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STRESS MANAGEMENT AT THE WORK PLACE



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Dominance of Culture in The Plays of Rahul Varma

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Introduction:

Canada is a country that populated by people who came here from all over the World. The earliest of migration to Canada took place thousands of years ago from Asia and became what are today known as the native peoples of Canada. Amongst the immigrants many were from India but East Indian community has a number of outstanding individuals who have used their talent and efforts to make significant contribution to not only economic life of Canada but also in the creative field and literature. 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, 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); 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.

Expatriation, living in an alien country and alien environment produces a profound sensibility towards the everyday differences between the dominant culture and the implanted culture. The diasporic theatre is a reflection of this sensibility. Consequently it represents the differences and injustices in the life of immigrants and "different" cultures – considering that white is perceived as



the norm. The immigrants attempt to participate and intervene in the politics of the homeland. At the same time they are denied to assimilate the so called culturally tolerate but dominant culture of host country. Besides cultural conflict and identity crisis. South Asian Canadian playwrights address the issue of culture beyond border where minorities attempt to adapt to mainstream culture. The south Asian Canadian playwrights also highlight one of the dilemmas which "the new concept of diaspora has thrown up. The powerful attraction of diaspora for post-colonial theorists was that, as transnational social formations, diasporas challenged the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood."The immigrants yearn for the lost national homeland on the one hand and attempts to consider host country as their own country on the other. This transnational and transcultural notion dominates in the plays of South Asian Canadian playwrights. The present chapter examines at length the representation of issues related to immigration in the plays of Rahul Varma.

Rahul Varma's *Land Where Trees Talk and Other Plays* show the evolution of Rahul Varma's art over the last decade and his commitment to challenging the inequities imposed on new immigrants in Canada. In the title play, he enters new but related territory the encroachment of commercial technology on the rights of the first nations. His plays especially in *Land Where the Trees Talk and Other Plays* show "his commitment to challenging the inequalities imposed on new immigrants in Canada" All immigrant groups have come across various problems in Canada in the second half of 20th Century. The immigrants are in double jeopardy by virtue of their newness and colour. Rahul Varma's plays deal with this jeopardy of the immigrants who are of working classes. However, the playwright is not content with the presentation of hardships faced by the immigrants in settling in Canada, he promotes cross-cultural understanding. His multiculturalism vision is clearly seen in his founding of theatre group entitled Teesri Duniya in which actors of various ethnocentric backgrounds play the various roles. His plays also depict the marginalization of women first due to their colour and secondly due to weaker sex. Double marginalization of women is seen in his plays. His plays deal with the very sensitive issues - immigrants facing racism and violence against women. The play is set in Canada of first half of the 16th century. The play opens with actors coming one by one and sitting in a circle. The actor playing the role of trees also enters. The play is set in District society, Quebec. European explorer with a few crew landed in the Quebec. The natives are unaware of the explorers. As the explorers/ whites landed on the Quebec they discover black gold, oil, Texas tea. At the same time, the whites see the natives who encircled the whites. The natives are described as "The savages! The bunch of animals in animal skins" (Land Where 63). In the beginning the whites like Simon, Patrick and the captain of the ship are afraid of natives and so decide to use guns if necessary. The whites used power and religion to rule the natives. They establish trade relationship with the natives with the help of religion. However, the natives sense a danger in the trade of whites:

Chief: I want you take your cross back. I want you to take back everything you gave our tribes.

Captain: You want to call off this beautiful trade relationship we've got.

Chief: I am sensing a major catastrophe (Land Where 65).

All natives throw the cross back to whites because they felt that the whites engage the natives to fight against one another. The whites come not only with might and knowledge but also with diseases. The grandson of the thief of the Quebec dies due to a strange disease brought by the whites.



All natives protested against the whites and asked them to leave their land. However, the whites refuse to leave the land: "This is our home, now" (Land Where 66).

Natives walk and kneel at earth's feet. The whites conquered the land without war as the natives are not able to resist the whites. The whites used the disease as a weapon against the natives and established first permanent settlement in Quebec in 1608. Near about 90% natives died of various diseases and two million tribal people were wiped out working in mines. African slaves are brought in order to replace natives. The explorers established their government and remaining natives signed the land treaties and these land treaties are later violated. The speaker narrated various incidents like the Russian revolution, death of 30,000 west Virginians due to silicosis, death of millions in the Second World War, discovery of AIDS in 1983, lead contamination in Western Canada, global warming, acid rain and PCB seares in 1990. The narrator ceased to narrate events and individual members recite a personal event and exit. The speaker has given a detailed description about the scientific and technological development in Canada and consequent terrible effect of such development on the natives.

As the natives don't want to separate from their land, natives create blocks in order to protest against project. The policeman is called to threaten natives. But natives are not willing to separate from their lands:

"We belong here. You can take the land from us,
but you cannot take us from the land" (Land Where 75).

The deep attachment of natives to the land is seen in above line. One of the natives, Thomas is lured by the promise of job. As he is always denied the job due to his color, he is attracted to the job at Megawatt Project. In this way we can see here how the non-natives people are snatching the rights of land from the natives.

