

ALIENATION AND DISPLACEMENT IN MANJU KAPUR'S THE IMMIGRANT

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ABSTRACT

Words like “Alienation” and “Displacement” are two familiar terms in postcolonial literary scenario. Especially in the Indian writing one comes across these two terms more often than in any other literature due to the fact that Indians struggled to maintain their identity both at home and abroad in the postcolonial period. This is highlighted and frequently used as a theme by many Indian authors particularly women authors. The members of Indian Diaspora, spread over to more than 20 million world-wide and survive in midst of ‘home of origin’ and ‘home of the adopted land’. The process of survival of the individual/ community in between these two and the reason of finding a better place for survival caused the voyage undertaken in the whole process from ‘displacement’ to ‘alienation’ or vice versa. Manju Kapur, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Shashi Deshpande are some of the women writers who made a deep impression on the literary canvass with these themes. Some of them displaced (alienation) from their ‘home of origin’ to USA and other parts of the world where they even experienced the displacement and alienation and presented these two through their characters in a more convincing way.

The dilemma of belongingness in the novels of the authors mentioned above, particularly in Manju Kapur’s novels is a matter of flux and agony, which further reveals the issues of ethnic identity, cultural identity and the uncertainties of staying in one locality. The paper aims to disclose the protagonist’s sense of alienation and displacement in Canada in one of the Kapur’s novels *The Immigrant* where the author projects life as an immigrant was unbearable, forcing the individuals to make an effort to go through the process of economic, social and cultural adjustment. Further, the paper highlights the desire for ‘cultural fusion in the new dwelling’, which in fact forms the basis for the novel and Kapur’s brilliant presentation of the conditions that the characters go through is another significant feature of this novel which is also looked at. However, the discussion also includes the ‘alienation’ and ‘displacement’ factors, in the lives of many Indians moving abroad, presented by few more women authors but to a limited extent.

Keywords: Alienation, identity, displacement, diaspora, globalization, immigration

INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur, one of the most accomplished and highly acclaimed contemporary Indian English Women Novelists, is one among the growing number of women writers from India on whom the carving of the hardship but strong women ultimately disintegrating the conventional boundaries

has had an outstanding impact. The main focus in her novels is on marital bliss and women's role at home and away, particularly in the culture where individualism and patriarchy are always referred to as alien ideas. Majority of the contemporary women authors are now communicating themselves candidly and courageously on multiple themes without adhering to feminist perspectives on societal issues.

Manju Kapur's novels convey an appreciable modernist meaning of self-identity, particularly dealing with or considering the matter related to crisscross ideologies of culture over scrupulous thinking. The women appear in her novels go through various struggles in their lives and the deep monitoring of their lives under the dictatorial mechanism of a closed society are the primary themes in the writings of Manju Kapur. Moreover her novels take into consideration the intricacies of life, especially that of women, which include various histories, divergent cultures and countless patterns of human values which are at the receiving end and tackled by women in the context of socio-cultural conditions of homeland or abroad. In an interview given Deepa Diddi she claims that

Yes. I am a feminist writer in the sense that my works are women-centric. My novels focus on the needs and desires of women from different backgrounds and in different situations. Women yearn for recognition for their work, particularly since domestic labour so often goes unappreciated. They want concern and a sharing of responsibilities. (159)

Immigrants in her novels are usually caught between the traditional culture of their hometowns and the cultures of the alien land. *The Immigrant* (2008) is the fourth novel of Manju Kapur and as the title suggests, divides its fictional localities between India and Canada in the vehement context of globalization with far greater emphasis than any of the earlier novels of Kapur. The novel examines through the story of Nina, the arranged marriage system, and sexual compatibility between individuals, the cultural conflict and the dislocation. Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* is the story of two individuals, Nina and Ananda who are immigrants to Canada. The focus of this paper is on how Manju Kapur's main characters, in spite of their diversified ideologies try to construct and locate their identity as Indian Diaspora in Canada and how such individuals are confronting the treatment of diaspora in a foreign land. Manju Kapur discusses about the conditions of Indian diaspora in three major parts of this novel: Indians' life in general

as a big number in Canada, Ananda along with his uncle and Nina who are busy with their assignments in Canada.

