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**Ali SALAMI**

University of Tehran  
16 Azar St., Enghelab Sq., IR – Tehran  
salami.a@ut.ac.ir

UDK 821.111(540).09 Kapur, M.-31

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v6i2.3>**Farnoosh PIRAYESH**

Alborz Campus  
University of Tehran  
16 Azar St., Enghelab Sq., IR – Tehran  
farnooshpirayesh@gmail.com

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## FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY: NINA'S QUEST FOR HYBRID IDENTITY IN MANJU KAPUR'S *THE IMMIGRANT*

**Abstract**

The paper explores the liberating power of Bhabha's concept of hybridity in Manju Kapur's novel *The Immigrant*. By concentrating on Nina's immigration to Canada, the novel addresses her early affliction due to the cultural clash between the East and West, tradition and modernity, her assimilation problems, as well as her gradual assimilation, her in-betweenness, transformation in her roles and identity, and survival in the host world. She opens a space in-between the home and host culture, mediates between them, and becomes the citizen of two worlds; she thus enters the third space, i.e. she stands in-between two cultures prioritizing neither the home nor the host culture but the middle ground and emerges as a hybrid who occupies the in-between space and develops a double vision. Using Homi Bhabha's insights, this study seeks to demonstrate that being positioned in the third space, i.e. moving beyond the polarities and challenging the fixedness of identity and experiencing in-betweenness – being neither one nor the other, might pave the way for her liberation. The paper is to show that Nina is neither one nor the other, i.e. neither a traditional nor a modern woman but both, simultaneously transcending and reconciling the tradition and modernity.

**Keywords:** hybridity, third space, diaspora, in-betweenness, immigration, Manju Kapur, *The Immigrant*.

## Introduction

The decision to leave one's motherland behind and move to a new country is a crucial one because it leads to a "serious psychological crisis and a unique developmental opportunity" (Elovitz et al. 47). Most immigrants who cross "geographical borders" seldom prognosticate "the emotional and behavioral boundaries" they will come across (Espin 20). As soon as they set foot in the new land, they may be confused due to "role expectations, values, and identity" or shocked because of the differences between the home and host cultures; they feel uprooted and impotent as they find themselves unable to act proficiently in the host culture (Espin 19). This occurs because they realize that the identities that are commonplace in their native land are no more wanted in the new one. Even though identity changes during one's lifetime, the effect of immigration on identity is dramatic because immigration entails considerable psychological transformations that develop through the immigrant's lifetime and lead to shaping a brand-new identity. At first, an immigrant's identity is fragmented and fractured because the price of immigration is fragmentation and loss of identity in the process of hybridization. Consequently, an immigrant begins a quest for identity, examines the homogeneous ethnic identity, and questions the idea of fixed unified identity. Simply put, the immigrant loses his/her identity and reconstructs it.

For Bhabha, there is no essential identity as identities are constructed. He maintains that in the world of travelling and migration identity indicates "iteration and the re-creation of the self" (9), that the question of identity is "always poised uncertainly, tenebrously, between shadow and substance," and that the image of self and subsequent self-consciousness is "at once refracted and transparent" (49). He also warns how perilous it is to believe in fixed identities within the colonial cultures' classification, which strikes at "the 'roots' in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present" (Bhabha 9). It must be noted as well that identity, a site in which the notions of diaspora and hybridity connect, is constructed in "interaction and contestation with both old and new homelands and forged in the 'turbulence of migration'" (Collins and Solomos 497). Bhabha, however, prioritizes neither the home nor the host but the borderline that he calls the third space in which identities are shaped.

Bhabha sees hybridity as the third space, "which enables other positions to emerge" (211). Hybridity functions as a regular movement between spaces,

