



Immigrant Sentiments, Expressed Through the Indian Sub-continental Female Diasporic Voices

Debasis Samaddar

Assistant Teacher of English,

Chowhatta High School, Birbhum, West Bengal, India

Abstract: In this era of globalization people of the world and especially people from the third world countries are migrating to the developed countries in search of betterment of life. The various sentiments and feelings of these people and their urge to adjust themselves in the alien land, are often expressed through the voices of the diasporic writers. This paper seeks to show the different immigrant sentiments as expressed through the works of three Indian sub-continental diasporic female writers - Uma Parmeswaran, Yasmine Gooneratne and Monika Ali.

Indian diasporic female writer, Uma Parmeswaran's first novel is *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. It deals with two Indian immigrant families in Canada and it expresses the various tensions that the families face being minority in the alien society.

Sri Lankan diasporic female writer, Yasmin Gooneratne's novel *A Change of Skies* deals with a Sri Lankan family that moves to Australia. Here she presents the themes of immigration and adjustment to the new land.

Bangladeshi diasporic female writer, Monika Ali in her novel *Brick Lane* describes how Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant woman in London, experiences social and psychological alienation for a certain period of her life and how she ultimately destroys the constraints at the end of the novel.

Keywords: Globalisation, Third World, Diaspora, Diasporic literature, Immigrant.

Introduction: In this era of globalization people of the world and especially people from the third world countries are migrating to the developed countries in search of betterment of life. The various sentiments and feelings of these people and their urge to adjust themselves in the alien land, are often expressed through the voices of the diasporic writers. This paper seeks to show the different immigrant sentiments as expressed

through the works of three Indian sub-continental diasporic female writers - Uma Parmeswaran, Yasmine Gooneratne and Monika Ali.

Diaspora and Diasporic Literature: The word diaspora originally comes from the Greek term “*diasperien*” that means “to sow or scatter seeds”. Diaspora has also “historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile” (Braziel, P. 1). Therefore, diaspora may be defined as dispersion of people, language or culture that was formerly developed in one place.

When an individual or group of people start creating literary production about people or language they may have disinherited, but writing in another language, they may be called as diasporic literature. That’s why we hear about Indian diasporic literature in Canada, Sri Lankan diasporic literature in Australia or Bangladeshi diasporic literature in UK and so on. From the locational point of view, diasporic writings have been classified as “East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Asian Pacific, Caribbean, South American, Latin American, African, and Central European”. Though, “recent uses of the term move from essentialist notions of homeland, national or ethnic identity, and geographical location to deployments of diaspora conceptualised in terms of hybridity, metissage, or heterogeneity” (Braziel, P.5-6)

The writers of Indian diaspora are trying to re-invent India from their own perspectives. Uma Parmeswaran is one of those Indian diasporic writers who have greatly enriched English literature, through their literary contributions. Her first novel, *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, is set against the backdrop of the floods in Winnipeg in 1977. It was published in 2002. The novel deals with two Indian immigrant families – the Bhaves and their cousins the Moghes in Canada and it expresses the various tensions that the families face being minority in the alien society and the conflicts which are both internal and external, personal and political. The Bhaves and the Moghes are different from some families that are usually seen in diasporic fiction. No authoritarian parents or weepy sentiments are seen here. Rather, the narrative is about a negotiation between different cultural values, which is quite common in most of the immigrant families. At the same time, the novel also finds joy in daily immigrant life.

The Bhave family consists of parents - Sharad and Savitri and their three children - Jyoti, Jayant and Krish. Sharad originally belongs to a wealthy family in Pune. Giving up his profession as a scientist, Sharad has started business in Canada. Savitri teaches at a local school. Jyoti, their elder daughter, is a college student and she is in relation with Pierre, while Jayant has just turned 18. Jayant have some elevated feelings for their ancestral house and for their native land, India. He expresses his emotion thus: “Hinduism has a place for everyone and everything” (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P. 103). He feels sad for his inability to use Marathi and Hindi words like ‘*raat-ki-rani*’, ‘*dhobi*’, ‘*charpai*’, ‘*vilayati baba*’, ‘*chunam*’, ‘*jamun*’, ‘*rakhi*’, ‘*kabaddi*’, ‘*shehnai*’ and ‘*tulsi*’. In order to face the painful present he tries to relate himself with the India’s ancestral past that provides him power and he also tries to stretch out his helping hand towards the other Indian immigrants so that they can adjust and assimilate themselves in the alien culture.

Sharad's scientist sister, Veejala along with her family also settled in Canada. Her son, Vithal has some similarities as well as dissimilarities with Jayant. Like Jayant he also thinks that: "They – white Canadians – don't want us to assimilate. They want us out. We'll be squashed like bugs soon" (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P.81). But while Vithal supports Jyoti's love with Pierre, Jayant does not. Earlier in the novel Jayant opines that "Our people, our old country... Dad there's no our people, no old country for anyone in the world anymore, least of all for us... This is one land and here we shall stay" (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P. 30-31). He tries to become a responsible citizen of the country. Later in the novel bringing in a Christmas tree, Jayant declares: "It is an evergreen tree... and it will stand until the snow melts and then it will fall because it doesn't have roots" (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P.220) and "An evergreen tree... is a thing of beauty ... And a thing of beauty is a joy forever" (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P.221). The underlying meaning is that in Canada, their life is also like an evergreen tree that has no roots.

