



Racial Discrimination and Exploitation in Rahul Varma's plays

Mr. Dabde Tulshiram Laxman
Assit., Prof., Dept. of English,
A.S.C. Collge, Naldurg,
Dist. Osmanabad - 413602
E-mail - anildabde80@Gmail.Com

Abstract:

In this paper Rahul Varma focuses on various themes like racism, exploitation, unhomliness, diaspora, multi-culturalism, gender-inequality These plays are based on actual events and all of them have racism, justice and inequality at their core. The underlying theme of his plays is to promote cross cultural understanding. His theatre company 'TeesriDuniya' is fine example of cross cultural understanding as the actors of this theatre belongs to different ethnocentric origin. His plays like 'Equal Wages', 'Counter Offence' and 'Trading Injuries' reveal the problems faced by the working class immigrants in host country like Canada and their responses at their newness of their environment.

Rahul Varma's plays are based on actual events and all of them have racism, justice, racial discrimination, inequality, exploitation at their core. The underlying theme of his plays is to promote cross cultural understanding. His theatre company 'Teesri Duniya' is fine example of cross cultural understanding as the actors of this theatre belongs to different ethnocentric origin. His plays like 'Equal Wages', Job Stealer 'Counter Offence' and 'Trading Injuries' reveal the problems faced by the working class immigrants and refugees in host country like Canada and their responses at their newness of their environment. For a refugee or an immigrant to some extent, an alien land often becomes a territory of suffering and exploitation. Whereas for an immigrant, the new place of adoption may not seem so hostile, for a refugee or exile the circumstances of his home country drive him from one land to another. The will of a refugee remains immaterial as he is forced to leave his homeland. The option of choice, therefore, does not remain with a refugee who has to bear racial discrimination to a greater degree. In all cases, however, the diasporic people are always haunted by a sense of loss, nostalgia, as Salman Rushdie also points out: "Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are always haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt."(1991: 10).The will of a refugees and immirants remain immaterial as they are forced to leave their

homeland. The option of choice, therefore, does not remain with these people who have to bear racial discrimination to a greater degree. So, the present paper aims to show how the refugees and immigrants face the ill-treatment by the white employers.

Keywords: *Racism, Discrimination, Refugee, Immigrant, Dispora, Multiculturalism. Exploitation.*

Rahul Varma's Dramatic Style at a Glance:

Rahul Varma is a playwright, artistic director, essayist and an activist who migrated to Canada from his birth country India in 1976. In 1981, Teesri Duniya ('Third World' in Hindustani) Theatre, co-founded by Rahul Varma and Rana Bose, which is dedicated to producing socially and politically relevant theatre examining issues of cultural representation and diversity in Canada. Teesri Duniya has staged a major production every year. Some of their plays are *Job Stealer* (1987); *Isolated Incident* (1988); *Equal Wages* (1989); *Land Where the Trees Talk* (1990); *No Man's Land* (1993); *Counter Offence* (1996); *Job Stealer* and *Bhopal*, translated as *Zahreeli Hawa* into Hindi. The themes dealt with by Teesri Duniya Theatre are racism, gender equality, identity crisis, Native Land Rights, work-place hazards, wife battering, and environmental colonialism among others. Rahul became the company's artistic director in 1986. Rana Bose later split to make his own theatre company, Montreal Serai. There are two theatre groups functioning in Montreal.

Rahul Varma's another play 'Counter Offence' reveals the problem of women's marginalization. In *Counter Offence*, Shapoor, an Iranian studying in Canada on a student visa, marries Shazia, the daughter of East Indian parents living in Montreal. The marriage is not without problems, and one day, in one of his many heated moments of anger, Shapoor hits his wife. Shazia calls the police and Sgt. Guy Galliard from the domestic unit answers the call. Because of his own experiences with conjugal violence (his mother was killed by his father), Galliard is rough in his treatment of Shapoor. In steps an Indo-Canadian and anti-racist activist, Moolchand Misra, who exploits Sgt Galliard's handling of Shapoor to advance his own views and uses racism as a platform against the predominantly white police force and its Brotherhood, headed by Gilles Prougault. Prougault, though seemingly fair, has political ambitions within the union, and is fully capable of machinations. Shazia finds support from her parents, Shafiq and Mohammed Rizvi, but her father is more concerned with his standing in his ethnic community than with Shazia's real welfare. Shazia finds support in



Clarinda Keith, a black woman running a center for battered women, who understandably, have zero tolerance for domestic violence. Moolchand tries to play on divided loyalties, arguing that she should join him in nailing the whites, but she says she will testify in favour of Galliard, who is committed to her cause. Moolchand's tenacious pursuit of Sgt. Galliard pays off when Galliard is summoned to an enquiry, a development not taken kindly by the police of the Brotherhood. Soon after, in a seemingly bizarre coincidence, Shapoor is found dead in a YMCA hotel room, and suspicions are raised. (Sutton, 23-24)

In this play Rahul Varma has taken issue for treatment of inequality to non-whites by the white officer. When Prougault told about Shapoor's arrest and lock up in custody, Moolchand becomes suspicious.

