



QUEST FOR IDENTITY, CULTURAL BELONGINGNESS AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY IN “A LIFE APART” BY NEEL MUKHERJEE

¹Author – Divya Bansal, ²Author – Anu

¹Research Scholar, Ph.D., ²Student, MDU, Rohtak

¹Department of English,

¹Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

Literature that incorporates Trauma theory illuminates an individual's mind in a precise manner. This century opens the door to the contemplation of the inner conflicts and battles of the ego. Late in the 20th century, Sigmund Freud was a leader in developing psychoanalytical theory. Those who have followed in his footsteps can trace their inspiration back to him. A leading novelist in English literature, Neel Mukherjee illustrates the protagonist's anguish in a foreign country. The protagonist's past and present memories are intertwined in this story through the power of memory. The main character discovers a way out of his miserable situation by coming out as gay.

KEYWORD

Belongingness, Identity, Crisis, Culture, Diaspora

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where globalization has a universal impact. People travel to different countries and settle down there. They start studying or working and transform their lives. As people meet others, they vibe with the ones belonging to their nationality. They try to help each other and often form a community, as it is easier to survive together. Usually, they try to hold on to the traditions and customs of their homeland. But at the same time, they are required to integrate into the new society, contributing to its flourishing by working in the new country, acquiring new habits, and speaking the language of the host country. Large groups of people belonging to the same nationality and living away from their homeland, but following the traditions of their homeland, are called Diasporas. The following study includes a major novel of the 21st century dealing with the themes of cultural hybridity, sense of belongingness, alienation, struggle to find themselves and search for a new life in a different space.

Mukherjee is a 45-Year-old man who was raised in Calcutta by working parents who did their best to provide him with the best education they could afford. In Calcutta, he attended Catholic high schools before transferring to Jadavpur University to study English literature. His parents had died by the time he finished high school. He received Rhodes Scholarship and from there began his journey of England. He

started working on this novel right from the University of East Anglia days after earning his master's degree in creative writing and a second B.A. degree from Oxford. It was "rejected by every single U.K. publisher (some of them rejected it more than once) until an Indian publisher first came to the rescue in 2006, then a U.K. publisher in 2008," according to an interview he gave. Neel Mukherjee is an Indian-origin writer located in the UK who frequently explores issues of diasporic identity in his work. Diasporic consciousness, shown in *A Life Apart*, will be examined in this study. The Novel features young Indian origin protagonist living in England who is unsure of his place in the world. In the faraway nation, he discovers that he is all by himself. Ritwik's family was shelling in a small quarter in the city where the members lay around all the time and his younger brother was in cramped, humiliating circumstances. Even though he was the breadwinner, Ritwik's father was treated like an outcast because of it.

Indian author Neel Mukherjee's debutant Novel, *A Life Apart* revolves around the story of Ritwik Ghosh, a young guy. When it comes to the period, the novel takes place in the 1990s. In Calcutta, India, his parents are laid to rest. Ritwik shifted to England in his 20s. He recently received an Oxford University scholarship for his further education. Neel was nominated for the Man Booker Prize for some of his notable works - *Past Continuous* or *A Life Apart* (2008), *The Lives of Others* (2008) and *A State of Freedom* (2017).

The word "India" conjures up images of poverty in the Western mind. Despite India's advancements in science and technology, the country nevertheless suffers from severe economic degradation, which exacerbates the country's poverty. Ritwik believes that in India, wealthy people are privileged, while those who are not rich are not. Because of the biased educational system, the well-off are unquestionably the lucky ones. Analyzing a person's thoughts and feelings is a common thread that connects literature and psychoanalysis. It represents the real-life people which are supposed to be represented. Trauma, then, is a mental state of distress. It causes irreversible damage to a person's mental well-being. The ethical, historical, and political dimensions of cultural trauma are intertwined. As a result, the author is unable to confine their research to a single area of psychology. It's a combination of feelings and emotions. In addition, it depicts Ritwik's recollections and the impact they have had on the new region. Psychological Problems arise out of Anxiety.

