

Representation of migrants's identity in the selected novels: A comparative study to Islamic history

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ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of migration is a rich debate in the postcolonial studies categorically, South Asian English diasporic fiction and in Islamic history too. It brings along the issue of confronting with the self-identity. The current article discusses the crisis of identity in the selected novels of two different writers: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Uma Parameswaran's *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. These migrants leave the country of origin and move to the host country on account of some pull factors. However, the migrants in the host country face various problems which shatter their identity and make them hybrid against which they struggle to reframe it but often fail in doing so. On the other hand, the article discusses the concept of migration and its relevant issues in the light of Islam. In this regard, it throws light on two major kinds of migration such as "Hijrat-e-Habsha" i.e. temporary migration and "Hijrat-e-Madina" i.e. permanent migration. The study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative content analysis technique is implied for the interpretation of the selected texts and direct approach is used for the analysis of the selected contents of the texts. The article sums up that the process of migration is a complex phenomenon and it brings both: prospering and damaging consequences for migrants as it depends upon the nature of movement and the circumstances in the host country which the migrants come across.*

Keywords: *Migration, Refugee, Economic Migrants, "Hijrat-e-Habsha", Hijrat-e- Madina" Identity Crisis.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration is a rich debate in the postcolonial studies, categorically, South Asian English diasporic fiction and in Islamic history as well. The process of migration brings along the issue of confronting with the self-identity that has become a matter of severe discussion. The present article analyzes identity crisis of migrants in the selected novels of two writers: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Uma Parameswaran's *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*.

A close reading of these novels shows that the migrants move from domestic country of to the targeted country which shatters their identity and ultimately they struggle to reconstruct it in different ways. There are different provoking factors in the act of migration. Sometime people leave their home country due to *push* factors such as war, politico- religious restlessness, natural disaster and economic crisis. These migrants are termed as *refugees* or *the asylum seekers* and their decision of migration is not voluntary but imposed. For this category of migrants adapting to the new country is more difficult than those who take this step willingly. On the other hand migrants migrate to other countries due to some pull factors such as economic prosperity, freedom of thought and standard living. In the present study, the selected novel deals with the obstacles of *the economic migrants*.

On the other hand, the paper discusses the concept of migration and its relevant issues in the light of Islam. In this regard, this article throws light on two major kinds of migration in the light of Islam and they are "Hijrat-e-Habsha" i.e. temporary migration and "Hijrat-e-Madina" i.e. permanent migration. A few of the events related to the act of migration are taken in the context of Islamic history for discussion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 IDENTITY

The term "identity" has its roots back in Erik Erikson's theory which defines it as the capacity to keep continuity and an inner coherence. Hall (1989) confirms Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a numbers of intersecting discourses (P, 10). According to Cherise Smith (2011), various theories that aim to define identity and its origin assume that identity is either a natural, innate quality of a person, or a socially and culturally constructed entity. Common to both of these schools of thought is the question of whether identity of a person is changeable, and whether people themselves can change their identity. Poststructuralist theorists, such as Derrida, Foucault and Althusser believe that identity is formed by discourse and culture (Smith 2011, 8).

In Postcolonial Studies, hybridity is a key concept that defines identity construction process of people with reference to multicultural setting such as migrations. In social sciences the term "hybridity" constitutes together with the term "diversity" which ultimately leads towards heterogeneity. In simple way, it is a form of mixture, combination, overlap or interbreeding. Hybrid identity is the production of multiple backgrounds and exchange of experience between self and external living setting. The integral feature of hybrid identity is the sense of belongingness which runs in various forms. Some migrants, especially those from the first generation, have a clear sense of mono-affiliation to the country of origin. But even if this feeling emotionally persist, however at a cognitive level multiculturalism is recognized,

which indicates a degree of hybridity small to medium, with only a few reflections and internal negotiations. The feeling of multiple belonging is often met, especially beginning with the second generation due to socialization in both contexts. These migrants refuse the assimilation while they see in hybridity the solution of solving the pressure of decision. Specific to this group is the cultural Code-Switching, which makes possible the passing from one form of identity into another. Due to the prominent situational identity, these people cannot be classified into a certain category, which leads to the lack of trust from the part of the environment. There are hybrid identities which are accompanied by the lack of a cultural background.

2.2 MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS IDENTITY

The act of migration refers to the shift of people from one place to another. Suarez- Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2005:96) defines migration as permanent or temporary dislocation of people from one area to another. Migration is therefore the translocation of a person or persons from one place to another. When migrants move from home country to another place, they lose their socio-cultural, linguistic and geographical identity which they try to sustain but often fail in doing so.

The research scholars of migration are of the view that even after moving from one country to another the migrant usually tries to link with their homeland and may move back and forth between national borders. In this way they are not completely uprooted from their homeland nor are they firmly planted in the targeted country. This means that migration is a process of linking together countries of origin and destination.