Nina, one of the protagonists is presented as a wife at home. *The Immigrant* therefore explores the transformation of an immigrant who once a self-assured and committed citizen is no more off-track in her chosen world nonetheless entangled in her husband's identity. She passes through the phase of alienation in the initial period of her new life in her husband's home. The successful transition in her case reveals the uncompromised spirit of the women who readily reckons the need for adoption of a new world. Kapur sounds affirmative of her view that the Indian women have undoubtedly achieved their success in the post-independent era of the country from where her heroines come and never act as rubber dolls for others to play as per their wish. In this regard Sunita Sinha opines that:

Discovery of one's self is the key theme of the novel and refers to the aspiration for freedom and liberty achieved by an individual as well as by a woman dwelling in between family and self is primarily considered in Kapur's novel....She is feminist in the sense that she is intensely concerned with the issues related to woman. Kapur's fiction stresses on the woman's need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, and self-actualization. (160)

Manju Kapur has presented the aspects of alienation and displacement by enunciating the apprehensions of a protagonist. The decision to immigrate to a new place definitely necessitates willingness of the mind to integrate and adjust one's self to the foreign ethos without leaving their old persona. In this novel, for both Ananda and Nina, the settlement in a new land is not just geographical and cultural but also inevitable because of their interests. Such a decision finally causes them the displacement of their own interests and identities. The novel is an illustration of the theme of migration that has a global appeal and also the hybrid identity to which majority of the individuals or groups of modern times consider alien to.

The immigrant's psyche undergoes a constant interaction with the traditional culture of the native home and the adopted culture of an alien land. It ushers a reconstruction in the inherited custom and culture of 'the immigrant'. Cultural diversity which the immigrants are concerned with is primarily taken as the setting of this novel. Immigration necessitates them to embrace the contrasting culture of an unknown land snapping down the native boundaries. Moving to a new country no more causes separation but may be perceived as rebirth and

reinvention in a new place, city, and country noticeable for their new culture. The belongings of the past never be discarded but continues to stay with those who intentionally approaches to explicate them in want of alien experience.

Prof. A. K. Singh rightly says about this amalgamation that ‘the diaspora is always forced, in one sense, each of us is in a state of diaspora’(227). It means ‘one’s own area of one’s native culture, history and tradition are kept intact in the host nation. It tells about a specific or unchanged rational position in a different geographic and social environment where an individual tries to survive. While defining more about this situation, Julian Wolfreys compiles it more openly by saying:

Setting of various peoples away from their homelands; often appogated with the notion of the Jewish Diaspora in modern Israel, but extended in cultural studies, post- colonial studies and race theory to consider the displacement of peoples by means of force such as slavery (110).

Nina tries her best to adapt to the conditions in the new world. But things do not take place as she predicts them so. The forceful sexual assault of her friend Anton shatters her most. She further suffers due to the death of her mother. Her own existence seems poor to herself in comparison with every other person. In a state of annoyance Nina conveys her dissatisfaction to her husband in the form of letter – “This is not your country. You are deceived and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven where everyone loved you. This woman is looking for a reason to get rid of me. I am the wrong colour, I come from the wrong place. See me in this airport, of all the passengers the only one not allowed to sail through immigration, made me feel like an illegal alien” (107). Kapur writes that Nina is responsible for carving or moulding her own life and she has no right to blame anybody or seek explanation from anybody for displacement. (323). Finally when her only source Ananda deceives her, she feels as if she is utterly clueless and helpless.

Ananda too, like his wifewavers between two different worlds and tries his best to fit himself into the alien land. His story too starts in India where he begins his career as a dentist. The suddenddeath of his parents in an accident leaves him and his sister Alkaas orphans. Starting off as an immigrant he initially joins his uncle’s family. But he quickly learns that family life in Canada is not as self-sacrificing as the one in his home country. This makes him to start a new life as a paying guest with Gary Geller, his friend and business partner. All these developments

indicate the ‘displacement’ of the protagonist from one role to the other causing utter confusion in taking a righteous decision in his life. Ananda’s realization, in the words of Kapur, “This was the country to live in, despite the cold, the darkness and the never-ending winter” (27) is only a strategic revelation of every individual’s suffering of ‘alienation’ and displacement in a foreign land.

CONCLUSION

There are two important things in every individual’s life, one is home and the other is identity. Despite of the fact that people as immigrants live in an alien culture, they are very much connected to their conventional and cultural identities and also to their respective homelands. They always try to keep a separate space for their cultural identities of their native-land in their minds. These people are not ready to separate themselves with their own customs and traditions. As it is a known fact that nothing is steady and stable in foreign land. If one thing fails, the immigrant tries another. He or she has no other option and ready to go back. But the displacement of the individual from one position to the other and in the process the individual’s attempt to adjust to something alien is always a challenging task in contemporary global scenario and Kapur has best exemplified these things through her characters. The novel ends with a message that truly represents the case of immigrants. “The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the Western world” (334).

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