

**MANJU KAPUR'S SEARCH FOR SOMEWHERE ELSE IN
*THE IMMIGRANT***

Ms. Kakali Bhattacharyya

Assistant Professor,
Department Of Humanities and Management Science
B.P.Poddar Institute of Management and Technology,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

The litterateurs of recent decades have found more interest in chronicling the experiences of an immigrant on foreign land and a search for an identity there. However, each immigrant has to go through the same process of alienation, loss of native identity followed by a gradual integration into the mainstream. The expatriate experiences a relief when he becomes a product of hybridity. His merging with the melting pot and reluctance to give up his past identity at the same time create in him a dilemma. He is inevitably confronted with an inclination to return to the motherland and its culture. In the gamut of fiction writing on Indian diaspora, there seems to be a clear bifurcation between two categories—one which champions the cause of return when all reasons to stay back disappears and the other which posits complete assimilation with the host society and its culture. My paper, with the help of Manju Kapur's novel *The Immigrant* (2008), tries to find a third alternative beyond the two and seeks an answer in the immigrant's refusal either to return to the native origin or continue in the same host society. Identity is ever-increasing and needs not to be limited and restricted. Newer accumulations of identity provide the third alternative – to move on and make further explorations in other societies.

Kapur begins her novel with Nina, the protagonist, who represents the Indian culture and ethos that centres round marriage especially for a girl (where arranged marriage is a customary one unlike in the West). A diasporic tale of an immigrant from the East to the West certainly exposes the readers to such complications like sexual permissiveness, problems of intimate functions, extramarital liaisons which are suppressed and hidden in the Indian community even today. It is true that Kapur's novel discusses all the common threads that one may find in a diasporic tale – alienation, gradual merging into the melting pot, hybridity etc. But Kapur seems to outweigh India and its culture by the hidden positivism underneath the apparent negativity of Western sexual permissiveness according to the Indian standards. In fact an educated Indian woman like Nina needs an exposure to Western feminist liberalism to decide for her course of action in life. It is not only her bond with the West that pushes her to explore further but also the newly acquired strength of her personality that deters her from retreating to an orthodox Indian society and its closed culture.

Towards the beginning of the novel, Kapur questions through one of her characters – why do you think there is such a brain-drain in India? Kapur's whole novel is actually an answer to this question. That the West is “filled with

opportunities” as pointed out by her male immigrant character, Ananda, is only an extrinsic factor. The greater reason is emphasized by Nina’s personality development which may be said to be the intrinsic factor made possible only because of migration. No doubt the process entails a tough journey through alienation, tug-of-war between past origin and a diverse cultural and societal present, and a final understanding with the immigrant’s own self as a hybrid carrier of ethos and beliefs. Henceforth, the dichotomy between return and non-return arises. But as Manju Kapur offers the third alternative to explore further, she seems to signify that the supremacy of the Indian diaspora over the Indian natives as matured and practical individuals is to be dissolved with the evolving time, when diaspora is being superseded by the concept of the world ultimately turning into a global village.

Keywords – diaspora, acculturation, melting pot, hybridity, root, return etc.

The fictions, with expatriation and immigration as subject-matters, have more often prompted diasporic writers to yearn for and reclaim the past. Such fictions like Bharati Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters*, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, *The Tiger’s Daughter*, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Christina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and many more have sought the answers to validate the existence of an individual in his return to his root. Interestingly, native and non-diasporic writers emphasize on assimilating to the culture of the new land and merging into the melting pot e.g. in the novels like Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Blackbird*, Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man*, Ruthprawa Jhabvala’s *Three Continents* and so on. When considered the extrinsic factors, the opportunities that the West provides becomes lure enough for members of diaspora to settle down abroad permanently. On the other hand those who return, it is often the emotional tie rather than the material and physical comfort that brings them back to their native land. In such cases, if a simplification has to be made, the native land is a marker for emotional bond which is intrinsic, whereas the land of emigration symbolises material comfort. However as I explore through Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant* (2008), this simple equation undergoes a conversion.

