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**The Reflection of Work Culture of  
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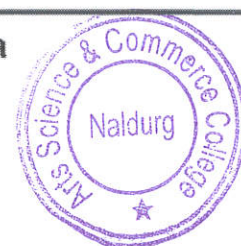
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## **Immigrants' Marginalization in the Plays of Rahul Varma**

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### **Abstract:**

*Rahul Varma, a South Asian playwright has written plays on issues of marginalization of immigrants in host country. He is especially known for the handling of marginalization of immigrants in Canada, Asia and various parts of the World. Rahul Varma a Montreal based Indian playwright also writes on issue – oriented, provocative and socio-political plays. His plays like 'Equal Wages', 'Land Where the Trees Talk', 'Counter Offence' and 'No Man's Land' reveal problems faced by the working class immigrants in host country like Canada and their responses at the newness of their environment. Marginalization of Indian immigrants is multifaceted- it is cultural, economic, political, racial, environmental etc. The South Asian playwrights are marginalized in the sense that they have not received as much as much critical response as they are worth for. Hence the present paper will throw light on the multiple ways of marginalization of South Asian immigrants in Canada.*

### **Introduction:**

Marginalization is the state which reflects backwardness of a person, thing or various aspects, related to political, religious, educational, economic, and physical order. This concept expresses the condition of socially excluded people due to dominant culture or power mechanisms. Basically, the emergence of being "other" or "marginal" within the European culture has a unique history. The marginalized people are dragged between two or more social worlds, either they embrace the new culture and select it as their chosen homeland or experience a sense of suppression or frustration. This paper is an endeavor to bring the facts of life in Canada. The people from South Asia and various parts of the World are coming to work in Canada. These working people are exploited at the workplace and given low wages by the white people in Canada. It discusses about the feeling of these marginalized people.

### **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); 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 along with his company Teesri Duniya Theatre, whose mandate is to produce socially and politically minded theatre that reflects Canada's diversity.





Rahul Varma's play 'Equal Wages' (1989) deals with the exploitation of immigrants and refugees, particularly the female labour 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 asserts working early in the morning. She has to work a long shift as she cannot refuse her master. However, she is denied equal wages. The women workers are threatened to be removed from the job that's why these workers have to give money to the company's X'mas fund even when the workers don't celebrate. As Shyamala says, "I give money to the company's X'mas fund even though I don't celebrate .....I get along fine with all white women even though I'm paid less than them. (Rahul Varma P.30)

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 creep?

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

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

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

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. Mohan Patel is another example of unemployed marginalised man is denied job because he has no Canadian experience. The people from other nations especially from Asia are denied the jobs due to lack of Canadian experience.

Shayamala: And in the interview they would ask

"Do you have Canadian experience." And if you say...

Mohan: No.

Shayamala: They will say no Canadian experience, no job.

Mohan: That's right, but how did you know?

Shayamala: That's my Canadian experience.

These marginalised workers from 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. Here we can see how the white people torture the marginalised workers.

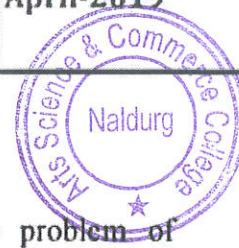
In 'Equal Wages' the white owner of Sly Textile Corporation Mr. Hack Saw Sly exploits mentally and physically too. Here is a conversation between Pamella and Sly. Pamella requests him light work for Romila, because she is pregnant. This play deals with the very sensitive issues - immigrants facing racism and violence against women.

Pamella: she (Romila) can't. She is feeling sick.

Sly: She is faking.

Pamella: She isn't faking. She is pregnant.





Sly :I don't see her stomach bulging.

Pamella : It's something you won't understand.

Sly : She can't be pregnant. That's not compatible with her job.

His play 'Land where the Trees Talk' is an attempt to tackle the problem of environmental racism and the land rights of native people. The native people are marginalised by snatching their by the white people. '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.

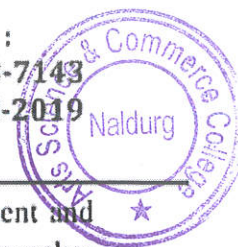
Captain: You want to call off this beautiful trade relationship we've got.

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.

'Counter Offence' treats the problem of woman's marginalization. This play examines a case of conjugal violence against woman and 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 fits 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 make 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 multiculturalist leaders use the situation to their advantage.

### Conclusion:

Hence marginalization of Indian immigrants is multifaceted- it is cultural, economic, political, racial, environmental etc. The South Asian playwrights are marginalized in the sense that they have not received as much as much critical response as they are worth for. Hence the present paper will throw light on the multiple ways of marginalization of South Asian immigrants in Canada. Varma's plays as discussed above throw light in the hardships and difficulties faced by the marginalized immigrants in an attempt to settle in Canada. Though Indian immigrants faced a lot of problems still they try to adopt the alien culture.

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