passes “through and between identity itself,” and this latitude to move between identities does defy the allegations of “essentialized racial identity” (Yazdih 33). Subjects, therefore, are shaped “in-between” and such an in-between space bridges the home and the world (Bhabha 2-13). The in-between space is the space of hybridity where “cultural meanings and identities” bear the marks of other meanings and identities (Ashcroft et al. 53-54). For meaning to be generated, the I and You must be organized in a passage through the third space, which refers both to “the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance” (Bhabha 36). In fact, the subject of enunciation encounters split and obliterates the traditional idea of subject (Bhabha 36). The third space of enunciation, which causes “meaning and reference” to be ambivalent, ruins the idea of an “integrated, open, expanding” cultural identity (Bhabha 37). The third space, therefore, questions the idea of the homogeneous, unified cultural identity verified by the past and preserved in people’s “national tradition” (Bhabha 37). It is in this conflicting and ambivalent space that cultural identity comes into being, which highlights the fact that cultures are not pure (Ashcroft et al. 108). Once this ambivalent space of cultural identity is recognized, one can vanquish the “exoticism of cultural diversity” and find an “empowering hybridity” within which cultural distinction may function (Bhabha 136).

Drawing on these ideas, the study will discuss Bhabha’s implications of hybridity, identity, and the third space to disclose empowering hybridity in Nina, the heroine of *The Immigrant*. Specifically, the paper will demonstrate that the protagonist undergoes transformation in diverse aspects (eating habits, dress style, and behavior) and shapes a hybrid identity ultimately. To achieve this end, the paper is divided into chapters entitled Immigration, Traditional Nina, Nina In-between Home and Host, Transformed Nina, and Hybrid Nina.

## **Immigration**

When a person immigrates, s/he is likely to encounter displacement, nostalgia, and the overwhelming need to survive. Immigrants’ responses to the effects of immigration vary: some desperately cling to their home culture, others abandon their home culture thoroughly and embrace the new one; still others strike a balance between the home and host cultures. They, as Monika Fludernik asserts, have to:

meet at least two challenges: the external pressure of assimilation to the traditions of the cultural majority and internal tensions between different generations within the diaspora itself. They may respond to these challenges by adapting to the new way of life or by holding on to the traditions and beliefs of their homelands. (177)

Immigrants should discard their past in order to be able to survive in the host land, but they initially fail to do so because they arrive with, as N. Jayaram claims, “socio-cultural baggage” consisting of “religion, language, music, art, dress, cuisine, etc. often in the folk form . . . [and] in their regional variants” (qtd. in Gupta 16). Immigration “brings in its tail not only people but their culture and cultural commodities” (Mulloo 117). When immigrants cross borders, they undergo psychological transmogrification because their ethnic identities, forged socially, religiously, historically and politically over years, shift constantly (Oberoi et al. 192). Immigrants thus encounter enormous problems while acculturating due to the cultural clashes between the cultures of the home and the host.

Women immigrants encounter even greater challenges during the process of immigration. Yet, despite being restricted by traditional upbringing and values, women immigrants are given more opportunities in the host culture, which could lead them to independence and transformation. Transformation does not appear immediately because she always adheres to the home country's tradition and culture right after settlement in the host land. In the migration process, women turn into “both the creators of the ties that bind as well as the carriers of culture” (Kalra et al. 52). For example, in *The Immigrant*, “Kapur deftly explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives: the way a young woman's life, already so pressured in professional and reproductive terms, becomes an even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture” (Scurr qtd. in Panda 575). During her odyssey towards hybridity, Nina thus undergoes two phases: firstly, she remains true to her Indian origin as well as Indian values and resists change; secondly, she gradually undergoes transformation, becomes autonomous, and shapes her hybrid identity. That is, Nina initially holds onto tradition as much as she can; however, as the story progresses, she not only gains confidence but also discards the restraints of tradition, redefines herself, and declares her independence.

## Traditional Nina

Those in the minority cannot rely on tradition to express themselves; yet, they are equipped with “the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness” (Bhabha 2). First, the migrant experiences “a half-life, like the partial presence of colonial identity; second, s/he repeats a life lived in the country of origin, but this repetition is not identical, introducing difference and transformation; further, this difference-in-repetition is a way of reviving that past life, of keeping it alive in the present” (Huddart 53).