The novel is set in an Indo – North American environment. It is a story of emigration specially Indians in North America. The title refers either to Ananda or Nina – the word ‘immigrant’ is applied to both and is perhaps best taken as encompassing the experiences of both. It should be stressed here that Kapur’s immigrants are in both, country of origin and host country, members of the university-educated, Anglophone and cosmopolitan middleclass. It traces a long journey spanning over seven long years in America. The nature of struggle for the protagonist encompasses the cultural markers like food, relationships, name etc. Finally, her individual self asserts itself being supported by the western idealism.

Temporally speaking, *The Immigrant* is located throughout in a period recent but not contemporary, the 1970s of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency. Spatially, the novel devices its fictional locales between India and Canada (with a couple of excursions to the US). Sociologically, we are firmly in the midst of a middleclass territory with characters’ conditions ranging from the shabby-genteel to the nouveau riche but with educatedness, command of English and a certain international veneer always presumed. The closeness, of some of the characters’ experiences to the novelist’s own world is also very apparent – Nina, the protagonist is not only a

Miranda House graduate but a teacher at that college (indeed Nina's sister-in-law is a Miranda House alumna too), and her Canadian destination, Halifax in Nova Scotia, is a location where her creator herself has lived and studied. (Rollason, 1)

Kapur introduces Nina, the protagonist, as a lady almost thirty and a spinster – her only longing, like any other middleclass young Indian lady, to get married – “Had she been married, thirty would have been heralded as a time of youthful maturity, her birthday celebrated in the midst of doting husband and children. A body could feel young in these circumstances, look forward to the gifts, the surprises, the love”. (1) Nina is the representative of the majority of middleclass Indian young ladies who believe yet that marriage is the be-all and end-all of their lives. No matter what, they believe they are born to get married and to die without it is unthinkable. She had tasted love once but the betrayal forced her to choose loneliness. Nevertheless, the issue of marriage dominates Nina's mind and she eventually gets married to Ananda but her new identity becomes only a passing phase, finally helping her in the process of identifying herself as an individual woman. Ironically, her (broken) marital relationship helps her find her own identity, bringing back the “... depressing, lonely futures” she so much dreaded once, only this time she hardly dreads the condition. It is her conscious, deliberate decision. The novel demands a mature treatment of mature issues like problems of intimate functions, extramarital liaisons etc. and unlike India, North America is culturally more liberal and permissive. The novel traces the development, the mental or the personality, of Nina which was lacking although Nina was an English lecturer in Miranda House. Thus immigration takes an essential place in an individual's life and the shift from India to North America is also significant. In fact the details of Nina's pre-marital life are necessary to estimate the intrinsic development that Nina undergoes in the course of the novel made possible by her immigration.

“...the factors triggering migration are basically the same that propel most other changes in life, i.e., unacceptable economic, political, military, social and personal circumstances and insecurities obtaining at home”. (Naval and Hussain, 10). Kapur seems to invoke the readers with the most thought-provoking questions that demands attention when Dr. Sharma, Ananda's uncle in Halifax, says – “Why do you think there is such a brain drain in India? ... India does not value its minds – unlike here. Otherwise you think we are not patriots? But there even the simple tasks of daily life can bleed you dry”. (18). Ananda endorses the same thought. He migrates to Canada because it “... was a country filled with opportunities”. (17). On Ananda's parents' demise, uncle Sharma from Halifax sends him admission form of Dalhousie University Dental School and Ananda willingly accepts the opportunity, with nothing to hold him back in India. If Ananda is seeking a better life in Canada, Nina's reason to immigrate is purely her marriage. Ananda from Canada is an eligible bachelor, well off professional, settled in a first world country; “promising at the very minimum change, novelty, excitement”. (79). Choosing Ananda means inevitably choosing Canada. “Canada seems like a nice place” (61) is the opinion that Nina forms from Ananda's letter since the latter feels that Canada is “sane, civilized and secure” (60). However both migrate for a better life. Here I would like to mention that Nina's marriage to Ananda, the NRI, is essential for the plot of the story. Neither the sexual infidelity, so responsible for the crumbling down of Nina and Ananda's marriage, nor her liberation from the shackles of such a farcical marital relationship is possible in India.