At first glance, Ritwik Ghosh appears to be in a bank queue in Neel Mukherjee's "*A Life Apart*" (Norton), as he stands in line in South Calcutta. He is waiting for his mother's turn at the crematorium. Except for her drooping head, her body is draped over a stretcher next to him. At long last, we have access to a furnace. The doors smash shut as the stretcher is lowered into the fire. Ritwik is confronted with the traditional nuances that don't let him forget his past incidences such as discrimination, domestic maltreatment and erotic assault. As a child, six-year-old Ritwik has been subjected to domestic violence. Throughout his life, his mother has been abusive to him for insignificant reasons. The abnormality of his thinking drives him to perform actions that are contrary to morality. If you want to learn something, you're going to have to go through a lot of hardship. On the other hand, he chooses to live a life that is viewed as unusual by many.

Ritwik Ghosh was raised by an abusive mother as one of two children in 1970s India. After she died in the 1990s, he flees to England and studied at Oxford before moving to London. In exchange for free lodging, he cares for Anne Cameron, an 86-year-old woman, while he looks for a job and has sex with other men. He has also written a novel, based on a character in Rabindranath Tagore's work *Ghare Baire*, Miss Gilby's expanded story. Bimala, the wife of a minor official in Bengal in the early 1900s, enrolls in Miss Gilby's class to learn English, just as the province is about to be divided. It tells two tales in *A Life Apart*: The first is Ritwik's, a tale of a young man's journey from Calcutta's slums and abuse to the edge of England, where he believes he may start anew in a new world full of possibilities. Will Ritwik ever find the salvation he is yearning for in the wounded, all-consuming relationship he has with his mother. There is a possibility that the second story, the one he is writing himself, the story of an Englishwoman living in the old Bengal on the eve of India's first partition could be it. Or perhaps it's in the weak and wounded figure of 86-year-old Anne Cameron, who offers Ritwik in London a place to stay in exchange for the care she requires? Once in the slums of the King's Cross part of London, Ritwik encounters the suave and mysterious Zafar bin Hashm. Ritwik's life spirals out of control as the past and present of various people clash.

Ghosh's poverty is not the lethal deprivation of street beggars or victims of the famine that Mukherjee describes with exquisite grimness in his novel. Poverty was the cat and mouse game Ritwik played with himself. Everything in his world was dominated by it: his old clothes, his ill-fitting school shoes, and even his father's home renovations, which ensured they would endure forever. ...it was the "slow drizzle which... hounded you every fraction of your time, got under your skin, into every space in your head and made me an inferior, an edgy animal because, you see, it never finished me off but gnawed at me here and there just to remind me it was here and that I was powerless in its half-grip"

The next year, we see Ritwik in Oxford. Being Gay, his life in England was melancholic, he feels alienated among people around him. In the end, he leaves university and heads to London, where he becomes a "virtual prisoner in this strange place" because of an expired visa. The novel's forward momentum and picaresque tone are derived from the different plot lines. Ritwik's life is connected, even though he can't realize it at first. Confidence and sexual experiences with strangers are interspersed throughout his time at Oxford. Even though this is a life apart, a friend at university talks about child abuse and it started to dawn on him that he was assaulted as a child. However, Oxford is just a stop on the way to London, where he works as keeper. Some secrets match his own, as well as a new connection to India, where she and her family once lived in the dusty darkness of her enormous mansion at twilight. Ritwik is curious about the world, but he's also in denial about many aspects of his own life. As the door to his own life opens, reality presses in on him. Invisible when his student visa expires, he finds himself pulled to the underworld of prostitution and sex workers.