Upon her arrival in Canada, Kapur’s Nina attempts to revive her past life, to keep it alive in the host country. She is a vegetarian and a committed Hindu wife who follows her home culture and adheres to her former culture and identity: “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” (Kapur 163). Nina is an immigrant who “came with old world values” (Kapur 374) to Canada, so she initially thinks and behaves as “a traditional, backward Indian girl, like some of these women you see at the India Club” (Kapur 197). Her “thoughts centered around her warm home and a cup of hot tea” (Kapur 197). She exhibits the dominance of her traditional side when she wishes to join the pilgrims for “Kumbh Mela”—a purifying custom “held in Allahabad every twelve years,” and considers “the Ganga” “to be naturally pure” (Kapur 233). Nina thus goes through a “hostility phase” and questions the host culture (Oberq qtd. in Kim 25). For instance, she looks askance at her husband Ananda’s taking a gift for Gary because Ananda “spent so much time helping them” and she wonders why “still he had to take something. Was that how things were done here, give, give and give? She resented every fold of the thick coloured paper around the bottle” (Kapur 192). In a similar fashion, she “felt ashamed of herself” for “using her situation to gain sympathy and comfort” from women to whom she opens up: “see what being in this country had reduced her to” (Kapur 216).

Nina’s allegiance to her home culture also comes to the fore in her advocacy of arranged marriages. Like many Indian women, Nina sees marriage as “the bedrock of her life in Canada” (Kapur 362) and supports arranged marriages in her meetings with other women. She, who “could defend arranged marriages in her sleep,” vociferously says that “many people prefer it actually. 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 even asserts that “If you are used to the idea, it is not strange” (Kapur 291). She also claims that “these marriages are greater successes than ones made on the basis of emotion” (Kapur 91). When it comes to her own marriage, she maintains: “everybody needs someone, and fate has joined us [her and her husband] together” (Kapur 389).

Nina’s adherence to home tradition is mostly highlighted in her wishful thinking about motherhood. In India,

A woman’s prime function, as defined by . . . [Indian] society, is to serve as the vessel that will bring forth the next generation. From her childhood, an Indian girl is taught that she is born to marry, procreate and serve others mutely. Social institutions shape her to fit these roles “voluntarily.” Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or religion, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture does. (Sobana 160)

Nina thus “wanted a child, to settle down, to give her days focus in this new country. What was she to do with her time, it wasn’t as though she had a life” (Kapur 222). For Nina, motherhood turns into “an essentialist desire for identity, self-fulfillment, security, assimilation and belongingness into the new country” (Sobana 151): “if she had a baby, the next 20 years would be taken care of. Her interest in Canada would grow, her child’s home after all” (Kapur 213).

Another attempt to keep her Indian identity alive in the host country is visible in Nina’s attachment to Indian food. Nina’s initial attachment to her home country food reflects the idea that a significant “realm of the immigrant’s psychosocial struggle is constituted by the difference in the food he has grown up eating and what he now has to consume every day. Besides gustatory and olfactory familiarity, the original food provides all sorts of narcissistic and object-related gratifications” (Akhtar 93). When Nina “first came to Halifax, not eating meat had been a way of remaining true to her upbringing” (Kapur 355). While in Canada, she muses if she could “change now?” (Kapur 151), decides she “won’t get used to it” (Kapur 151), and keeps eating “rice and dal” (Kapur 294). She also “had secretly carried these [the special pickles] ten thousand miles” and has brought “recipes her mother had anxiously written down for her” (Kapur 151). Nina is, for example, ecstatic when she and her husband dine out at a restaurant that is run by “an Indian couple” (Kapur 184). Once there,

“these smells and imagined sights travelled across the world from north India to eastern Canada to kick her sharply in the stomach” (Kapur 187).

Nina’s attempts to revive the past life also include wearing traditional Indian women’s clothes as clothing is closely associated with Nina’s “ethnic identity” (Woollett qtd. in Espin 126). Nina arrives in Canada in her traditional clothes and for some time after her arrival keeps on wearing them as she believes her clothes demonstrate her ethnic identity. By preferring ethnic clothes, an immigrant wishes not to lose ties with the homeland and to experience the sense of belonging. Similarly, Nina “had fancied carrying all parts of India to Canada in her clothes” (Kapur 151) as, “with getting married and travelling to the West, ordinary was out of the question” (Kapur 155).