All around them countries like Burma, Pakistan, North Korea, Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon were showing the way to totalitarian regimes with their repressive measures and violation of

human rights. What was so special about this country (India) that would enable them to escape the fate reserved for so many of their neighbours? (11).

Immediately after immigration the neophyte observes differences in basic principles of life, the culture, practises and mores. Ananda learns that Canadian life is essentially a “do it yourself culture” whether be it making a cup of coffee, finding bottles of drinking water, cleaning the toilet or doing the routine household chores. As “tears gather[ed]...” (20), from a feeling of helplessness and alienation, he realises that he has to perform duties which had not registered as his responsibility in India. Ironically he had pined so much for this life. Of the other things Ananda soon learns, one is -- “every young adult in North America left home as soon as possible” (30). Again, like his expectation to get included in the Sharma household, he also believes he will have financial support from his uncle for his pursuit of studies. But very soon he learns that indulgence is not encouraged in North America. Here blood expects one to stand on one’s own. Food also poses to be a problem for Ananda, he being a vegetarian.

If Ananda is undergoing education in Canada, it is both in terms of degree in dentistry and practical needs to learn and be a Canadian in true sense of the term. “You had to learn fast in the West, it was sink or swim, and Ananda was trying out his strokes”. (24). He believes in what Gary says, -- “When in Rome do as Romans do”. (33). His education is complete and transforms him into a perfect Canadian. Ananda imbibes all the Canadian principles I have mentioned above – becomes self-dependent, takes loan, leaves Sharma household and even turns into a non-vegetarian [he now eats everything because “it is simpler and convenient” (114). In fact he does not eat Indian food but cooks the same only when he has guests]. Simultaneously he obtains the degree in dentistry. Of course one had to constantly undergo tests and prove himself to get entry into the mainstream, be it professionally or socially. In his spirit he has turned into a Canadian too. He loathes any interference from uncle Sharma regarding his emotional life and desires privacy. “What he (Ananda) did with his emotional life was his business. They were not in India. In the guise of discussing his future he (uncle Sharma) could not come and say anything he liked”. (42).

Ananda takes Canadian citizenship, adopts Canadian pronunciation, relents being called Andy – in fact encourages it --, undergoes alternative therapy (with a surrogate, possible only because it is Canada and he carries a Canadian spirit). His allegiance to the Canadian society makes him to confess to Gary regarding the segregation practiced between a girl and a boy in India - “Of course everything was done, but not out in the open”. (37). In fact, he assimilates to the extent that he commits adultery with his receptionist Mandy taking to licentiousness. He justifies his action in his mind by reminding himself that he loves his wife and committing infidelity does not mean he is unjust to Nina. His integration is complete as he takes “pride at being associated with this country (Canada), they (Ananda and Nina) had nothing quite like this in India” (268).

In his process of assimilation, Ananda simultaneously abandons his own culture – a process in which one inevitably leads to the other but generally not to such an extent. Although soon he becomes a part of “hybrid Diwali” (28), celebrated in Halifax among the four hundred Indian families, Ananda chooses to reject the various Indian occasions simply because he cannot replicate any ceremony on his own. Moreover, he is determined to conduct his own life with more integrity than his uncle. He promises to himself, “... none of this Indian for a day and western for the remaining year”. (28) The readers are certain to be touched by his honesty but his thought is a matter of convenience. Further, he forbids Nina from wearing salwar kameez or sari.

Ananda, considering himself a Canadian, disapproves the Indians in Canada who buy showy things believing that the Indians there have “no taste” (119).