The two stories are in complete contrast. As Ritwik travelled to England, Miss Gilby, an Englishwoman has travelled to India. The time frame of both stories also varies from each other. Ms. Gilby's story is set in past whereas Ritwik' is of present. Their purpose is completely opposite. Ms. Gilby is on a mission to educate women and becomes guide of Bimala whereas Ritwik found himself drowning in the world of prostitution. When Ritwik and Miss Gilby are both unrolling their stories at the same time, it creates a rich crop of impediment and sarcasm in the story. The contrast, on the other hand, has a moral significance, implying that we all share the responsibility of grief. At some point in the middle of the book, when we realize that Ritwik is the creator of Miss Gilby's story, we are brought to tears by our capacity for empathy.

In the fullness of time, though the relationship of the politics of both the countries bears down. In an inquietude scene, Miss Gilby is invited by Bimala to join her in the kitchen as she prepares dinner. A bucket of huge fish is brought in by one of the kitchen staff. Despite her best efforts, the creature continues to thrash, and the lady is unable to contain it any longer. A large curved bonito, the weapon of choice of another servant, is brought to the fire. With the help of the ashes, she rubs her hands together. She places the fish's head on the blade and cuts it off with quick sawing motions. "The crowd erupts in applause as blood paint splashes the floor and her hands. "The head is for you, Miss Gilby," Bimala says. "It's our signature dish," says the chef. The partition of Bengal, which took place in 1905, is one of the events that will eventually lead to the partition of the entire subcontinent by the middle of the century. There will be a lot of bloodsheds if it happens.

The presence of not just one but two elderly Englishwomen strikes reader as a flaw in the book. Additionally, Ritwik's landlady or caretaker Anne Cameron—who is half-senile and Ritwik delivers her breakfast and empties the bedpan in exchange for a place to live in London—is Anne Cameron. All of the novel's major plot points revolve around Miss Cameron, who holds the threads of life in her hands. Her spouse was stationed in India, therefore she lived there for a long time. Her son was homosexual. In contrast to the countless objects that were flying through the air in the first chapters, we now see genuine birds. Interestingly, they are birds that have no business being in England at all. Anne's son committed suicide in the room that Ritwik currently occupies because of his homosexuality. Forcing himself on Ritwik's novel, Mukherjee defies his own rules by introducing a shocking stream of consciousness section, in which Anne remembers the birth of her baby in India while also recalling his death:

“Splattered with blood on the wall behind him and the desk, his brains were extinguished by the explosion of a dark jam that oozed from his head. Only the faint metallic smell of blood and the tinny odour of internal organs could be detected. brain her son, her thirty-six-year-old, a son who had torn out of her one August afternoon with the monsoon rain coming down in unforgiving sheets outside the bungalow and the Indian midwife incomprehensible dumb in her foreign language and Clare's ayah and Dr. Higgins all crowding around thirty-one hours for a little head to come out but all tangled inside and Dr. Higgins despairing too unforeseen complications the child who made both beginnings and ends unexplainable.”

Some loose tiles in the bathroom hide Anne's stockpile of gin bottles.' Ritwik discovers and removes them. They agree: "I'll keep your hiding location secret, and you'll let me drink whenever I want." She offers him the bargain. Both he and Anne are bound by destiny. Neither of them has anything. They, along with others, will be worse off by the end of the book. On a Himalayan terrace, Miss Gilby gazes out over "the steep valley of air spreading out over the summits of hills and ranges to the distant majesty of the Garhwal." Out of sudden, she is distracted by an eagle, flying above the Himalayas. She has received a letter. She takes a look at it. The riots in Bengal have claimed the life of her friend, who was Headshot. She raises her gaze. The eagle has flown out into the distance. Flying is a skill possessed by birds. We simply cannot.