2.3 LEVELS OF MIGRANTS' HYBRID IDENTITY AND RECONSTRUCTION

Migrants' issues of identity run at different levels against which they struggle and try to reconstruct it in different ways, depending on their factor of movement along with the nature of relation with the host country. Do all the migrants develop a hybrid identity? And what form of affiliation do they adopt? Which are the strategies used in the migration process of reconstruction the identity? Leaving the origin country, the migrant suffers the loss of a part of his identity, especially regarding the cultural identity. The uproot experience is accompanied by a surprise in the host country: the migrant acts "normally" but the environment behaves differently, so the expected reaction from the outside is missing. There are different strategies of reconstructing the identity approach by migrants in the host country. In this process the key elements are migrant relation with the origin country and with the host country. The refugees are also termed as the native foreigner. They completely give up their culture of origin and join the cultural values of the host country. These refugees think themselves more native than the natives even though they remain still foreigners. In context Hoffmann considers them with "the whip of ambition and fear." They expect high and at the same time feel great fear of rejection too due to their instability. A refugee often has a bad past in his home country so he firstly tries to give up his origin but fails in doing so and ultimately the circumstances force him to fight against his cultural roots. Despite of his efforts, "the native foreigner" would not be completely accepted by the natives, but he will have a special place in the community, because even though he shares the present with the native ones, he does not share the past.

The second category of migrants is *the economic migrants*. They don't give up the origin completely; rather, they try to preserve it in the host country too. Vordermeyer terms them as nostalgic ones who live with nostalgic feeling to origin and cultivate a rejection attitude to the values of the host country. So they have a durable identity in the targeted country. These migrants sometime propagate their culture of origin in the host country with confidence. If they fail doing so then they become secluded, rejected face poverty too.

This study uses the views of several thinkers in the realm of hybridity including Homi Bhabha who asserts that both the colonizer and colonized are implicated in ambivalence. The ambivalence relates to hybridity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffi, 2007:11).

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Uma Parameswaran's *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*

A close examination of writings exhibits that Uma parameswaran gives a considerable insight to migrants' issues because she is herself a decedent Indian immigrant. In her work she has talked about the issue of identity and root and by discussing these problems she has tried to construct imaginary home for migrants for which they lament in the host country. Her addressees are South Asian and other minorities living in Canada as immigrants.

Uma's *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* is about an Indian migrated family in Canada. The protagonist Bhav migrates from Pune to Banstoba as an economic migrant in order to improve his family's financial status. Along with him migrates his wife, who quits her job as a school teacher and the property she has as ancestral share. In the host country, the migrated family receives harsh racial treatment from Canadians. In this regard, Bhav says "the white Canadians don't want us to assimilate, they want us out, and we shall be squashed like bugs soon" (81). Similarly, the sister of Bhav, Veejala, who is a scientist, faces the same situation after her settlement in Canada. Nalini Iyer (2009) suggests in her review that the novel is "refreshingly different" and "steers clear of the stereotypes about immigrant families".

They neither enjoy their lives in smooth way in the host country, nor may they detach themselves from roots. The characters in the novel feel alienated and thus live in host country as scattered and segregated personas. Uma parameswaran being a professor of English admits racial segregation which she has faced during her employment in Canada. On the other hand she laments for her roots in India. This sense of indianness is pointed by Kumar Das in his work in following words, "it is not surprising that writers in English are conscious of their indianness at the bottom due to a crisis of identity (44).

All characters in the novel experience the crack of identity in one way or other. They feel double-ness which locates them in what Bhabha terms as "Third Space". Both postcolonial and feminist scholars have theorized the concept of the third space and related ideas in relation to the notion of identity. Marie Lugones (2006), for instance, in "On Complex Communication" suggests that if we place ourselves in the "limen", we conceive of "ourselves" as not "exhausted by domination." She goes on to say that "the key that opens the door to the limen is not resistance to oppression, but rather resistance to particular forms of oppressions at particular times in particular spaces (77)." Female character in the novel: Jyoti, Veejala and Savitri resist and frame their

identity in the third space. By occupying this space, the women become empowered and are able to make autonomous decisions.

3.2 Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Hamid being post-colonial writer has discussed the crisis of identity in the context of migration in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The novel revolves around the protagonist Changez who has been living in America since early age, graduated from Princeton and is working in a reputed organization. It seems that his American Dream has been realized and he has finally got such opportunities which would ensure a promising and a bright future as he says "This is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible." (P.g 3). However, after the incident of 9/11, shatters his dreams soon. Hamid shows that American culture breeds a sense of superiority among the Americans and their attitude of arrogance towards non-whites offends and annoys them. This breeds resentment against America and its culture. Hamid portrays the racial discrimination to which non-Europeans are subjected to by the American culture and society. Changez' position is not different from that of the Negro physician, discussed by Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks* ,89) who was treated as ugly, dirty, nigger, in spite of his polite manner and wisdom.

The issue of identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is so much evident. Changez assimilates American culture, and falls passionately in love with Erica. Assimilation is another characteristic of his identity:

I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American. The Filipinos we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business-and I wanted my share of that respect as well (65).