It is true that after his failed physical relationship with Sue he does not explore anymore into the realm of girls before marriage. Also when he does, Ananda marries an Indian. However this has nothing to do with his loyalty to Indian culture and his motherland. He does so for purely personal reasons. Marrying a Canadian or establishing a pre-marital relationship with a girl means going through physical intimacy that will reveal his medical problem regarding intimate functions. (How ironic that Mrs. Batra should think Ananda has that traditional streak that induced him to come home for a bride!) Having an arranged marriage in India carried less risk of getting exposed since such premarital intimacy is not common in India and there is less time and scope for such revelation. Also his marriage to an Indian will be the answer to many speculations in Canada for remaining single for seven long years. Even in his marriage he is happy that the girl he is marrying has a name that is “both Indian and Canadian” (49). Unlike his Andy there is no need for a westernized version of Nina.

If Ananda is so satiated with his life in Canada it is only too obvious that he will not endorse any idea of return to India. His identity to himself is essentially that of a Canadian. He has surrendered himself, both mind and body, to the land and its people. When Alka, his sister from India, insists on his return, Ananda has only one question in mind – “why should he go back”? (46). “India had become a threatening place. A censored press, forced sterilizations, a factory that never took off, money laundering, kickbacks, torture with more and more in jail. Each detail became a brick in the edifice of Ananda’s love for Canada, the sanctuary”. (46-47).

In fact Ananda’s friends had all opted for a career abroad. So when opportunities show themselves up in Canada “he already had the mind set of an immigrant, departing with no desire to return. Ananda landed in Halifax on the 15th of August, his country’s day of independence as well as his liberation from it”. (18). So, how can he abandon the land of liberation and return to India? In short, unlike Indira’s India, Canada is “sane, civilised and secure” (60) and so a return back is out of question for him.

Nina and Ananda are, in many ways, similar to each other. Both, being immigrants from India, experience similar kinds of responses from the mainstream society. In fact when Ananda immigrates he has uncle Sharma as an emotional and material support who had actually encouraged his immigration. Likewise Nina has her sole support in her husband Ananda. Like her husband (who, in spite of being a practicing dentist from India, has to undertake a degree course in dentistry in Canada), Nina has to take up a library science course there before she gets entry into the professional world of Halifax despite having taught as a lecturer in Miranda House in Delhi for ten years. Even in the end she too decides for a no return although for very different reasons. If, on his arrival in Canada, Ananda learns about the life there – its manners and ways – so does Nina. She soon realises despite her expectations that in Canada people do not hanker for relatives. “It’s pointless to think of them (uncle Sharma and his family) as we do of relatives back home.” (132). In the West, close and dependable people comprised of friends like Gary and not relatives. Then even, she learns from her husband that a relationship between a couple is more important than any other. “Couples do things together in this country”. (146). Her association with Sue’s La Leche League and Beth’s support group expose her to the western concepts of liberation, freedom rebellion, courage, integrity and individual woman self. She reads for the first time, beyond authors like Lawrence, *The Second Sex* and *The Female Eunuch*. She also learns the principle that guides the lives of the westerners – push yourself and do new things. Like Ananda, Nina employs these principles in her life – she stands up for her own right,

takes up library science etc. However, it is true that Nina had in her, her own individualism and a sense of an independent spirit, only that it was lying dormant in her. The exposure to western idealism awoke that individual spirit in her.

However both differ from each other in their basic attitude towards the adopted society its culture, life and people. While Ananda's assimilation was quick, swift and smooth without any resistance, that of Nina is pained, stressed and gradual. She takes a lot more time and effort to acculturate. The marriage is arranged in so far as it arises through an astrologer and an introduction masterminded by Ananda's sister Alka and her mother Mrs. Batra; but it is voluntary in the sense that, once introduced the couple embark on a long-distance relationship by airmail and phone. Nina admits to ignorance of much of her own country when she lived there (in Delhi her "Chinese" students from India's north-eastern states had all looked the same to her "I swear I often could not distinguish between my north-eastern students" (141) and listening to a radio report of the Kumbh Mela she finds herself "as much a stranger (to it) as anyone in Canada ... she had never had anything to do with ritual Hinduism" (175). Nina is a voracious reader, but her literary reference points are not Indian but Anglophone – E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence and there is scarcely any evocation in the entire book of the Indian philosophical or literary tradition. More importantly, she had in her childhood stayed in Brussels as an immigrant (her late father being posted as a diplomat there). Thus, Nina does not come exactly from the most traditional of Indian family backgrounds. Even though coming from such a not so rigid semi-Indo background, Nina requires both space and time for her gradual personal development and mental emancipation.