### **Nina In-between Home and Host Culture**

The in-between space is accessible merely through immigration, and an immigrant not only opens the in-between space between the home and host cultures but also occupies it. The in-betweenness is thus a state in which one finds out that their own culture and the new culture are inconsistent physiologically, psychologically, socially, and philosophically:

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an “in-between” temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. (Bhabha 148)

Immigrants, therefore, are “two-forked creatures” (Hoffman qtd. in Ritivoi 168). The in-between space is further “the space of transformation and reconstruction of identity” (Nyman qtd. in Kuortti and Nyman 199), which must be “fought for and negotiated” (Rutherford 106). To put it another way, the “in-between” space is the space of “immense creativity and possibility” (McLeod 215). Bhabha also asserts that to live on the border one needs the “art of the present” (1). This means that one should embrace “the contrary logic of the border” and use it “to rethink the dominant ways we represent things like history, identity and community” (McLeod 217). Borders, according to McLeod, are significant

as they are “full of contradiction and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places” (217).

In *The Immigrant*, Nina is depicted as a heroine trapped between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, home and host, and dislocation and relocation. In other words, she finds herself vacillating between her Indian identity, family expectations, and her own wishes. Consequently, she bears the brunt of the disparity between “domesticity and the outer space, tradition and modernity” (Alterno 78). Her joy in the early days of her settlement in Canada ebbs away as she, like other immigrants, faces her fragmentation and in-betweenness. Nina is a diasporant who is “not quite Indian, yet not completely foreign,” who inhabits “an in-between space” of which she is aware (Kothai):

Certain Indians become immigrants slowly. They are not among those who have fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death threats, nor among those for whom the doors of their country slam shut the minute they leave its borders. 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. . . . As far as citizenship is concerned, a divided heart means that the immigrant clings to his status, feeling that to give up his passport is the final break in the weakened chain that binds him to his motherland. That day does come however. (Kapur 162)

Nina’s “in-betweenness” is further emphasized by “fluctuating emotions [that] were part of the adjustment process” (Kapur 242), by being seen as “the perfect mix of East and West” (Kapur 164) who not only “cries and feels homesick” but also feels “adventurous” sometimes (Kapur 335). Although she “is vegetarian,” she feels uneasy every time she announces it and after some time she is “sick of rice and dal” and does not “know what’s the matter with . . . [her]” (Kapur 335). After she tries Indian food at a restaurant, she concludes it is “not bad, not bad at all. Not exactly like home, but distance blurred the distinction” (Kapur 187). On the one hand, she is

grateful for the rest of . . . [her] life [because she is] in a place, five hundred or was it six hundred–seven hundred million of . . . [her] country men would give their eye teeth to be in. . . . [She has] a Saab, a General Electric fridge, a washing machine, a dishwasher, running hot water, . . . [she] can eat and drink whatever . . . [she] like[s]. (Kapur 234)



On the other, there is an always present doubt as she wonders:

But just having to tell herself this seemed so pathetic. Did the people who lived in these houses with the blank windows ever count their washing machines? She could see two, three cars parked in the driveways of the houses on Young Avenue; did the inmates look at them every morning and think how lucky they were? Then why should she? (Kapur 235)

The mere presence of doubt makes her feel “miserable” and a “culprit” (Kapur 235).

### **Transformed Nina**

Immigrants do not adapt to the new culture at the same speed: some adjust smoothly and swiftly, some do not. How one undergoes a change depends on the home culture and the “current cultural context, as well as on personal characteristics, such as age, gender, place of birth, and education, and the characteristics of one’s group, such as size, structure, status, values and beliefs” (Sam and Berry xx). Their adjustment to the host culture also depends on the ability, as David Morley asserts, to “move beyond the singularity of perspective that has characterised . . . traditional nationalism so as to construct a sense of identity, security and stability which is more open to others, beyond its own narrow confines” (qtd. in Kalra et al. 95), resulting in immigrants’ endeavours to become more and more independent of values and tradition of the original country. During this phase, immigrants experience a heavy dilemma because they not only strive to be loyal to the norms of the home culture but also try to keep up with the requirements of the host culture. The adjustment is an arduous task because “more than personal adjustment to a strange situation is required to make the immigration experience a creative, productive series of events in one’s life” (Elovitz et al. 25). Adjustment, on the one hand, is agonizing, “much like fitting the proverbial square peg into a round hole” (Elovitz et al. 25); on the other, it necessitates transformations that one undergoes in order to accommodate to the new land.

