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## AN IMMIGRANTS' PREDICAMENT IN THE PLAYS OF RAHUL VARMA

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### Abstract:

Canadian theatre has always been an exercise in inter-cultural negotiation, yet in the past few decades, the official multicultural legislation has provided opportunities for more artists belonging to ethnic minorities to consciously diversify our country's theatre practice. Montreal based Indo-Canadian playwrights like Uma Parmeshwaran, Rana Bose, Rahul Varma have been leading figures in creating intracultural theatre, which seeks to question the discourse of multiculturalism. Rahul Varma along with his company TeesriDuniya Theatre, whose mandate is to produce socially and politically minded theatre that reflects Canada's diversity, Rahul Varma has staged plays such as 'Counter Offence', 'No Man's Land', 'Bhopal' 'Equal Wages', 'Land Where The Trees Talk', etc. in order to create counter discursive spaces where the audience may examine 'benign' forces such as multiculturalism. His plays' dealt with racism, gender equality, identity crisis, Native Land Rights, work-place hazards, wife battering, and environmental colonialism among others. The present paper ventures to show Multiculturalism in the plays of Rahul Varma.

### Introduction :

Nowadays , Education is very crucial for every citizen in The World. Not only Education for job but also for meaningful life, life with purpose. If our Teaching-learning System is appropriate , flexible according to the situations, which shapes the students' lives etc. What will be the future of Our India ! Our Education system should be Man-making and not Machine- making. If we want to increase the quality of education we should adopt new trends in Literature. The present paper focuses on the new trends in Rahul Varma's plays.

At the beginning of the 20th century, many farmers from Europe and America came to inhabit the vast stretches of Canada. With the increase of population and diversity in the needs, many new industries cropped up and people from across the world including other countries from Asia came to be absorbed in them. These industries like construction, lumber, mining, railways and manufacture units attracted labor. More and more people were allowed, though they were not necessarily liked, because Canada needed more and more people to populate and work its prairies. The Indian Immigration to Canada, in the early 20th century co-incided with a general fear of the Orientals snatching the jobs of the white Canadians because a large number of Chinese and Japanese were already present there. Not much research has so far been done on the works of the Indian diasporic playwrights based in Canada. The reason may be that fiction written by the South Asian diasporic writers has always attracted the research scholars who have so far concentrated on Bharati Mukherjee, MG Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje, like Uma Parmeshwaran, Rana Bose, Rahul Varma etc. A number of Indian English literary figures have migrated to the various part of the world for various reasons. Rahul Varma is one of those figures who migrated to Canada and started writing the plays on the experience of the people coming from various nations.

### Rahul Varma 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, TeesriDuniya('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. TeesriDuniya 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); and *Bhopal*, translated as *ZahreeliHawa* into Hindi. The themes dealt with by TeesriDuniya 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. 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).

*'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 Quaiser 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. Quaiser'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.

So, this play illustrates the experiences of Jeena and other women in the textile industry, and how the politics of compensation for work related injuries affects the mutual relationship of this couple mentioned above. The flashback technique worked through music aspires to show the merger of the riot experience in the Indo-Pak partition to the Quebec separatist movement, and its impact on the immigrants trapped in sweatshops.

*Counter Offence* (1997) by Rahul Varma was about a case of conjugal violence being twisted into a crime against race. In this play an immigrant is arrested for beating his wife and he ends up becoming a mere instrument to air the racial fire in the hands of a community leader, a human rights activist and the two contrastive elements of the police force. *Counter Offence* blends the twin issues of the violence against women and crime against race in such a manner that the crime against gender is subordinated to the crime against race by an opportunistic leader who is given voice by the policies of multiculturalism of the government. Here it seems that leaders of ethnic groups are sometimes bought off by political recognition or patronage. Such leaders are therefore unwilling to and incapable of formulating any ethnic interests. As a result ethnic groups get reduced to preserving quaint customs and folklore but their social mobility is not advanced in real terms. An individual of a particular group may gain but the group as a whole does not. The leaders of ethnic groups not propagating the interest of an ethnic group sits entirely on Moolchand. But there is a paradox here. He does play the racial, ethnic card, but not to get Shapoor any respite, only to manipulate his own political ambitions, and to manipulate Shapoor's parents' entry into Canada. For example, he is shocked to learn that Shapoor has applied for his parents in the family class.

You are a certifiable idiot." Why in the family class? With that kind of money, they are investors before they are your family. (163)

In order to explain further, he says, They should be put in "investor class". You fool. If you had listened to me, by now your father would have been buying up real estate in Laval.

Now you can't transfer them to a different class. (*Counter Offence*: 163)

Moolchand's speech in the opening scene (149) is-factually, emotionally and politically correct but he is using it all for the wrong reasons. He sees everything with colored glasses-"..If you don't mind helping a colored man." In the same breath he tries to play with the word, Brotherhood. As also "...a white officer?" "a large number of citizens are uncomfortable with the way white officers treat other people" (156). He himself introduced the colored vs. white conflict

in the police station and now he testifies in the court "Mr Prougault seemed quite nervous when I introduced myself" in the overconfident way as a member of a "race tribunal." By his tactful approach, he tries to prove Galliard guilty. It is perhaps a case of "reverse racism". His typical East Indian attitudes towards women makes him patronize Clarinda, and he also makes light of the suffering of Shazia. "I expected to see somebody black and blue" (Varma 160.)

Moolchand rapidly can change his accent to "a Canadian accent instead of his usual East Indian" (Varma 169.) It is his way of identifying with the Canadian environment. Even after moving to Canada, the Asians carry their family hegemonic values with them. Moolchand is astonished at "why should an East Indian wife behave in such a strange way?" (Varma 158.) (read = why should an East Indian wife report her abusive or violent husband to police?). In trying to color the immigration department's decision as racist, he caustically comments to Prougault, "One more ethnic out of Canada eh Mr. President?" (163) He vehemently seeks justice for Shapoor but never once does he mention that Shazia is ethnic too, that she is a victim, not of a racial crime but of a crime against her gender.



She has been battered and ironically she is the one who is and is supposed to be ashamed. The typical Asian and East Indian concept of shame associated with battered women is used in the play to show how the so-called multiculturalists leaders use the situation to their advantage.

Rahul Varma's another 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 speak with each other:

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

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

Rita : Money, money, money . . . Is there anything else in life?

Shyamala : 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.

#### Conclusion:

Thus, his plays' dealt with racism, 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 in the plays of Rahul Varma. His plays throws light on hardwork of the women, exploitation by the officer as the workers don't have Canadian experience, equal wages are denied, this shows the multi-culturalism as they are not from one place, they from various countries.

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