The reasons for the delay in the process of her adaptation can be traced to her uncertain, alienated feelings, discrimination practiced by the host members, survival of the ethnic elements in her, and the differences – cultural, conditional etc. When she immigrates to Canada, Nina leaves behind her the familiarity and steps into the unknown and the uncertain. She is filled with nausea and panic as she sits in the British Airways plane. Yet she has Ananda waiting for her there. Ironically when she leaves Ananda by the end of the novel, she has no one to fall back upon yet she is confident to explore further into the unknown, this time certain of one thing, the impossibility of a return either to Ananda or India. From the very start of her journey to Canada, Nina seems to be getting indications that she will not find life smooth henceforth. Her attire, accessories etc., her nausea which continued and seemed to be an omen, the ignorance from the Punjabi sweeping woman in the Heathrow Airport, all seemed to be discouraging the journey she has undertaken not only to Canada but also in her life.

What all immigrants face on foreign soil is suspicion, discrimination and xenophobia. That he is an expatriate is writ large in the behaviour of the mainstream. Nina undergoes the same fate. The many glances at her bridal bangles, the demanding questions which the officers at the immigration counter in the airport "fire" at her, the cubicle with neon light and no windows where she is taken she feels is a "jail" (107). Though she has a valid visa her passport is scrutinised. Nina feels she is less than a human and all this because of her skin colour. She faces humiliation, has to prove her identity and marriage even though she held a respectable status in the Indian society. How shocking that a high school pass woman officer can imprison, scare and condemn her, she a teacher of an Indian university. The reason why every immigrant leaves his homeland is to earn respect. Ironically he loses respect in the host society to gain respect in the eyes of his native community. Nina's letter to Ananda (108) speaks of the deception every migrant has to experience. They set their foot forth in the hope of finding a "liberal haven" (108) instead what they are made to feel is like an "illegal alien" (108). The only consolation that

remains is the glitter and light of the new world awaiting them. Yet the readers know that for Nina what waited was a hollow life – a life devoid of taste and flavour – signified by the flavourless tea she sips in the restaurant after clearing the immigration counter.

Nina's allegiance to her native country and its people, culture and mores slow down her integration. As a student of library science she has to keep records and make documents of Canadian publications and archives. This fills her with a pang of guilt as "she felt a little disloyal to her own country, at the idea of servicing Canada in such a thorough manner". (259).

The differences, both cultural and conditional, between the two countries also hamper in the process of her adaptation. In Halifax, Nina feels homesick, forlorn and sometimes adventurous. Marriage is all she had longed for. But in her case this seems to be isolating her more both from the society and her husband. In the new land she has no engagement other than household chores, music, radio and occasional visits to supermarkets. Back in India, in B-26 Jangpura she at least had her mother in that cramped room of theirs. She had her colleague cum friend Zenobia, students, classes and above all a job. Here in Halifax she shares a superficial relation with her husband, occasional letters to Zenobia and her mother, and her loneliness. Besides, culturally she is shocked by the open display of passion in public; observes the differences in cinema halls, fairs etc.

Her simultaneous efforts to adapt both to Ananda and to Canada make her feel "...rootless, branchless, just a body floating upon the cold surface of this particular piece of earth". (178). She becomes nostalgic and reminisces with fondness even that which she resented in India especially the 'jhuggis', the poverty, the poor children and the filth.