Moolchand : A white officer ?

Prougault : (with a deep breath) Would you like to see him now ?

Moolchand : You didn't take it personally, did you Mr. Prougault ?

But you have to agree with me that a large number of
Citizens are uncomfortable with the way white officers
Treat other people.

Prougault : Other people ?

Moolchand : Non-whites ? People from other countries, cultures,
traditions and histories. (Varma, 157)

The law of the immigrants in Canada made it clear that immigrants should not be treated roughly whatever be the crime. But Galliard neglects this and becomes too rough towards Shapoor. Moolchand is aware of the double practice and the discrimination attitude of white policemen. According to Moolchand, "white policemen had nothing to gain by arresting one of his tribesman. It is only when they find someone "different" they get all dutiful. And then they get your wife to collaborate with them..... "Look my neighbour, a white guy, got drunk and made pulp out of his wife before passing out. The cop tells her, 'call us when he wakes up. Why didn't the cop arrest him?'"(167-168).

Equal Wages is dedicated to "the struggling women of the world who have broken the silence of ages." While the situation in the play could apply to many immigrant communities, especially from Asia, Varma understandably makes the key characters in his plays indo-Canadian. The play deals with the exploitation in garment industry; in which immigrant women are loaned sewing machines so they can work at home. For the women this might be a godsend in that they can stay home with their small children and yet make some money; but

the other side of equation is that employers do not incur any overheads related to maintaining a building and machinery etc. and do not have to pay any of the benefits that labor laws require. In the scene at the factory, we see exploitation of both men and women, but women are much worse off in that Sly (Varma's choice of names of his characters is very obvious) harasses them with his chauvinism and sexual demands. (Parameswaran, "Introduction." 11)

'No Man's Land' set in present time against the backdrop of Quebec separatism from Canada. Quaiser, Jenna, and their daughter Samreena's flee communal violence in India and arrive in Montreal in 1970, with a charred brick as a reminder of their a home back home . Home in the new country is identity to Quaiser. Determined not to let the misfortunes of other impede his desire to own a home Quaiser buys his house below market price from an Anglophone owner who is forced out of Montreal, but finds himself in difficulty again when separatist movement shuts down his factory and the restaurant. Worse, Quaiser fails to see that his obsession to own a house had destroyed Jeena's body and mind. *No Man's Land* is a play that considers the predicament of Muslim refugees from India who are uprooted for a second time by separatist struggle in their new home. *No Man's Land* with emphasis on abusiveness of the workplace for immigrant women trapped in sweatshops.

For a refugee or an immigrant to some extent, an alien land often becomes a territory of suffering and exploitation. Whereas for an immigrant, the new place of adoption may not seem so hostile, for a refugee or exile the circumstances of his home country drive him from one land to another. The will of a refugee remains immaterial as he is forced to leave his homeland. The option of choice, therefore, does not remain with a refugee who has to bear racial discrimination to a greater degree. In all cases, however, the diasporic people are always haunted by a sense of loss and nostalgia. Rahul varma has used the new technique in *'No Man's Land'* that is internal voice of Jeena. Jeena, a Indian-Canadian protagonist in this play confirms the situation of worker who worked harder as dog .

"I worked like a dog. Part time, full-time, overtime, all the time. Because Quiser wanted to buy a house. No matter what sacrifices I had to make and no matter what I had to do." (Varma, 173).

Jeena's internal voice throws light on the hard work and careful supervision of poverty taken by the family in Canada.



Rahul Varma's this play continues with theme of exploitation of an immigrant couple who fled the violent aftermath of the partition of India and Pakistan - only to find themselves in the midst of Quebec's separatist movement. Quaiser, the head of the family gradually works his way up to the position of manager from a factory hand and also to part ownership of a restaurant. Quiser's wife Jeena has the ambition was to become a teacher teaching students making them knowledgeable in life . At the same time, Jeena has to sacrifice her school teaching ambitions and she has to work as sewing the cloths for living. This play brought forth the permanence of loss of identity and self across borders and cultures.