According to Bhabha, “the liberatory people who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity” (38) and are involved in “translation and negotiation” (Bhabha 38): they translate and negotiate “cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextu-

al temporality of cultural difference” (Bhabha 38). As immigrants go through “adaptive transformation, their internal attributes and self-identification change from being cultural to being increasingly intercultural, and their emotional adherence to the culture of their childhood weakens, while accommodating the host culture into their self-conception” (Kim 69).

Like some immigrants, Nina initially does not manage to adjust smoothly to an immigrant’s life. Her assimilation to the host country is excruciating, stressful, and slow due to her loyalty to the traditions of her home country: “in Nina’s case it took months to wear down her resistance” (Kapur 200). Nina afterwards wishes to be “more in charge of her circumstances” (Kapur 220) because “her future [has been] still as unclear as on the day she had wed” (Kapur 298) and anticipates a “day she would have clarity of mind and heart” (Kapur 171). As she knows that she is “emotionally, financially and socially, heavily dependent on him [Ananda]” (Kapur 286), Nina wishes “to find ... [her] feet in this country... [so she does not have to] . . . walk on” (Kapur 283) his. She “feel[s] like a shadow” (Kapur 310) and wonders if it would be “wise to lose ... [herself] in a child, just because ... [she] had nothing to do, and these were the expectations with which ... [she] had been brought up?” (Kapur 298). She becomes “less enthusiastic about a baby” (Kapur 286) and decides “it’s too soon. I have to find my feet” (Kapur 310). She keeps reminding “herself that for an immigrant changed situations meant changed priorities. Her group assured her she had to move in ways that enabled rather than disabled her” (Kapur 325).

Immigration necessitates compromising cultural differences in terms of clothes as well. In other words, shedding the ethnic attire facilitates an immigrant’s adjustment (Panda 574) and the apparel transforms into “an identifiable symbol of a changing consciousness” (Schreier qtd. in Espin 126). Nina, who initially resists shedding her traditional clothes, gradually muddles through because “once dressed in a certain way, it would be easy for her to blend in” (Kapur 201). Nina knows that because of weather conditions and difficult maintenance of her ethnic clothes “she couldn’t live in such clothes for the rest of her life,” so she acquiesces “to graduate to Western” (Kapur 200-202).

In order to develop a hybrid identity and survive in the new land one needs to undergo transformation in his/her lives and roles. As immigrants go through “adaptive transformation, their internal attributes and self-identification change from being cultural to being increasingly intercultural, and their emotional ad-

herence to the culture of their childhood weakens, while accommodating the host culture into their self-conception” (Kim 69). This transformation does not only occur within an immigrant’s identity but also encompasses other things like his/her choice of food. Nina finds it demanding to adjust to the eating habits of her new land. The first change in her eating habits appears as she “touch[es] meat” to cook a dish for her husband (Kapur 168-169). Further change occurs when she, disappointed by Indian food at a restaurant, “bravely” proposes that they “can go to Mike’s Ribs next time” (Kapur 187). The real change occurs when she decides that all taboos should be dismissed (Kapur 355). Thus, one day when her husband is cooking, she decides she “will have a little” fish (Kapur 355). Later, she graduates to “red meat,” which is “the real test”: “Flesh. Mammals. Cow. Cows that looked into your eyes” (Kapur 356). In fact, she “could have graduated to chicken from fish,” but she “did not want the dishonesty involved in these slow, cautious steps,” thus following her husband’s motto: when “in Rome, do as the Romans do” (Kapur 356). Changing her eating habits proves advantageous to her because she feels she is in control of her body and that she is offered more opportunities: “that Monday Nina walked to the library, fish and beef indelibly part of her being. Feeling less Indian had its advantages. There were more possibilities in the world she could be open to. Her body was her own” (Kapur 357). Another change occurs while she is ordering “sushi,” which she does know is “raw fish”: even though “dread filled her,” she realizes “life was all about pushing yourself and doing new things” (Kapur 406).

