important shift in Nina wherein she has now immersed herself as a woman in the Canadian context, with all her previous dispositions of being an Indian woman and an immigrant.

No immigrant can escape from the nostalgic feeling of one's own country. She remembers the vendors who came to their door, the gardener who watered their plants, the rows of jhuggis in the nalla near her house, without sanitation, water or toilet facilities in India. She passes her time eagerly hearing the reports on Kumbh Mela in India which happens after twelve years which for the devout Hindu was an extremely auspicious event. "Today is the day of the Maha Kumbh, the day the spiritual blends with the

ordinary,...marching to the Ganga...Two crore faithful will bathe in this river today...It is a bitterly cold morning, there is a mist and the sun has yet to rise, but nothing deters these pilgrims from the icy river" (p.172-173)²¹. While hearing the report:

The words reverberated through Nina, though she was as much a stranger to the Kumbh Mela as anyone in Canada. Educated, secular and Westernised, she had never had anything to do with ritual Hinduism. From so far however, the crowds, the pilgrims, the pety, 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 as guilty of exoticising India as the tourist posters in the Taj Mahal restaurant (p.173)²²

Ananda too enjoyed the description of Kumbh Mela by Nina. Memory surrounds him as he had visited once when he was about five or six years old with his parents. Nina was excited to know the details. Ananda replied:

He remembered something. Getting up when it was still dark, shivering on the river bank, the sound of conch shells, his father carrying him as he waded into the freezing water, his mother holding his sister's hand, people, people around in the growing pale of morning (p.173-174)²³

To immigrants talking about India and remembering India gives joy and pleasure to them which they really long for.

On the other hand Nina is not happy with her married life as far as sex is concerned. She finds her husband sexually dysfunctional. Dissatisfied at the bridal night

itself she tried to ignore it but failed to do so and remembers her ex-boyfriend Rahul.

Involuntarily comparisons arouse. Rahul, with his obsessive talk of sex, endlessly curious about what she felt in what position, this technique versus that...His little virgin, he replied, who need to be educated so that they could feel as much pleasure as possible. That was what love was all about. (p.90)²⁴

In due course of time Ananda realizes his sexual incapability and goes to California for cure at Dr. Hansen's clinic. He has his sex treatment what was called 'Sexual therapy' with the help of white skinned surrogate lady Marty. She was to teach Ananda better practices in sex and how to improve. According to Indian tradition such type of women are called as prostitutes but in western scenario it is a noble profession. On inquiring with Marty about his boyfriend and his reaction to this profession he was stunned to hear "It doesn't bother him. But he also understands I'm in a caring profession. I want to help other people." (p.200)²⁵

Satisfied with the two weeks treatment Andy (who preferred called himself instead of Ananda in a Canadian/western culture) returned back to Nina. (At the time of marriage Andy liked the name Nina as it can easily fit in the Canadian context). Andy thereafter has satisfactory relations with his wife. When Nina comes to know about the Sexual therapy and the surrogates she tries to sip it but somewhere or the other Indian consciousness of other woman rouses her. For an immigrant it becomes very difficult to balance between two cultures one of

home country to the immigrant country. It becomes burden to carry on man-woman relationship.

Satendra Nandan puts it in essay on "The Politics of Dispossession and Exile", "What then is writer's enigma of survival? Initially, it is an outrage of more horrendous fates of people elsewhere. One is dislocated from one world, but is connected to so many others. Suddenly they become closer to one's own. The writer then tries to find ways of being human, new ways of redefining his humility, new ways of recognizing his inseparable humanity with others"²⁶

Leaving in the Canada in the midst of western culture, the western culture gets absorb in their blood vein. It is surprising in the Indian context that both seem inclined for extra marital affair or in a better sense extra marital sex. Nina gets a sex partner in Anton, a fellow friend in Library School and Andy gets Mandy, a white skinned secretary. Both enjoy committing adultery forgetting the commitment of loyalty at the time of marriage. Nina finds solace and sexual satisfaction in the arms of Anton.