Despite her delayed progress in her adaptation and assimilation into the Canadian culture and society, Nina eventually integrates into the melting pot. To begin with, three months after her marriage she obtains the visa and is finally allowed entry into the Canadian land. "She had been accepted ... she was in the process of crossing oceans to be one of them". (102). Having never done before in India, Nina starts preparing meat and pork for Ananda although initially she does not consume these herself. Gradually Nina finds her place in the Canadian society. She joins, as a member, the Halifax Memorial Library which brings purpose and meaning to her lonely life with selections of Stephen Leacock and Madame Bovary. She is soon introduced to the Geller family. However, the pretty, educated, English speaking girl from India pass the test and the Gellers' reservation in the beginning quickly turn to friendship. She, with the passage of time, joins La Leche League with the help of Sue and participates in candid conversations regarding her problem in conceiving. She is now a Canadian who has cast away her Indian awkwardness and shyness. Consequently she sees a male gynaecologist, thus expanding into Halifax, whose examination she however detests. Nina gets "an entry into the system". (212) – she finds her first job in Canada, a part-time job in the library. Ironically the closer she goes to establishing herself in the mainstream, she is thrust towards self-dependent finality – her obtaining of the job is timed with Ananda's infidelity though necessary for the medical treatment, which in turn results in their separation. Her merging with the society further occurs when she joins Beth's support group that functions on feminist principles. She not only merges with the society but even with the prominent thoughts harboured by the women of that society. When Ananda opposes her integration into the support group, Nina asserts, "I need to find my feet in this country". (216). Immediately after her arrival in Halifax she longed to conceive but now she speculates, "But was it wise to lose yourself in a child, just because you had nothing to do ..."? (227). The suppressed Nina revived by such books as *The Second Sex* and *The Female Eunuch* (obtained from the support group) observes, "... I miss doing things. I feel like a

shadow. What am I but your wife”? (237). With her conscious decision, Nina joins the library science course in the Library School. “Nina noticed her status had risen, both in her group and in her place of work ... getting a degree that would affect the makeover of her Canadian identity”. (247).

Culturally, her acculturation has been on a linear line – starting with the outward, by shedding Indian clothes, and moving to the inner morals by justifying adultery. Nina’s conversion begins with graduating from salwar kameez and sari (especially unsuited to the climate) to western dress. Thus Kapur writes,

As immigrants fly across oceans they shed their old clothing because clothes maketh the man, and new ones help ease the transition. Men’s clothing has less international variation; the change is not so drastic. But those women who are not used to wearing western clothes find themselves in a dilemma. If they focus on integration, convenience and conformity they have to sacrifice habit, style and self-perception. The choice is hard and in Nina’s case it took months to wear down her resistance. (152).

She even wants to decorate a tree for Christmas, “It hardly mattered if such was not their custom”. (213). Nina transforms into the girl who like any other Canadian woman smokes and drinks beer. Nina’s conversion, especially her licentiousness, is inevitable while living in the West. Although, initially she ignores Anton’s moves, finally she succumbs to both of their desires. She imbibes the western attitude as reverberates through Anton’s words – “But it’s stupid to confine yourself to one person for your whole life. What about adventure, what about experiencing differences? Nobody owns anybody, you know”. (261). She picks up the attitude, is not filled with any sense of guilt or remorse as she vindicates it to be her right too, like the other North Americans who consider it to be their “inalienable right”. (263). After all, her life is her own and she does not owe anyone any explanation since it is for her own pleasure – “a healthy give and take”. (273). Ironically both Ananda and Nina commit adultery away from their native home India. More specifically, Halifax is now their home and they make this adventure when both of them are away from Halifax, Ananda in California and Nina in New York. Finally, she turns from a strict vegetarian to omnivorous. She eats red meat, flesh, mammals, and cows.

When she first came to Halifax, not eating meat had been a way of remaining true to her upbringing. In Halifax her vegetarianism was treated respectfully, as part of her beliefs, but she felt false every time she concurred with a picture of herself as a traditional devout Hindu. Really what did she care about a religion she never practised? After she had had sex with Anton, it seemed especially hypocritical to hang on to vegetables. Down with all taboos. (270).