Rahul Varma's play '*Equal Wages*' (1989) deals with the exploitation of immigrants and refugees, particularly the female labor force in urban Canadian sweatshops. The fundamental violation of the dignity of a people by using them as mere instruments in successfully running sweatshops across Canada and in the third world, the immigrants' helplessness, and the systemic apathy to their plight all are reflected in this play. The play opens with a middle-aged immigrant woman, Shyamala working for a cloth merchant Mr. Shabby. She is working in Sly Textile Corporation and is afraid of losing her job. Hence she starts working early in the morning. She has to work a long shift as she cannot refuse her master. However, she is denied equal wages. Women have to work both at factory and office in order to earn as much as men. Shyamala and her daughter Rita speaks with each other:

Rita : Why do you have to work in the factory as well as at home for this ceeep.

Shayamala : because working twice as hard, I can make as much money as man.

Rita : Money, money, moneyIs there anything else in life?

Shayamala : Yes taxes ...(Varma 23).

Mohan Patel is another example of unemployed man is denied job because he has no Canadian experience exploited. The people from other nations especially from Asia are denied the jobs due to lack of Canadian experience. These workers are paid less wages and are exploited. The immigrant workers have fear in their mind because they can be removed anytime without any reason. With Shyamala another woman Romilla, is doing work of two people alone and getting less salary. Once she is pregnant and expects light work from Sly



the owner of Garment Industry. But instead of showing her sympathies, Sly lays off Romilla.

In Rahul Varma's *No Man's Land* we may observe an aspect of cultural compromising. A young immigrant, Teja, openly expresses his loss of sincere touch with his own religion:

Jeena: We did not want to be refugees.

Teja: Do you know I am a Sikh from Pakistan side of the Border?

Jeena: You don't look Sikh.

Teja: Just because I am not wearing my turban? Well, with a turban-less head I don't look Sikh. But I had to change my appearance just to escape alive. Ah, well, such were the times and such was the racial hatred. Now I am a weekend Sikh. I put on the turban on weekends only when I have to go for weekly worship. Ha. Have to keep the culture alive, you know. Rest of the time they take me for a Hindu who prays faithfully to a thousand different Gods. I'd rather not say anything about the Muslims – minimum punishment, death. (Varma, 171).

In *Job Stealer*, Rahul Varma deals with the nature of jobs that these refugees are assigned to. As already said, their humanitarian traits are overlooked to deprive them of their basic human rights. Rahul Varma also shows how the vicious circle of racist whites entraps refugees and denies them any jobs suited to their characteristic traits. The placement Officer bears a grudge against these refugees. He is indifferent towards Kabul, a refugee and demands: "First you need to write the Canadian Board Exams. Then, you will have to wait until a place becomes available. Don't worry it won't be more than ten years. Then you'll get a chance to do your internship. After which you will go to the north for four years. Then you can come back here and practice medicine..." (111). It illuminates the long and tiresome phases of requirements that immigrants have to undergo in order to get a job. It highlights the intention of the whites to frustrate these refugees so that they leave the host country. Employer 1's apathy towards these immigrants gets reflected in his denying a job to Kabul. Ironically, their first division certificates fail to fetch them any jobs at the hands of racist employers:

Employer 1. Do you have Canadian experience?

Kabul. I can't get that until I get a job.

Employer 1. I am sorry but you need Canadian experience (112).

A refugee who has just landed in an alien land cannot be asked to produce Canadian experience. It is by becoming the resident of a country only that a refugee can produce his experience of that country. The deliberate strategy of the Employer 1 is to drive out this alien



influx. The second refugee is also dismissed on the pretext that his “expectations are too low to be a good technician...” (112)

Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. The essential sadness of the break can never be surmounted. Set against the backdrop of a political upheaval in some country, *Job Stealer* takes into account the experiences of refugees who are mercilessly treated in the new land. The introduction of the four refugees from diverse cultural backgrounds emphasizes the diverseness of their experiences and how they meet uniform treatment because of being aliens. The playwright underscores the well-known fact that God created all men equal in the beginning but then man divided man on the basis of caste, class, colour and creed. In the pursuit of economic Advancements and resources, man moved to other places and he sometimes turned back and sometimes stayed their permanently which caused racial abuse. Unequal economic advancement made man both a master and slave. Rahul Varma foregrounds the plight of the downtrodden and the refugees to show how capitalists grow richer at the cost of the physical labour of the workers. He makes us peep into the living conditions of the refugees who suffer under a cruel boss, the factory owner. The racial discrimination meted out to these refugee workers reflects the racial attitude of the white boss in particular and whites in general towards these visible minorities.