Furthermore, despite her former advocacy of arranged marriages, she eventually admits that “she hadn’t wanted an arranged marriage, had only entered into one when she had no other choice, and after a long courtship” and keeps wondering if “her marriage” was “arranged by herself? Fate? Circumstances? Alka? Her mother? Her age?” (Kapur 293). Hence, she “decided she was a fool” (Kapur 298). Nina then enters a liaison with a classmate named Anton. It is with Anton that she breaks all the taboos: “it’s stupid to confine yourself to one person for your whole life. What about adventure, what about experiencing differences? Nobody owns anybody” (Kapur 344). In Ottawa, her transformation further comes to the fore: “Thursday night. To celebrate the last day, the graduate students went to a pub cum restaurant downtown. The air was blue with cigarette smoke. In the spirit of adventure Nina held a tentative cigarette between her fingers. Before her was a second glass of beer” (Kapur 341). The relationship with Anton relieves her of tensions and she exercises independence to opt for

the life she wishes: "All around her she heard of open marriages, of no bonds but the voluntary, of no living according to the rules of others. Her life was her own; she didn't owe anybody any explanations" (Kapur 359).

Not only does displacement transform gender roles but it also opens new and formerly unattainable possibilities in terms of education and employment for women. In fact, if an immigrant is granted opportunities in terms of education and career, s/he will adjust successfully to the host culture (Jacobsen and Pratap 90). And as soon as immigrants deal with "strangeness and homesickness," they must learn the language, lifestyle and at last they must land a job (Jacobsen and Pratap 83). By gaining positions and landing jobs, immigrants survive. It should be noted that immigrant women are often faced with limited opportunities in terms of jobs offered owing to lack of training or sufficient education. If a woman is unemployed and financially dependent on her husband, her husband can restrain her monetarily and exert his patriarchal power on her (Gomes 15). Yet, once a displaced woman is economically empowered, her security increases and she takes control of her life. As a result, she not only becomes involved with "household and community decision-making processes," but also improves her "negotiating position" (Martin and Tirman 97-98). By making money in the host land, women run counter to "traditional gender roles and authority" (Tsolidis 57) and can lead a life of "dignity and self-respect" (Singh 109).

In the novel, Nina goes through a similar process. The reader learns that she has "come to Canada in the throes of hope and love, that was why it was taking her so long to adjust to the necessity of a career" (Kapur 306). Her adaptation to the new land begins when she initiates finding her feet in the host land by taking a job and later pursuing education. For her, the "work is not merely a source of income but also a psychological necessity" (Akhtar 31). Although at first she finds it "pleasant" not to do "anything for a while" as she wants to start a family immediately (Kapur 164), she nevertheless wonders "'maybe I should look for a job?'" (Kapur 189). In fact, "she was not particular about a job; any job will do" (Kapur 248). In spite of her lack of qualifications, Nina manages to find a job in her new country:

On the last day of Ananda's absence, Nina got a job. It was perhaps inevitable that her trips to the library would coincide, sooner or later, with a notice announcing the need for part-time help. She gazed at this notice

lovingly—an answer to a prayer, another gift from the library—knowing in her heart that this job was meant for her. (Kapur 270)

Although it was just “a part-time job, paid by the hour” (Kapur 282), it “was good ... that in the middle of all these changes she had a new job, a place with purpose, co-workers, timings and salary attached to it” (Kapur 270). Indeed, “work is an easy way to integrate. Work engages the mind and prevents it from brooding over the respective merits of what has been lost and gained. Colleagues are potential friends” (Kapur 163). In the meantime, encouraged by Gayatri and the co-counselling group, Nina considers pursuing her education: “Maybe she could be like Beth, study to be a librarian. She could continue what she was doing, but with respect and a future. As a Part-timer she only got minimum wages, it was essentially a student’s job; under thirty-five hours a week” (Kapur 308).