Rahul Varma's *Equal Wages* was staged in 1989. The play is dedicated to the struggling women of the world who have broken the silence of ages. It deals with immigrant women's hard work in Canada and the exploitation meted to them. No doubt men also suffer but women are much worse off in that the master harasses them with his chauvinism and sexual demands.

The play *Equal Wages* begins with the entry of a middle-aged immigrant woman, Shyamala. She works in the kitchen early in the morning and works in factory. She 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. Mr. Shabby is the cloth merchant and Shyamala is working for him. However, equal wages are denied to women. Women have to work both at factory and office in order to earn as much as men. The Canadian boss pays fewer wages to women. 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 ceeep.

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 ... (*Equal Wages* 23).

The scene shifts from Shyamala's house to the entrance of the factory where we come across foreman of factory (Donny) and Mohan (another unemployed). Mohan is denied job only because he has no Canadian experience. It is also true in case of Shyamala.

"They'll say no Canadian experience, no job." (p. 24).



Immigrant male worker Mohan Patel faces number of interviews and each time he is denied a job due to the lack of Canadian experience. Hack Saw Sly is the owner of the Textile Corporation and hires immigrant workers paying fewer wages. Immigrant workers are paid less wages and are exploited. Immigrants want to raise their wages but the owner denies. Instead, Sly has frozen the wages of workers. The immigrant workers are threatened to be removed from the factory. It is compulsory for the workers to give money to company's X'mas fund even when the workers don't celebrate. Shyamala is paid fewer wage in comparison with white women even though she works as hard in the company as the whites.

I get along fine withal white women even though I'm paid less than them (Equal Wages 30).

Racial discrimination is being practiced in Canada as is seen in case of Shyamala. She is rendered jobless, even a notice of seven days is not given to her. The playwright has mixed the songs and music with dialogues in order to avoid the artificiality of language and to project the cultural differences. The immigrant workers are made to work hard on low wages. The exploitation of workers by the masters is seen in the song. The master, Sly always thinks of his profits and neglects his workers. Mohan Patel has been forced to work in warehouse even though he is half crippled. The immigrants are asked to pay taxes as the Government of Canada lays heavy taxes on the immigrant workers. The bad condition of workers in Sly Textile Corporation is pointed out by the author. The owner always threatened workers to work or to die. The immigrant workers are described as "Unemployed cheap labor" (Equal Wages 33).

Our noses bleed but still we're alive.

If you can't cope, you won't survive.

Sound of one, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

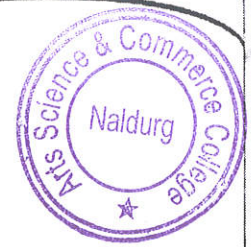
These low wages just don't fit.

Bossman he doesn't give a shit (Equal Wages 33).

The above song points out the sad condition of immigrants, exploitation being meted to them and their helpless condition in an alien culture. There is no other way before the immigrants other than coping with the adverse situation. Romilla does a work of two people alone and gets less salary. Romilla is pregnant and expects light work from Sly. But instead of showing sympathies towards suffering Romilla, Sly lays off Romilla. The white master is not afraid of law and order of Canada as he knows the workers have little money to run after justice from the government. Pamela is also removed from the job as she demands equal wages. Donny, the white worker gets more wages than Pamela although the latter is doing as much work as the former. Pamela demands "equal wages for equal work" (Equal Wages 38).

The marginalization of women is a universal phenomenon. Shyamala's efforts to establish her identity is further complicated by globalization and migration. Number of illegal immigrants land in Canada. As a result the native white Canadians employ such illegal immigrants in their factories on fewer wage. The illegal migration and havoc in back home has disrupted the relatively settled character of traditional cultures. Ong writes in this connection:

"Identity is constructed through participation in global economies that compel individuals to mobilize themselves in a search for economic opportunities, which may take them to



different countries sequentially. Transnational migrants participate in different cultures, manifesting their ethnic or group culture in different locations; consequently, their sense of self is fluid as it emerges from such movements. Furthermore, contemporary transnational migrants are not simply acted upon by the dominant society, but participate in conscious and deliberate ways to manage perceptions of who they are, as well as the meanings attached to their race and culture."

As the immigrants attempt to participate and intervene in the politics of the homeland. At the same time they are denied to assimilate the so called culturally tolerate but dominant culture of host country.

Conclusion:

So, when the immigrants attempt to participate and intervene in the politics of the homeland. At the same time they are denied to assimilate the so called culturally tolerate but dominant culture of host country. Besides cultural conflict and identity crisis, South Asian Canadian playwrights address the issue of culture beyond border where minorities attempt to adapt to mainstream culture. I tried to show through this present paper how the non-natives are dominant in every strata of the society. They do these things because they have the identity of their nations. This shows the multi-culturalism as they are not from one place, they from various countries. Rahul Varma's plays' dealt with racism, gender equality, identity crisis, Native Land Rights, work-place hazards, wife battering, and environmental colonialism among others.

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