

Diasporic dilemma and dichotomy in the fiction of Gabrielle Roy and JhumpaLahiri

R.Vidhya

Associate Professor

PG & Research department of English

SeethalakshmiRamaswami College

Tiruchirapalli - 2

vidhu.raam@gmail.com

Diasporic writing voices the traumatic experiences of the immigrants caused by their displacement, fragmentation and marginalization. Every culture scattered around the world has witnessed the emergence of writers who fall under this genre. Two such renowned diasporic writers are the French Canadian Gabrielle Roy and the Indian American JhumpaLahiri.

Immigration proves a pleasant experience only for the few who succeed in assimilating themselves in a new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment. To many, immigration is not a delectable experience. They often find themselves sandwiched between two cultures. Their obsession with their past, the feeling of nostalgia, a sense of loss and an anxiety to reinvent home find expression in the literary genre called diaspora writing also known as 'expatriate or immigrant' writing.

The dispersal and distribution of a number of ethnic, racial and cultural groups across the world has resulted in the emergence of a plethora of writers who delve at length the diasporic sensibilities of these distanced communities. Gabrielle Roy and JhumpaLahiri are two such writers who voice their concerns of the diasporic communities of Canada and India respectively.

Both these writers portray their characters' struggles and anxieties in their works *The Garden in the Wind* and *The Namesake* respectively. *Garden in the Wind* is a sympathetic portrayal of a Ukrainian couple caught in the complicated and undiscovered setting of the Canadian North. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri focuses on the cross cultural, multigenerational story of the Bengali Indian family's journey to self-acceptance in Boston.

The focal point of this paper is to examine the immigrant psychology and behaviour and thereby to study the diasporic dilemma and dichotomy experienced by the Ukrainian couple and the Indian couple who migrate to Canada and America in Gabrielle Roy's *Garden in the Wind* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* respectively and finally observes how they emerge as successful and satisfied individuals in countries that are not their own.

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Roy a master stylist has crafted four short fictions *Un Jardin au bout du monde*, later translated into English under the title, *Garden in the Wind* by Alan Brown. The title story, the most poignant among the four is about an old Ukrainian couple left alone to die in their remote homestead in northern Alberta. The story has an 'end-of the world' quality where the characters physically distanced from their native lands, also experience social and psychological alienation. The tale is concerned with their sense of isolation in the immense Canadian North and their need to root their identity in terms of culture, language and religion.

As the story opens, Martha who is in her late sixties remembers how Stepan and herself leaving Volhynia, Ukraine, when they were young along with many villagers and finally reach the untamed Prairies 'rolled in their immigrants' train on a dragging and endless journey'. She remembers how their arrival on an untamed landscape and recalls their frenzied pace of their labors. She thinks that they came into the world in their little villages in Poland living on top of each other. And next thing she knows is that they are lost here in Canada in so much silence, that their lives have become 'small and forgotten as those of insects?'

Martha collects all their collective efforts in transforming the flat expanse of uninhabited land into an immigrant village at Alberta and how they lovingly name it Volhyn after their native Volhynia. Now after thirty years in Volhyn, Maria Marta Yaramko and Stepan Yaramko still living together have long ceased to communicate with each other. Stepan spends their long evenings by rereading from his pile of old Ukrainian newspapers and Martha would keep looking at the old pages of Eaton's catalogue. Now that their children have left for the cities, and with no great chores to attend to, the husband kills time by grudging and taking care of his cattle and fields while the wife tends to her garden.

If it had not been for her garden and her flowers, Martha fears that she might have been terrified at the thought of leaving this world. She wonders if she could ever take her place in the civilized world and join her children who would no longer be ashamed of her. She understands that those in Volhyn are now 'reduced to a handful, old and complaining' and knows that 'they were no longer quite Ukrainian but not quite Canadian either, but poor lost folk, who could only help themselves by disappearing'.

Marta even thinks that God had failed her and her people, by 'forgetting his creatures lost in the depths of the Canadian waste'. She resents the Ukrainian icons in their little chapel and asks 'What did they know about the life of immigrants in Canada?'

When she was young she had longed for enormous distances, but she never ever anticipated such 'frightful boredom' in such 'unchanging landscapes'. Suffering now due to age

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and sickness, she questions God ‘Will you ever tell us why we came so far, what wind blew us here, what we are doing here , the poor of the Ukraine, in these farthest part of Canada?. She is unable to find answers to these questions and these high-flown thoughts only upset and tire her. She finally says to herself, ‘What was the good of thinking anyway?’

For Stepan, even the certainty of having lived escaped him, or his life appeared to him at best like a long, monotonous day, a day some thirty years long and without milestones, without events.’ Like Marta, he too regrets for having left his Volhynia in Ukraine. He thinks his life is like ‘a long, dry windy day with a harsh brilliant sunlight, filled with sudden furious storms and brutal cold.’

He pines for the love of his children and grandchildren who have left for the city. Though there is no communication between his wife and himself, he feels terribly sorry for her illness and is ready to sacrifice all his savings for her treatment, but understands the treatment will end up in vain.