Without a doubt, education for immigrant women facilitates their self-development and it paves the way to their independence, empowering them. According to Melinda McPherson, empowerment is “the ability to make choices (such as a job of choice), to speak the local language, to be knowledgeable, to see that there were pathways after tragedy, to express an independent perspective, to exercise a critical perspective, and to be financially independent” (88). In the novel, Nina’s quest for education, and indirectly for empowerment, starts when she makes up her mind to apply for “a library degree,” the main reasons being: “‘because I have to do something that ensures me a job I am suited for, where I won’t take forever to qualify.’ And that would give her independence, she thought but didn’t say” (Kapur 309). A few months later, “Nina got the letter they had all been hoping for. She stared at it, this promise of a degree recognised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and with it the possibility of a job anywhere in North America” (Kapur 322). Thus, “for the next two years, hers was the comfort of being part of a student body, no longer the outsider, one of many bound together by a huge, squat, grey institutional building, five floors high, crammed with books, learning and administration” (Kapur 324–325). By doing this, Nina “was taking the first steps towards autonomy” as she was “not being controlled by circumstances” (Kapur 323) any longer. When she decided to pursue her education, “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” (Kapur 324). She anticipates becoming “a qualified librarian, one who had the promise of a job anywhere in North America. She would believe in that promise, believe in new opportunities. Certainly those

seemed more within her reach than her companionate marriage plus children dream" (Kapur 415). Through her quest for education, Nina gains both independence and "self-reliance, identity and survival" (Neelayadatchy 6).

### **Nina: The Hybrid**

Hybridity signifies "border existences, of subaltern identities as existing between two competing identities" (Hall 91). It glorifies what is heterogeneous, plural, and different. The hybrid dwells "on the border" and is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition that constitutes it as different from either alternative (Hall 91). Hybridity is thus seen as an "internal growth" (Kim 145), as "the third space":

[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford 211)

The third space is "a space of gendering, of emasculation but also of reorientation and multiplicity" where house and home become "a space that is ruptured and imaginatively transformed by queer diasporic subjects even as they remain within its confines" (Gopinath qtd. in Ikas and Wagner 92). In this space, a person, be it male or female, is not entangled in the binary oppositions anymore, nor are they stuck within a specific fixed identity (Ikas and Wagner 92).

To survive in the new land, one has to put down new roots and fit in, liberate oneself from malice, guilt and remorse, obliterate the unpleasant past events, and accept new opportunities. A successful immigrant is the one who balances their past and present, negotiates the two, becomes the citizen of two worlds, and shapes a new identity accordingly. That would mean that such a cross-cultural individual dwells on the borderline between two cultures, moves between them, and merges both the local and the global. The immigrant thus "rewrites home and presents new identities and subjectivities emerging within a confluence of heterogeneous cultures" (Capello qtd. in Banerjee 6). The immigrants, however, do not discard their past completely because, as Bhabha asserts, the "beyond" is not something new nor does it mean to leave the past behind (1).

As a result, the present is no more viewed as a “break” from or a “bonding with the past or the future, no longer a synchronic presence” (Bhabha 4).

As it has been maintained throughout this paper, the novel depicts immigration as regeneration and transformation and shows the formation of a hybrid identity by immigrants. Nina is not bogged down by everything that happens to her; instead she grabs the opportunities offered. Instead of being paralyzed by norms, traditions, and domestic values, she opts for blending in. She gets the best of both worlds, adopts a cross-cultural identity, and is empowered on the journey of self-discovery. By inhabiting two cultures, Nina adopts a plural identity and emerges as a hybrid. Nina’s transformation starts with her decision to pursue her education, to find a job, and to alter her clothing style and eating habits. Yet, it is after she discovers her husband’s infidelity and Anton’s intentions that she severs the ties, liberates herself, and moves on. The woman who leaves Halifax is far from the woman who entered it once. While early in the novel Nina craves for a spouse, at the end she feels the “need to be ... [her]self” and to go somewhere “away from” her husband, thus carving out a new route for herself (Kapur 437). Her education in Canada makes her autonomous and her mother’s death emboldens her to take her life in her own hands.

Although “her mother had died and she was entertaining thoughts of Ananda being her solitary anchor” (Kapur 431), she decides that “You had to be your own anchor” (Kapur 431) and realizes that “to a certain extent this country freed [her] emotional needs from the yoke of matrimony and social sanction” (Kapur 437). When “the University of New Brunswick called her for an interview,” she decided to take this opportunity, “packed her bags and left for Fredericton on a Greyhound bus. In her bones she knew she would get the job. Interviews had always been easy for her” (Kapur 438). After all, when her mother died, “there was nothing tying her down anywhere. She was travelling away from Halifax, deliberately pulling at the bonds that held her” (Kapur 438), thus feeling “relieved,” taking joy in her “regeneration,” liberating herself “from the nuptial bond and social sanction, and resuscitat[ing] her feminine identity” (Sobana 159). While leaving Halifax, she cherishes good memories, which she deems evanescent:

those who had been nice to her, wayfarer on the path, nothing permanent, but interacting with them had made that stretch easier. Colleagues at HRL, the woman’s group that encouraged her to be angry and assertive.