Little moans began to escape her-were the walls of the hotel thin?...The moans grew into soft screams. On he kept- she found herself whimpering, she felt wet and hot...her legs thrown across his back, eyes glazed, arms around his neck. (p.259)²⁷

Nina got involved with Anton to such an extent that she could not bear his parting. When Anton was about to leave for summer holidays "the thought of no contact for three months gave Nina a hollow feeling. She pulled his arm around her chest, and idly

gazed at the contrast of their skin. With Ananda her skin was so much lighter, with Anton so much darker” (p.276-277)²⁸. This shows Nina’s attraction towards race. She is more fond of white skin and the style of their love making. Thus Nina becomes more Canadian as compare to Indian.

For Andy after Sue it becomes difficult for him to come out of the concept of white beauty which makes him feel manlier in the white society. He continues to have a regular sex with Mandy and enjoys the period when Nina visits India twice. After returning from her mother’s funeral Nina “found a wavy blond hair next to her pillow” (p.324)²⁹. She discovers Ananda,s infidelity. She realizes that there is nothing left to hold on to in their marital life and that she must start her life anew. Her mother’s demise signified that there was no need to return to India and thus be confronted by all things Indian. Her discovery of Ananda’s affair signified the end of their marriage and the end to her identity as his wife. She has thus broken free from the patriarchal constraints of her marriage and her previous romanticized notions of being a dutiful wife. Nina thus liberated herself from the patriarchal constraints she faced through the various processes in her life in Canada and changed her identity: the ability to choose her own career through education, the ability to decide whether she wants to have children, her sexual freedom, her change in dress and image, and eventually her decision to leave her husband.

Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach

yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, was not necessarily lasting, but ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back. (p.330)³⁰

In case of Nina and Ananda arranged marriage doesn’t work out where in India preference is given to arranged marriage and when once tied up women prays for the same husband for seven rebirth. For Indian women the concept made by patriarchal society ‘*Pati Parmeshwar*’ goes with every women generation after generation. Many women in these situations even suffer abuse and ill-treatment from their better half. However, in this story the prospect and reality of an arranged marriage is romanticized by both protagonists and is shown to provide Nina with her own choice and control over her own future.

However, the patriarchal issues as portrayed by the male protagonist, Ananda, are not completely overt. There is a subtle underlying patriarchal tone to his character and his actions. He is not seen as one who overtly tries to control and oppress his wife. However, through his various attempts to change her and steer their lives according to his reasoning, we can see how he tries to control Nina throughout the story. Ananda is portrayed to be an Indian immigrant man who has successfully integrated in Western society. Through his successful integration he is also struggling against a white classist western society as he constantly competes to be and to have all that is Canadian: an Indian-turned-Canadian bride, sex with

stereotypical white Canadian women, a white collared Canadian profession, Canadian food and clothes and Canadian ideals. It can be argued that due to his struggle for equality in such a society, his need to maintain power and control over his wife and their life together pacifies this yearning.

The story of *The Immigrant* thus reflects the metamorphosis of the immigrant to one of a confident and settled citizen who is no longer lost in her new world or in the shadows of her husband's identity. Mrs. Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. We see the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will. In this regard John and Abraham have stated:

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.³¹

However, *The Immigrant* does confirm the realities lived by immigrants, and in this case, immigrant Indian women, by the mere re-telling of such issues in the subjective forum of creative literature. Manju Kapur has thus sketched the diasporic consciousness articulating the uncertainties of protagonist. The novel is an exploration of an initial phase of constitution of the globalised, hybrid identity today being assumed by increasing numbers of educated Indians. The novel further gives the message to all the Indian youths who go to US, UK or other countries for making up their bright future. But they fail to realize the havoc the western culture creates in the life of Indian immigrants. They are torn apart between East and West and loses the peace of mind and life.

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