Finally, Nina imbibes the Canadian spirit of a confrontationist. After her assault by Anton she decides to confront the situation. She will not allow him to ruin her life. She exhibits the same spirit when she leaves Ananda. She is ready to face future and the unknown. Nina promises to herself not to fall “victim to circumstances”. (315). She has become a fighter who abandons both Anton and Ananda as acts of protest. The woman in her proves to be a self-reliant individual in spite of all “the difficulties, the pain, the solitude” (333).

Assimilation into an alien culture quite naturally causes an immigrant to forsake her own native practice. This process starts from the very moment she sets her foot on the adopted land. Even a girl like Nina, who is a staunch believer in middle class Indian values, voluntarily hides

the red and white bridal bangles the moment she lands on the foreign soil. To her these bangles lose their significance into meaningless plastic. Similarly, that she will change her clothing habit is signified by her hanging of her Benarasi, Kanjeevaram, Bandhni saris in her cupboard and shutting the same. Nina is actually unknowingly shutting them off her life. Also, when she visits India for a two month stay she finds the country inextricably poor and third world. She also feels oppressed by the blind acceptance accorded to a visiting daughter-in-law. Her un-Indian, Western individualism restricts her from identifying herself with the mother society. Not only her mind, but her appearance too betrays her. When Nina goes to Rishikesh to immerse her late mother's ashes in Ganga, though dressed in a sari, the taxi drivers treat her as a foreigner. All these are because, with time, she has abandoned her native culture and become like Ananda, a Canadian.

Therefore, through Ananda and Nina Manju Kapur seems to uphold the western spirit, culture, attitude etc. The surplus of comfort, the enhanced individual interest, all require effort and time to imbibe, but once adopted lends an individual a superiority even to an immigrant over a native. Kapur seems to be enthralled with the superiority of the Western culture and attitude. But the writer's Indian spirit gives her a tough resistance to declare the inferiority of her native culture. She cannot restrain from retaining in Nina, in more than one way, traces of Indianness. Her complexion is her identity marker - the 'tan' differentiates her from all whites. Also emotionally she is still the Indian wife who seeks privacy between herself and her husband. When Ananda insists her to call him Andy, she refuses because that will mean carrying alienation into the bedroom. She not only disapproves of Ananda going for a medical treatment with a surrogate, but even points out to Beth, the merits of an arranged marriage. "It has the advantage of social and family sanction, you are not alone to deal with your problems, it is more convenient to fall in love after you marry than before. And certainly it frees you of some of the sexual burden Beauvoir mentions". (222).

Ironically her marriage leads her to loneliness and she suffers due to her husband's problems regarding intimate functions. Moreover, her unhappy relationships with Ananda and Anton prompt her to undertake a journey back to India for two months. India is her motherland still her refuge. Her heart is still divided between India and Canada. Finally, although she has given up her Indianness in its true essence, Nina does perform her mother's last rites, organises the 'chauth' and makes the immersion of Mrs. Batra's ashes in Rishikesh. The Hindu self has survived the onslaught of the Western influences.

However, no amount of remaining Indianness in her can cajole her to return back to the motherland even after she separates from Ananda, the marriage being the bedrock of her existence in Canada. When she was considering the proposal of marriage between herself and Ananda, she was apprehensive – "if anything happens, I'll be left with nothing". (75) particularly when the alliance meant immigration. The readers now know that things have really gone wrong. When Nina suspects a possible affair between Ananda and his ex-patient during his visit to California, the question that immediately springs to her mind is – "Should she return home, announcing her failure to her former world? No, anything was better than that". (205).

A return is impossible for Nina because that will mean the dissolution of the prestige, respect and honour that she has gained in her former world. Also, her visit to India helps her realise that she no longer belongs to her mother society or culture. She has long dissociated from it. She has with great effort integrated into the Canadian life, now a return to the old world will mean a new journey, a new adjustment, a new struggle. Even after her mother's death a return became insignificant. "What was there to bring her to India again"? (326). Moreover, a

realization strikes her when she discovers the one wavy blond hair on her and Ananda's bed. She has just lost her mother, and she has lost Ananda too (to the owner of the blond hair, Mandy). Finally, the reality sinks on her – “You had to be your own anchor”. (328). On having comprehended this truth, Nina finds no reason to return back to India. Any place on the earth is the same for her.