When he moves to London amid the novel, Ritwik joins the ranks of the city's undocumented population: Indians, Pakistanis, Kurds, Turks, Albanians, and Lebanesans who gather in filth-covered parking lots at the crack of dawn to work for the day picking and packing fruit. 'The immigrant/diaspora fiction,' according to Mukherjee, has been done to death and is now replete with emotion and clichés. But if you're an immigrant like him, it's practically impossible to avoid the topic. The scenes in "A Life Apart" are exactly what we'd anticipate them to be. Ritwik encounters Mehmet, a young Kurdish man, "sobbing his guts out, surrounded by four or five other men" while working in a warehouse one day. Ritwik inquires as to what's going on; the men will only explain that Mehmet's sister has been injured. At another job, Ritwik met Dusan. Dusan tells Ritwik about the journey his family followed from Albania to Rome, but when he narrates his journey from Rome to England, he "stared hard at the ground and went red-faced silent." Ritwik is fascinated by the story. For both Mukherjee and Dusan, staying silent is a good form of defense.

Having a gay lifestyle in a country like India is not something that would be attributed to anyone. It's a flagrant violation of Indian morality. For the Indian people, customs and laws go hand in hand. Human beings, who are second only to God, are regarded as the most important creatures on the planet. Even though ethics were created by men, they serve as a barrier to a person's wicked tendencies. Although Indian Government legalized homosexuality, it is still opposed by some people who tend to follow religion and customs solemnly. But in England, it is different. No one can challenge such things in name of culture there alike India. None of them is going to establish ethics that would keep them from using their moral resources. Ritwik loves himself. When it comes to his deepest desires, he is a young man who doesn't hold anything back. Because it's a matter of survival, he has no choice but to do this with strangers.

Ritwik's brother Aritra, on the other hand, has moved to Delhi to complete his M.A. He, too, decides to leave Calcutta in search of a more fulfilling existence. Because they both have no responsibilities, they share a strong bond. Parents in India are nothing more than silent martyrs. For the sake of their children, they give up their happiness. Responsibility is a big deal to them. These two Indian brothers, contrary to their parents, are strong hitters. Nothing binds them, not even the rules of the nation. As a result, it follows

“When they woke up, they found themselves in a space so vast and dark that it was as if they had been hurled into deep space. Elderly people had no one to care for in their old age, no worries about the health of their parents or how to pay for their medical bills, and no noose around their neck; their lives were finally free of responsibility and no one could claim it.”

If an immigrant's visa or permit expires unexpectedly, their lives are jeopardized. They are unable to return to their own country. If they don't, they won't be able to survive in their original land. As a result, they continue to live and work illegally in a different nation as immigrants. It makes use of their efforts, which could last up to twelve or thirteen hours a day or more. When his visa runs out, Ritwik says he'll stay in the country for a variety of reasons. Because of the country's oppressive heat, he decides not to go back. To add insult to injury, he doesn't want to become involved in the Indian lifestyle. In London, Ritwik takes a job of fruit picking. He works with illegal immigrants who refuse to return to their home countries for various reasons. 'Ritwik' stands for a virtual prisoner in a strange land.

He gradually fades into the background of the network of illegal immigrants. He changes into a being without a past or future. However, he is imprisoned indefinitely with boundless freedom. Ritwik, among others, denies his or her cultural ethics. Thus, the attempt to imitate non-Western culture ends in a tragic failure. In this critically acclaimed work, Neel Mukherjee sheds light on these challenges. Mukherjee didn't write this book to shock its part in making this particular story ring true, but it is also by no means the be-all and end-all of the novel itself

In the end, it is Mukherjee's awe at Ritwik's universe and life that shines. Because Ritwik is as confused by modern life as Robert Merivel was by 17th-century England in "Restoration,". If the young hero of the twenties and thirties impacted the world, he was part of, and the hero of the fifties and sixties fled off from that world "on the road" or wherever, the present hero seems hardly able to remain in the world, without being crushed by it. By the end of the novel, the echoes that Mukherjee perceives with the early 20th century Swadeshi movement had faded away into nothing. Despite its downbeat tone, it's far from sombre.

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