

The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 8 & Issue 1, (February, 2023)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 28th February, 2023

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

©The Creative Launcher (2023). This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>, which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. Please contact editor on: thecreativelauncher@gmail.com

Licensing:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Article History: Abstract Received on: 16th November 2022 | Full Article Received on: 24th December 2022 | Revision received on: 27th December 2022 | Plagiarism Checked on 28th December 2022 | Peer Review Completed on: 10th February 2023 | Article Accepted on 10th February 2023 | First Published on: 28th February 2023

Research Article



Fruits of Migration: Seeing Punjabi Diaspora through its Stories

Dr. Neeta Kumari

Head & Assistant Professor

Department of English


Guru Nanak College, Muksar,

Affiliated to Punjab University,

Chandigarh, Punjab, India

Email Id: neetamks1010@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0123-210X>

 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2023.8.1.02>

Pages: 12-18

Abstract

Displacement for survival, perhaps since the inception of life on the earth, has been a marked feature of the animal kingdom—be it birds, mammals, reptiles, or human beings. However, these are only human beings who migrate not just for survival but also for a better life. In this very context, the present paper deliberates on the migration of Punjabis to England, America, and Canada through some of the short stories in Punjabi produced by the migrants settled in these countries. The stories have been taken from an anthology titled Punjabi Parvasian Dian

Kahanian (The Stories from Migrant Punjabis), edited by Jinder and Baldev Singh Baddan. The selected stories bring forth the diasporic people's desires, sometimes lust also, to enjoy the riches and the glamorous life of the western countries and their struggles for success in foreign lands. This literary response is a collection of mixed experiences. On the one hand, it exhibits bewilderment at the incompatibility with the new culture, a sense of alienation, and the sacrifices of health and ethics to reach prosperity; on the other, it brings forth how the migrants learn to explore themselves, gain independence (especially women) and shed their weaknesses and narrow attitudes in the new liberal environments. This study also includes the problem of illegal migration, the vice of greed behind it, the resultant fear and frustration, and how it results in turning humans into not-less-than-beasts.

Keywords: Punjabi Diaspora, Exploration, Independence, Liberal, Illegal migration, Punjabiya, Punjab, alienation, nostalgia, independence

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie, 10)

This statement by Salman Rushdie tries to bring home to the readers two features of diasporic literature—first, that a nagging nostalgia may lead the diasporic writers to recreate the lost lands in their writings; second, that the recreated homelands will just represent the writers' ideas of home, not the actual home left far behind.

However, the Punjabi short stories this paper deliberates upon showcase neither the visions of lost homes nor the sense of loss or nostalgia rather the immigrant experiences that form the third and fourth phases of diasporic consciousness, as discussed by Uma Parmeswaran. She states:

The first is nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in strange land. The second is a phase in which one is so busy in adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethno-cultural issues. The fourth is when they have arrived and started participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (108)

Thus, the selected stories received from the Punjabis settled in three different countries, i.e., England, Canada, and America, mirror the emigrants immersed in their life in the foreign lands, their desires to enjoy the riches and the glamorous life of these countries, and the ensuing struggles and sacrifices to succeed in the new environments. The stories from England are: "Doosari Maan" (Some Other Mother) by Baldev Singh, "Ret Da Bann" (A Barrage of Sand) by Mushtaq, "Rabta" by Santokh Dhaliwal, "Free Society" by Swarn Chandan, and "Rape" by K. C. Mohan; from Canada are: "Kandhaan" (Walls) by Balbir Kaur Sanghera, "Security Guard" by Kuljit Mann; from America are: "Aawaaz, Aawaaz Hai" (Voice is Just Voice) by

N. Kaur, “Jooth” (Left Over) by Gurpreet Dhaliwal, “Nahuaan De Nishaan” (The Marks of Nails) by Surinder Sohal, and “Piasi Kishti” (The Thirsty Boat) by Dr. Sandeep Singh.

These emigrant experiences rendered in fictional pieces form a collection of mixed responses. On the one hand, there is an exhibition of bewilderment at the incompatibility with the new culture and the resultant sense of despair, and the sacrifices of health and ethics to reach prosperity; on the other, it brings forth how the migrants (this paper will focus on women) learn to explore themselves, gain independence and shed their weaknesses and narrow attitudes in the new liberal environments. This study also includes the problem of illegal migration, the vice of greed behind it, the resultant fear and frustration, and how it results in turning humans into not-less-than-beasts.