Jyoti also indicates the assimilation of the cultures which could be the only solution for the problems of immigrant life, and she says: "We will plant evergreens and oaks with roots ... And grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing, we shall..." (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, P. 221).

Thus, Parameswaran tries to reveal the pangs of the diasporic community through different sentiments and feelings of these two families

The writers of the Sri Lankan diaspora make a significant contribution to the field of South Asian diasporic studies and Yasmin Gooneratne is one of them. Her novel *A Change of Skies* deals with the themes of immigration and adjustment in the alien land. It reveals the story of a Sri Lankan couple – a young Asian linguistics expert, Bharat and his wife Navaranjini. Taking a job of a visiting professor at Southern Cross University in New South Wales, Bharat moves to Australia along with his wife for a five-year term with a hope of great success. Though, initially they have less interest about Australia: "There's nothing there but koalas and kangaroos..." (*A Change of Skies*, P. 33) and Navaranjini consoles her husband by saying: "Well, Bharat, it's only a short-term visit: just a five-year sentence, after all." (*A Change of Skies*, P. 33). Their beginning was not pleasant there. On the very first night in Australia Navaranjini mistakes a hailstorm to an attack on them. She informs her husband that "It's the Australians! ...the Australians have come. They're throwing stones on the roof and breaking all the windows." (*A Change of Skies*, P. 81) Even she grabs a kitchen knife in her hand to save her husband. But gradually they become accustomed with the alien culture and society. Later they decide to stay there permanently and in order to mingle with the Australian culture even they change their names to Barry and Jean Mundy. By writing *The Guide for the Asian Migrants to Australia*, Barry feels that he will be carrying his family's traditional work of translation and interpretation into the new land.

Towards the end of the novel, Jean realizes through her experiences that it is the common humanity that unites Asians and Australians together. While Barry sets up a school to teach English to other newcomers, Jean establishes a restaurant and a school of cuisine.

The Bangladeshi diasporic writer, Monika Ali's novel *Brick Lane* is named after Brick Lane which is a well-known street in London and the heart of London's Bangladeshi community. Here she describes how Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant woman in London, experiences social and psychological alienation for a certain period of her life and how she ultimately destroys the constraints at the end of the novel. Here Monica Ali deals not only with the problems of being an immigrant, but also the with the problems of being an immigrant woman.

Nazneen is a Bangladeshi woman who gets married at the age of 18 with a 40 years old man, Chanu and moves to Tower Hamlets in London. Due to her inability to speak in English, except "sorry" and "thank you", Nazneen initially hardly leaves her flat. Chanu has spent many years in London. In spite of being an educated person, he oppresses Nazneen in different ways. According to him it is unnecessary for her to learn English and he says: "It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway?" (*Brick Lane*, P. 37). Though later learning English for Nazneen becomes a necessity for her family and she learns. It is noteworthy that the Bangladeshi culture and tradition have important role behind Nazneen's silent acceptance of her fate and isolation in the alien land. Her mother used to tell her, "We must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate." (*Brick Lane*, P. 14). From the very childhood the motto which has been internalized Nazneen is: "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne." (*Brick Lane*, P. 16).

But the turning point of the novel comes when Nazneen stands against her faith and tries to change her fate. Her life changes when she falls in love with another Bangladeshi man, Karim who brings clothes and, on which clothes, she works at home. The new relationship brings her in front of an inner dilemma. She neither wants to give up her traditional and religious values nor wants to ignore her own desire. But ultimately, she ends up her inner conflict by choosing the way to freedom. She does not go back to Bangladesh, as her husband wants and even does not remarry Karim to fulfil her desire. She decides to stay in London with her daughters. She is now independent from her husband and from her religious or traditional norms. Along with her friends Razia and Jorina, she establishes a dressing trade together. She becomes a part of the society where she has an identity. At the end of the novel Nazneen's daughters surprise her by taking her to the ice-skating where she skates along with her friends wearing the traditional costume, a sari and it indicates and fulfils the final utterance of the novel: "This is England....You can do whatever you like." (*Brick Lane*, P. 492).

Conclusion: Thus, different immigrant sentiments have vividly and realistically represented in these novels by the three Indian sub-continental female diasporic writers thereby suggesting that life is about changing and becoming one with the changed environment.

Works Cited:

- 1) Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. London : Doubleday,2003.
- 2) Braziel, Jana E, and Anita Mannur. *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003.
- 3) Gooneratne, Yasmine. *A Change of Skies*. Chippendale :Picador,1991
- 4) Parameswaran, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. Fredericton :Broken Jaw Press. 2002.