In all cases, however, the diasporic people are always haunted by a sense of loss, nostalgia, as Salman Rushdie also points out: “Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are always haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt.”(1991: 10). The present play articulates the experiences of refugees who find themselves in the worst of both worlds and bear the scars of racism. Since these hapless refugees cannot go back to their roots or their homes, their lives become equated with untold misery and suffering. The fleeing of these refugees from their war-torn country is confronted with racism on their arrival in Canada. The paper further attempts to contest the hegemonic power structures that remain instrumental in the subjugation of refugees. Dwelling on health-related problems of the refugee workers, the play interrogates the racial attitudes of the white employers who drag them into sordid and menial works. The play also describes the conflicts between indigenous and refugee workers.

Conclusion



Thus, his plays' dealt with racial discrimination, and exploitation, gender equality, identity crisis, Native Land Rights, work-place hazards, wife battering, and environmental colonialism among others. I tried to show through this present paper Multiculturalism is in the plays of Rahul Varma. His plays throws light on hard work of the women, exploitation by the officer as the workers don't have Canadian experience.

The playwright asserts that those who caused political turmoil in the country of origin and those who discriminate against others on the basis of race are the same people everywhere. It is not the issue of black or Asian or white but rather it is the psyche in such people that needs a change. He further foregrounds that if one becomes tolerant of others, there will be no more partitions, no more separatism, no more ethnic violence, no more religious fanaticism, no more homelessness, no more the problem of refugees or immigrants and no more a threat to a nation's integrity.

Work cited:

- Bansal, Hem Raj *Racism as a Crime against War Refugees in Rahul Varma's Job Stealer*, Journal of Literature, Culture & Media Studies Vol.V.9 &10Jan.-Dec.2013
- Bhabha, H.K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. 1994.
- Parameshwaran, Uma. *Sons Must Die and Other Plays*, New Delhi Prestige Books, 1989.
- _____. *Writing the Diaspora: Essays on Culture and Identity*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007.
- _____. *SACLIT Drama: Plays by South Asian Canadians*, Bangalore: IBH Prakashan, 1996.
- _____. *SACLIT: An Introduction to South Asian Canadian Literature*, Madras: Affiliated East West Press, 1996.
- _____. "An Introduction" to *Rahul Varma's Land Where the Trees Talk and Other Plays*, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1998.
- Paranjape, Makarand. "One Foot in Canada and a Couple of Toes in India: Diasporas and Homelands in South Asian Canadian Experience" retrieved from CoupleofToesinIndia.htm
- Ramraj. Victor. "West Indian Writing in Canada", *West Indian Literature*, (ed.) Bruce King, London: Macmillan, 1995.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World", *Textual Practice*, 10 (2), 1996.
- Varma, Rahul. "Trading Injuries" in *Land Where the Trees Talk and Other Plays* by Rahul Varma, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1989.
- _____. "Land Where the Trees Talk" in *Land Where the Trees Talk and Other Plays* by Rahul Varma, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1989.
- _____. "Counter Offence" in *Land Where the Trees Talk*

and Other Plays by Rahul Varma, New Delhi: Prestige Books,
_____. "Equal Wages" in *Land Where the Trees Talk and
Other Plays* by Rahul Varma, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1989.
146
_____. "Job Stealer" in *SACLIT Drama: Plays by South
Asian Canadians* (ed.) Uma Parameswaran, Bangalore: IBH
Prakashan, 1996.
Bhabha, H.K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. 1994.
Ong. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, Durham NC: Duke
University Press, 1999.
Parameswaran, Uma. *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees. Sons Must Die and
Other Plays*. Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998. 74-128.
Sutton, Winston. Playwright Comes of Age with *Counter Offence*.

Canadian Theatre Review. 94(1998): 23-24.

Varma, Rahul. *Land Where The Trees Talk and Other Plays*, Prestige Books New
Parameswaran, Uma. *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees.
Sons Must Die and Other Plays*. Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998.

Varma, Rahul. *Land Where The Trees Talk and Other Plays*, Prestige Books,
New Delhi, 1998. Print.

Varma, Rahul. *No Man's Land*. In Aviva Ravel (Ed.), *Canadian Mosaic: Six Plays*,
Simon and Pierre Toronto, 1995. Print.

<http://www.teesriduniyatheatre.com/en/home/about-us/rahul-varma/>

https://era.library.ualberta.ca/files/c12579s538/Kulkarni_Rohan

<http://www.makarand.com/acad/OneFootinCanadaanda>



PRINCIPAL
Arts Science & Commerce College
Naldurg, Dist. Osmanabad-413602