When he gets home late one morning after heavy drinking, he becomes perplexed when Marta is not around. He is relieved only after seeing her sleeping in the bedroom upstairs. To Marta’s surprise he prepares breakfast, puts the chicken in the pen, and clears up the piles in the grove. Marta is too overwhelmed with delight when Stepan saves all the plants in her garden from the cold by capping them with little paper cones, with his treasured Ukrainian newspapers. Having seen such care and love hidden in her husband, she stops repenting for her meaningless life, and becomes ready to leave her physical world of pain, drudgery and loneliness as she has entrusted her most treasured belongings in the hands of her dear husband.

JhumpaLahiri’s *The Namesake* describes the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrate to the United States to form a life outside of everything they know. The story begins as Ashoke and Ashima leave Calcutta, India and settle in Central Square, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Living in America, the Gangulis have the difficult choice of choosing between two different cultures. A traditional Bengali girl Ashima Bhaduri is married off to Ashoke Ganguli who has moved to USA to study and teach at MIT. While Ashoke adapts to the new world by keeping himself busy with his studies, she longs for her homeland and feels homesick.

The change of geographical location is the first shock for Ashima. After her arrival in the USA, the differences in the landscape - ‘heaps of broken snow’, ‘the frigid New England chill’, ‘leafless trees with ice-covered branches’, and ‘not a soul on the street’. But more than that she realizes the intensity of the loss of the family and community support. Her pregnancy aggravates her loneliness and living in an apartment this feeling only gets intensified. When her child is born

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without any relative around his side she feels the baby's birth is also haphazard like almost everything in America.

Though Ashima develops a love and respect for the alien land and loving the luxuries it offers, she still suffers from the trauma of dislocation and misses the warmth of her extended family. She in fact views life in America as a 'humble approximation of a life in India'.

As a University professor Ashoke is accepted into the academic community but at home he continues to be the typical Indian male, fastidious about his clothing and his food. He adapts himself to both Indian and American culture. When Ashima is reluctant to introduce items from yard sales into her home ashamed at the thought of buying what had originally belonged to strangers, Ashoke points out that even his chairman shops at the yard sales and is happy to wear a pair of second hand pants in spite of living in a big mansion. Ashoke lives a life of his choosing but death claims him suddenly and unexpectedly. He dies all alone in an alien land which he had made his home. Having left his ancestral home and native land as a young man, even his family living in the same country was not at his bedside when he breathes his last.

Ashoke and Ashima like to embrace their Indian culture but their children Gogol and Sonia wish otherwise. They resent their childhood trips to India which deny them the material comforts of the US. Though Gogol wishes to live the life of an average American teenager, still he doesn't date anyone in high school and doesn't attend dances or parties. Yet a second generation Indian American, Gogol Ganguli, the son of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli is expected to preserve the ideals of his traditional Indian parents but he has already assimilated the American culture. He distances himself from his Bengali culture despite his parents' wishes.

After college he falls in love with a rich Manhattan girl, Maxine but their relationship doesn't last long and finally he marries Moushumi, a second generation Bengali immigrant like him. Both of them are new generation Bengalis born and raised in America's multicultural society. In marrying her Gogol thinks he has fulfilled a collective deep-seated desire but this marriage ends up in a divorce. At the age of thirty-two Gogol finally discovers his identity an Indian American and after his father's death he decides to begin life anew.

Unlike Gogol, Sonia is able to successfully adapt herself to the American way of life. She lives on her own in San Francisco and works for an environmental agency. After the untimely death of her father she decides to take care of her widowed mother. She marries her Chinese American boyfriend and is happy in their shared world. But for Ashima everything changes after her husband's death. Though she feels suddenly lonely and permanently alone, she doesn't desire to escape to Calcutta. She decides to spend six months in the states and six months in India.

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Both Roy and Lahiri bring out the cultural conflict, the immigrant psychology and the quest for identity in their works. The writers portray the diasporic dilemma and the dichotomy which are amply reflected in the conflicts faced by the main characters, and the writers deal with them with utmost empathy and exceedingly intimate care. They weave their stories of immigrants caught in the whirlpool of alien customs, beliefs, values and language and yet are finally able to evolve as strong individuals.

Through their works of art the two writers attempt to reflect the inner feelings, emotions and the intimate thoughts of the immigrants. In both the works we find that life could not take a decisive journey and it could not be taken for granted. Though fate plays a vital role in shaping their lives, the characters finally emerge as resilient and matured personalities. They finally learn to flow along the current of life.

The places Alberta and America do not just hover in the background but have a real presence in the novels. Though the writers heighten the loneliness and displacement of their characters they have sympathetically portrayed, they still succeed in capturing the dignity of their characters. The characters' physical distance from their native lands correspond to their social and psychological alienation. Each tale concerns individual isolation in immensely alien lands – Canada and America. Finally we find that all the major characters in *Garden in the Wind* and *The Namesake* understand their need to root their identity on the foreign soil and finally emerge successful if not monetarily but psychologically definitely. Despite the themes of displacement and isolation their writings are remarkably affirmative. They dwell less on defeat and more on the will to persist and persevere and their writings celebrate the universality of the human behaviour with the masterful touch of eloquence and elegance.

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