Kapur's protagonist has learnt not to return or retreat. She has not retreated earlier so there is no possibility of one now. To leave Ananda is her deliberate decision. Besides, she is now heading for a job in the University of New Brunswick. There seems a promising life ahead, one to be explored yet. She belonged to Canada once but now it has become insignificant. There is absolutely nothing to hold her back there too. Thus Kapur writes,

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, ways 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. The continent was full of people escaping unhappy pasts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the western world. When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. (334).

Her decision reminds the reader of the very words Ananda's uncle had uttered, -- “One should take the best of one's country and leave”. (136). Truly, the readers discover Nina as an immigrant for life. Nina has not only reinvented herself but become Canadian or rather Western.

For most of the novel Kapur seems to sway between choosing out of the two polarities – the West and the East. There are incidents of East-West encounter when each faces the other. “The novel thus generates an indeterminate kind of hybridity that is neatly encapsulated in the moment soon after Nina's arrival when Ananda takes her to eat at the Taj Mahal, one of the few Indian restaurants in Halifax” (Rollason, 2). To the cuisine of the Taj – ‘Chicken do piyaza, palak, paneer, dal, raita and naan’ Nina reacts: ‘Not bad, not bad at all. Not exactly like home, but distance blurred the distinction’; its ‘photographs of exotic, touristy India’, though, are ‘as unfamiliar to Nina as to any other client’ (‘She wasn't the kind of Indian to respond to camels or colourful dancing girls’), while her husband admits he only comes there ‘to bring friends who think that with me they should be eating Indian food.’ (141-142). The whole episode may serve as an emblem of the uncertain (though not illusory) ‘Indianness’ of the migrant couple. “The tension in the narrative between Indianness and global hybridity is reflected in the texture of the writing” (Rollason, 3). The book's India-located portions are studded with self-standing Indian words, terms like “baraat”, “pheras”, “basti”, “chauth”, and “shamiana” for instance. The reader's encounter Kapur's lexical lists, especially culinary: “She soaked dals and imli, she ground the walnuts for her special barfi, she fried namak para”. (52). However, such Indian lists are balanced by parallel ones of North American consumer goods. – “Corn chips. Salt and vinegar chips. Onion and garlic dip. Mint and coconut chocolate. Cinnamon sweets. Buttery shortbread biscuits”. (180). As Nina ceases to identify more and more with India, the lexical Indianisms– barring the rarity of a visit home – become thin on the ground. They reappear at her mother's funeral – “A small shamiana was spread in the lawn ... Ila ... sang two bhajans ... the pundit gave a small talk about death”. (323). The funeral itself appears almost as the sign of Nina's letting go of any old, exclusively Indian self.

Kapur, in the novel seems to be caught in the confusion as to what hierarchy should be assigned to the West and India. The mental emancipation and internal development coupled with physical comfort and opportunities undoubtedly lure the Eastern world to the West. There is no denying this fact. But completely breaking off the native bond is also impossible. Moreover, a permissive culture has its disadvantages too. (It is ironic that the reason for which Nina leaves her husband is the very element that has contaminated her life too. If she justifies her committing adultery with the fact that she is not taking anything away from her husband, she has to learn to face consequences that may appear in her own life for imbibing the western attitude and culture.) There is no denying this fact too. It is at this juncture that Manju Kapur tries to resolve the dichotomy by bringing in the concept of the world turning into a global village which supersedes the concept of diaspora and where the horizon can be pushed further back so that anywhere can be home. But this alternative as provided and touched upon by the writer leads to the inevitable question then --- is civilization to move back to man's nomadic life? Kapur does not provide her readers with the answer but ends her novel trying to resolve a question with an answer which in turn leaves a question unanswered.

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