One common attribute of all these stories is that these can be seen through the “new economics of migration,” which challenges many of the assumptions and conclusions of the neoclassical migration theories, explaining why and how of international migration. While macro theory says that international migration is the result of differences in wages in the labour market of different countries, micro theory explains it as based on individual choices. However, the new economics of migration puts forward that “migration decisions are not made by isolated individual actors, but by larger units of related people—typically families or households—in which people act collectively not only to maximize collective income, but also to minimize risks and to loosen constraints associated with a variety of market failures, apart from those in the labor market” (Massey et al. 433). In the stories under this study also, the decision of migration is not of the individuals but of the families and all of them have migrated families, in some cases joint families also. Here, “Kandhaan” and “Jooth” go a step further where, the protagonists, Jasdev and Harry respectively, complying with the family decision leave their homelands as single men. While Jasdev has been persuaded by his family to go to Canada to marry Miti, a girl from a Punjabi family who settled there, because it will make his settlement in Canada easy, and he will become a financial support for his family in India in comparatively less time, Harry has come to America to earn and fulfill the dreams of his mother. He also is in search of a girl whom he can marry and start a family in a foreign land.

Again, in all the stories, the action takes place either within the family or amongst the members of the migrated community, “Nahuaan De Nishaan” being an exception in which an American appears as one of the main characters. This may be taken as the ground for reiterating what most of the diasporic literature has demonstrated—that emigrants can find a home away from home in their respective families or communities only; they can be significant for the economy of their destination countries but socially they can hardly be one with the natives. Hence, they are the ones who have chosen for themselves the destiny of mythological Trishanku.

Larry Sjaastad in his paper titled “The Cost and Returns of Human Migration” sees migration as an “investment increasing the productivity of human resources, an investment which has costs and which also renders returns” (qtd. in Piche 142). However, both costs and returns can be seen in monetary as well as non-monetary terms. This analysis focuses on the non-monetary costs and benefits. As the select literary writings contain cases of voluntary

migration, let us take an estimate of the returns first. Sjaastad says, “it is particularly useful to employ human capital concept and to view migration, training, and experience as investment in the human agent” (qtd. in Piche and Dutreuilh 142). Though the terminology used by Sjaastad is from the field of economics and economics is the primary factor in the migration decision-making and determining the migration behaviour and expectations, the returns of migration go beyond that. The experience of living in the open society and liberal environments of western countries proves to be a training ground to initiate and nurture a sense of independence, especially in women, as the stories exemplify. In “Kandhaan,” Miti is the first one who comes and gets settled in Canada and becomes a means for Jasdev’s migration. Jasdev gets a right to live in the country after becoming Miti’s husband and for a considerable time remains dependent on her economically too. Thus, the status of a resident of Canada and her earnings there make Miti virtually the “husband” of the house which cannot be dreamt of in the miserably patriarchal Punjabi society back in her home country. The same is the case of Santosh in “Ret Da Bann” who rejects Savitri to get himself engaged with Sunita because the latter has promised him to facilitate his migration to England after she herself moves and gets settled there. Again in “Jooth,” it is Sami whose citizenship of America helps his Punjabi husband to get a green card.

Further, the stories “Rabta,” “Rape,” and “Doosari Maan” depict the women who have learnt to explore and respect themselves as human beings after unlearning the male chauvinistic lessons they have been taught in their home countries. Rabta, the eponymous heroine of the story, begins by helping her mother there in India to be independent by using a computer and the internet. The feeling of empowerment that her mother feels when she sends her first email successfully is to be attributed to Rabta’s efforts only. The pleasure of getting connected with her daughter living in England without any male help gives an unprecedented sense of freedom to the mother. Moreover, it is only because of Rabta’s training that she has started surfing the internet using google. As the story progresses, we see that after extending her empowerment to her mother, Rabta, with a loving tact, not only brings her husband Rajveer back from an extra-marital affair but also makes him realise that such a slip, on her part too, would be as normal as he considers it to be for himself being a male. And in such a case, he would also be forgiving her in the same way he is expecting her forgiveness. The liberal airs of western society have contributed a lot to this widening of the mental horizons of Rabta, her confident arguments regarding the polygamous nature of human beings, and her subsequent convincing of Rajveer regarding the similar functioning of the male and female psyche.