Although, Changez struggles a lot to prove his loyalty to American yet he fails in doing so. He departs America as a broken soul who is neither Pakistani nor American. Finally he grows his beard as a symbol of protest and becomes a reluctant fundamentalist against such a cruel treatment which he met by America. The protagonist is compelled to leave American and finally he quits the host country but he now faces severe crisis of identity as he lives between two worlds belonging to neither. After reaching in Pakistan, Changez feels nostalgic for American and Erica because he grew there with his dreams which remain unfulfilled.

3.3 Migration in the light of Islamic History

In Arabic the word "migration" means to give up or to leave the country of origin. In other words it means to move from one place to another (p,495). In connection to Islam, all apostles of Allah migrated on the command of God from their country of origin to the host country either in order to preach the teaching of God or for the sake of safety from the torture of enemies of their religions. In this regard, Hazrat Ibrahim migrated from Iraq to Syria, Yaquob moved from Syria to Egypt, Moses shifted from Egypt to Madian whereas our Holy Prophet (S.A.W) migrated from Makkah to Madina (p, 7).

In the light of Islam, the act of migration is great phenomenon and it is considered as worship with significant results (Albakarah ayah 7). The decision of migration made by Holy Prophet (S.A.W) was, without any doubt, correct and it was purely a command of Allah which he obeyed. Anyhow, in others cases, the act of migration may bring both: positive and negative consequences.

Throughout the history of Islam migration can be found in two types. One is known as "Hijrat e Habsha) i.e. temporary migration and second is termed as "Hijrat e Madina" i.e. permanent migration (p, 111). The former refers to an act of movement of people from one place to another for temporary span in order to avoid the enmity of people and in this case migrants may return to their country of origin as soon as the undesired situation reconciles. In this respect, once a rumour spread that the people of Makkah have embraced Islam and pardoned one another. Hearing this, the migrants of Habsha returned to Makkah but they left the country again on knowing that it was a rumour. On the other hand, the migration to Madina by Holy Prophet (S.A.W) along with his companions was that of permanent in nature. The migrants lived there forever because the people of Madina- called Ansar, themselves invited Holy Prophet to Madina and conditioned that once he comes there will never return.

The act of migration, of course, leaves different impacts such as socio-cultural, politico-religious and identify crisis. It is a strange thing that one, for the sake of economic prosperity, freedom of thought and security, loses his belongings such as home, relatives' culture and identity. On invitation of migration by the residents of Madina, our Holy Prophet (S.A.W) did not accept it until He received permission by God. After first revelation when Syeda Khadija accompanied Prophet (S.A.W) to Warqa Bin Nofal on hearing the prediction of migration Holy Prophet became strange that he would have to leave His country one day. On leaving Makkah Holy Prophet (S.A.W) turned his glance back on Baituallah and said, "Oh Makkah, by God, you are the dearest to me on entire world and God also loves you the most, I would have never left you if people did not expel me" (p, 155). Love to home country is in nature of mankind and migration is a very difficult and complex process under which the migrants suffer a lot.

Migration also leaves great impact on economy of migrants. For time being the companions of Holy Prophet became hand to mouth but with the passage of time due to the help of Ansaar Hazrat Abu Bakar started selling garments whereas Hazrat Umar also started business whose trade was extended to Iran. Similarly, Hazrat Usman started selling dates while Hazrat Zubir used to sell garments.

The phenomenon of migration brings great crisis of identity for migrants. In the country of origin one lives like at home whereas after moving to the host country migrants, despite of leaving their cultural, social and other values, spend lives as second citizens and often face discrimination. In this regard, the migrants of Madina were called migrants by local community and Allah has also used this term for them although they spend their whole lives there and even died in Madina.

On the occasion of battle of Bani Mustaliq an Ansari and Mahjar enchanted their respective slogans due to a slight dispute which was extremely discouraged by Holy Prophet and they were warned to not speak like that again which they obeyed. To sum up, in case of temporary migration, one may return to home country while in permanent migration one is supposed to adjust in the host country perpetually. The process of migration leaves impacts on both; local community and migrants socially,

culturally and economically. All these impacts must be accepted for peaceful life on both sides and one has the right to sustain one's own cultural, linguistic and socio-economic values at the same time. But all this must be done with positive intentions and objectives rather than for the exercise of cruel policies.

CONCLUSION

The article brings to the light the issues of migrants in the selected novels with reference to the concept of migration in Islamic history. It exhibits that the act of migration is a complex phenomenon rather a simple movement where the migrants face various issues such as socio-cultural, economic and identical impacts. The selected novels reveal that migrants who move due to pull factors bear abovementioned crisis in the host country and lament for the country of origin. Whereas the discussion made with reference to Islamic history also throws light on migrant's issues anyhow it also terms the act of migration as a good move which brings prosperity, peace and betterment. Above all, love for home country is in the nature of mankind. However, in both cases: if one migrates either by force or willingly or for temporary span or for permanent living, one looks back and laments for roots.

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