Beth, Gayatri library school; the sense of community was there, warning but temporary everything temporary. (Kapur 438)

She realizes that “one should only live for the moment” (Kapur 388) as 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. (Kapur 438)

Not only do Nina's thoughts reflect the idea that the diaspora people are always somehow “en route: they come from somewhere, the old home which is linked with the past, they live in their new country in the present, and they might even be on their way to another place which will provide a not yet determined future” (Fludernik 294) but they also indicate that she will engage in “heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, [thus evolving into] a floating resident of the Western world” (Kapur 438-439). At the end of the process of her transformation and rediscovery, Nina realizes that “anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again” (Kapur 439).

## Conclusion

This paper discusses how Nina, the protagonist of *The Immigrant*, achieves hybridity. In the quest for hybridity, Nina, through her immigration experience, encounters various challenges the most important of which is the cultural clash between the East and the West or, better to say, between tradition and modernity, which agonizes her. On the other hand, immigration opens ample opportunities for her in terms of self-discovery, job, and education. In the process, she emerges as a hybrid, which is a gradual rather than an immediate process for her because of her attachment to the home culture. While she oscillates between the home culture and the host culture, for the sake of survival she grabs the opportunities offered, studies and gets a job, transforms herself in more ways than she has ever imagined, negotiates the home and host cultures, gains both freedom of expression and thought, learns to be self-reliant, and, as a result,



emerges as a hybrid. Nina undergoes metamorphosis both in appearance and attitude, so she changes from a whiney woman clinging to traditional clothes and thoughts to a modern woman who transcends her obstacles, liberates herself from the manacles of tradition, reduces and rejects dependence on others (namely her mother and husband), fends for herself and becomes autonomous, walks out of her home and into the unknown, and treasures her fluid identity. As a result, she transforms into a successful woman in control of her life who, nevertheless, does not relinquish her roots entirely.

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# OD TRADICIJE DO SUVREMENOSTI: NININA POTRAGA ZA HIBRIDNIM IDENTITETOM U ROMANU *IMIGRANTICA* MANJU KAPUR

## Sažetak

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### Ali SALAMI

Sveučilište u Teheranu  
16 Azar St., Enghelab Sq., IR – Tehran  
salami.a@hotmail.com

### Farnoosh PIRAYESH

Alborz kampus  
Sveučilišta u Teheranu  
16 Azar St., Enghelab Sq., IR – Tehran  
farnooshpirayesh@gmail.com

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Rad proučava oslobađajuću moć Bhabhinog koncepta hibridnosti u romanu *Imigrantica* Manju Kapur. Prateći imigriranje protagonistice Nine u Kanadu, roman prikazuje njezine početne teškoće zbog kulturalnih razlika između Istoka i Zapada, tradicije i suvremenosti, njezine probleme s asimilacijom kao i njezin život između dvije sredine, promjenu njezine društvene uloge i identiteta te preživljavanje u novom svijetu. Nina ulazi u prostor između vlastite i nove kulture, posreduje između njih i živi u oba svijeta; na taj način, ona postaje dijelom trećeg prostora, tj. nalazi se u sredini ne dajući prednost ni jednoj ni drugoj kulturi, hibridom koji nastanjuje prostor između te razvija dvostruku svijest. Cilj je ovog rada primjenom Homi Bhabhinih teorijskih koncepata pokazati da biti dijelom trećeg prostora, tj. nadići suprotnosti, propitati ukalupljenost identiteta i iskusiti život u sredini – ne pripadati ni jednoj ni drugoj kulturi – može funkcionirati kao oblik Ninina oslobođenja. Nina nije ni tradicionalna ni suvremena žena nego oboje jer istovremeno i nadilazi i pomiruje tradiciju i suvremenost.

**Ključne riječi:** hibridnost, treći prostor, dijaspora, biti u sredini, imigracija, Manju Kapur, *Imigrantica*