The story “Rape” speaks of the enlightenment of Naseeb Kaur, who, with her husband Jernail Singh, has come to settle in England. Representing typical Punjabi women trained to live to please their husbands, Naseeb Kaur also thinks that a wife’s body is the property of her husband and he has every right to take pleasure from it as and when he feels like. However, when she hears the news of the imprisonment of a white man for raping his wife, the idea is beyond her brains. When explained, she is quick to tell her husband that this is what he usually does. The news brings her to a new plane where she awakens to the fact that a woman herself is the owner of her body.

In “Doosari Maan” the mother is a suppressed woman who, all her life, has tolerated the rejection and infidelity of her husband silently. Bearing the pain, she withdraws herself from all other pleasures of life in such a way that she never demands anything and develops an inhibition against expressing her feelings even for her own children. But when her husband, who lives in England with their emigrated son, dies, she goes there, and the son persuades her to live with them. He also applies for her a pension to which widows are entitled. The feeling that the money she gets as a pension is purely her own gives her a sense of independence and she starts speaking her mind. The change is so astonishing for the son that he feels as if she has been metamorphosed into a new mother.

However, this independence of immigrant women is just a part of the story. In their research paper titled “Mapping Gender and Migration in Sociological Scholarship: Is it Segregation or Integration?” Curran et al. have examined a host of studies and volumes on the subject of gender and migration and have found that “women were both independent economic actors and dependent family members in the migration process” (200). This finding seems apt in the case of Punjabi women whose fictional accounts these stories give. An analysis of the relationship between gender and migration, as represented in the stories in hand, makes it obvious that migration does provide women with the opportunities for a reworking of their status in the family and the society at large, but it is not a promise to eradicate gender asymmetries.

In “Ret Da Bann”, on the one hand, there is Sunita, holding whose hand Santosh migrates to England; on the other, there is Savitri, who has to leave her country and go to England with her husband and his family. While living in England too, Savitri has to be a victim of the double standards of her in-laws’ family. Shedding the traditional inhibitions, they have her working in a pub at night. However, following the same patriarchal principles, they are ready to throw her out of the house because she hasn’t borne any baby in the six years of her married life. In the very attempt to get her life going, Savitri dies.

“Jooth”, a story from the American experience, tells the same tale of patriarchal double standards that Punjabi immigrants carry with them to the remote corners of the world. Sami alias Simran is a daughter of an immigrant who shows himself to be a devoted Sikh and is the president of a gurudwara. Sami brought up in America as a liberal –minded- girl, falls in love with a Muslim boy and marries her. But her father takes it as an insult to their religion. Though according to Sami, her father himself indulges in every kind of vice, he makes the eighteen-year-old Sami divorce the Muslim boy and marry a Punjabi youth, and thus claims to save his religion. The Punjabi guy marries the American citizen Sami in hope of getting a green card and leaves her when he gets the same, saying that she is the jooth (leftover) of a Muslim and he can’t stand that. In all the examples cited above, the case of Darshana in “Aaawaaz, Aawaaz Hai” is a bit different. Darshana represents those innocent women whose husbands go first to foreign lands and they follow them in the hope of a happy and rich living without having any idea about their status in the destination country, i.e., legal or illegal migrants. Darshana’s husband Yugraaj goes to America illegally and then asks her to come to him through Mexico with the help of some friends who were agents dealing with illegal migrants. Darshana takes

the flight completely unaware of the fate that awaits her in Mexico. Before reaching her husband in America, she has to stay for twenty- three days in the dry, dirty, and deprived locales of Mexico at the America-Mexico border amongst sex-hungry strangers. The experience maddens her in such a way that even when she starts living with her husband, she is afraid to go out and meet people. Yugraaj is also in constant fear of being found out. They lose their two baby boys living this way and then Darshana gives birth to a daughter. This infuriates the patriarch of Yugraaj and he gets into the habit of turning the house into hell with his abuse and violence at the slightest provocation. This goes on for eight long years and then Darshana decides to take hold of the reins of her life. She stealthily calls the police and thus arranges to get her family deported to her home legally.

But, it is not so that only illegal migrants have to pay a cost. Reaping the benefits of migration generally involves sacrifices at the cultural, ethical, and many a time the level of health too. Mrs. and Mr. Dhillon in “Free society” is an educated couple settled in England. They lead a satisfied life till Mrs. Dhillon comes to know that their fifteen years old daughter wants to be on pills rejecting their cultural principle of sexual abstinence before marriage. All the returns of their migration decision lose their value when the couple comes face to face with their daughter’s demand to be a part of the free English society.

“Security Guard” brings into the picture three generations of a Punjabi family living under one roof in Canada. The grandfather in the family is in constant conflict with his two grandsons as he wants to control them in the way he has controlled his son. The son, who is the narrator, finds it difficult to strike a balance between his dominating father and freedom-seeking sons. Finally, the decision goes in favour of the sons and the grandfather is asked to live separately. Now conflicts surface between the father and the sons who seek support from their parents in an Indian way but try to take the decisions of their life independently in the manner Canadian youngsters do. The story ends with the narrator trying to find ways of bringing harmony to the house.

While “Free Society” and “Security Guard” concentrate upon cultural incompatibility and consequential conflicts, “Piasi Kishti” warns that the cost of migration is never to be paid with life. The sombre story of Sewa Singh, a taxi driver, who, in the passion for making the most of his migration decision, doesn’t let even a single opportunity of making money go; he disregards the requirements of his body continuously and dies in a hospital as a repentant man.

As stated in the beginning, all the stories in this study take their main characters either from the families or the communities of immigrants, with “Nahuaan De Nishaan” as the only exception. In it, the interactions take place between an immigrant who dreams of riches and a native American who possesses all that the former longs for. Interestingly, the story doesn’t show the settler paying the cost but rather the native who bares the ugliness behind his riches and glamorous life as a warning to the dreaming settler. It is a fact that dreamers from all over the world today eye America as their destination country and try to enter it legally or illegally. Yugraaj in “Aawaaz, Aawaaz Hai” takes an illegal entry into this country and makes life hell for his wife and himself, while the narrator in “Nahuaan De Nishaan”, a genuine immigrant, is in search of the ways to the riches that John Smith, the owner of an Employment Agency

enjoys. But John gives the narrator an unsettling shock into reality when he reveals that he has acquired the affluence and luxury by making his wife his ladder. John has preferred wealth to his principles, whereas the narrator is the one who treasures the marks of nails of his friend who died to save his wife's honour. The story concludes with the immigrant's realization that he would never be able to pay the cost of success in such a society.

Thus, the literary response from the Punjabi diaspora is a spectrum of colours; it defies all specific monotoned statements that attempt to define or even describe it. Further, the recent experiences are also a reiteration that it will continue to be so, at least in the near future.

Works Cited

- Chandan, Swarn. "Free Society." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 80-88.
- Curran, Sara R., et al. "Mapping Gender and Migration in Sociological Scholarship: Is It Segregation or Integration?" JSTOR. pp.199-223. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.
- Dhaliwal, Gurpreet. "Jooth." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 502-510.
- Dhaliwal, Santokh. "Rabta." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 55-67.
- Jinder, and Baldev Singh Baddan, editors. *Punjabi Parvasian Dian Kahanian*. National Book Trust, 2013.
- Kaur, N. "Aawaaz, Aawaaz Hai." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 388-397.
- Mann, Kuljit. "Security Guard." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 272-308.
- Massey, Douglas S., et al. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." JSTOR. pp. 431-466, Accessed 27 Jan. 2020,
- Mohan, K. C. "Rape." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 132-133.
- Mushtaq. "Ret Da Bann." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 49-54.
- Parneswaran, Uma. "Trishanku and Other Writings." *Current Perspectives in Indian English Literature*. edited by Gauri Shankar Jha. E-book, Prestige Books, 1998.
- Piche, Victor. "Contemporary Migration Theories as reflected in their Founding Texts." Translated by Catriona Dutreuilh. *Population* Vol. 68, Issue1 pp. 141-164. <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal.population-2013-1-page-141.htm> Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.
- Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands". *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*, 1981-1991. E-book, Viking, 1991. 9-21.
- Sanghera, Balbir Kaur. "Kandhaan." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 191-211.
- Singh, Baldev. "Doosari Maan." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 42-48.
- Singh, Sandeep. "Piasi Kishti." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 526-535.
- Sohal, Surinder. "Nahuaan De Nishaan." Jinder and Baddan, pp. 517-525.