

Racialized Diasporas : An Overview of Stephen Gill's *Immigrant*

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Abstract: Diasporic communities are racialized in the countries of adoption. 'Race' has tremendous influential affective factor. To cite a few examples, an Afro-Caribbean, unable to prolong with the depressing condition, decides to leave Canada without any promising future. Dr. Hafeez, a Bangladeshi, belongs nowhere and his intellectual achievement bears no relevance for his security. Prabha perceives the discrimination that many Indians face in the land and has entangled her life to the point of destruction. Racial attacks and racist tendencies perpetuate and afflict the migrants who are caught up as *Trishanku*.

Keywords: Racism, racialized diaspora, immigration

I have gazed/ into the graveyard of their eyes often grabbing/ the dry bones of their silence... (Stephen Gill, 76)

People who cross the borders seeking greener pastures, at times tend to lose the lustre in their eyes and their eyes wear a graveyard look, and if not outwardly, somewhere in the inner recess of their selves, something haunts them behind the façade of their life; there is the unnamed lack that the being perceives and at times it tends to define it or goes on in the hum drum of life without probing its perplexity. In fact, the life of a migrant is well captured by Stephen Gill in the same poem and the pattern of life that hangs over him.

A Smoke of uncertainty/ surround them like fear
and the albatross of loneliness/ sits upon them
like a paperweight. (Shrine, 76)

A migrant cannot, however he may try or whatever be the top position he holds, find his root in the land of adoption. Rooting entails security but in the alien land, uncertainty follows the path of a migrant. Loneliness that ensues is like a curse that an individual cannot get rid of or be relieved from it. Searing loneliness accompanies a migrant and becomes the inseparable dead companion to live with. If this sensibility becomes the backbone of his poem, his short novel *Immigrant* (1978) portrays the turmoils of many migrants and Reghu Nath, an Indian who migrates to Canada, 'the land of opportunity' (8). The *Nugget Book Reviews* says that the author has created an informative and powerful portrait of the experiences of Canadian immigrants in the 1970s. W.F. Westcott says that the novel depicts the 'problems, language barriers, cultural discrepancies and longing for a mother country' in the new situation of the migrants in Canada. Jana Evans Braziel points out 'Economic migrants are individuals who move from their home countries to host countries in response to capitalist "push" and "pull" factors within local, regional, national, and global economies'. She clarifies that 'push' factors

include economic depression, unemployment at home and 'pull' factors specify economic boom, shortage of labour and other factors in host countries (33-34). Based on this view, Reghu Nath, we can say, falls under the pull factor and lands in Canada. It is through him we get to know the migrants from other home countries and their survival in the host country. The expression 'racialized diasporas', which is used in the title of this article, centres on Braziel's concept that various diasporic communities are racialized in the countries of adoption. Home countries also expell racialized minorities and they seek refuge in the other countries. Elaborating her views on race, racism and racialized forms of diasporic movement, she underpins the fact that 'race' has tremendous influential affective factor. Concerning the racialized diasporas, she presents three thematical ideas. First it deals with the migrants or '*outsiders within* – the post-migratory racialization of economic migrants'; secondly it is the '*barred entry* – the racialization of refugees by intended countries of destination that bar entry to these communities seeking political asylum'. A third pattern includes racialized diasporic communities who are ultimately forced out; these diasporans are forced out of the country of adoption and to seek new diasporas because they are 'targeted as ethnically "impure" bodies within the nation-state' (129). Forcing diasporans out of the country need not be by framing law and enforcing it on the economic migrants. Several strategies can be adopted to push them out. Queen of Sheeba, so known in the neighborhood, is a 'talkative intellectual' (43). As she converses with Reghu Nath, she informs that he has been a statistician and then taken courses in hair dressing. She confesses regretfully 'All I am doing now is washing dishes, either in a restaurant or at home.' Her qualification does not fetch her the suitable job for the Canadians are 'prejudiced and suffer from the worst kind of inferiority complex'(44). She intends to go back to Trinidad. In addition, she looks for a 'permanent meaningful relationship'(46) but the boys from Trinidad are crazy, after white girls. Mrs. Wallace shares that this girl from Trinidad gives supper parties for young boys to get recognition of the fact that she possesses heart and soul but 'the white males expected only sex from her'(64). Professional ambition and personal desires have been unfulfilled and she is edged to leave the land of adoption. It is, to use Braziel's categories of racism, historical racism that is in operative form in this context. Historical racism arise out of historical moments. It is defined by 'widespread injustice, prejudice, and disenfranchisement against a targeted race or ethnic group' (Braziel,134). Time has flown but the stereotype images imposed on the race continue to hold a sway and the pattern proceeds marching along with modernity. The Trinidadian's intellectuality is never recognized neither is her qualification considered, but as an Afro-Caribbean, she continues with a servant-maid's work. Unable to prolong with the depressing condition, she decides to leave without any promising future. Even for her air-faire she has to plead someone so that she crosses the border to reach home. Dr. Hafeez, a Bangladeshi, holds doctorate in combustion engineering from a British University. He has discovered 'a new system for producing stationary flame around a single stream of

monosized oil droplets of diameters between 500m to 10m'(108). He has eighteen published papers to his credit, he is listed in 'who's who' of the scientists from Europe. A visiting professor from Canada meets him at the seminar course given by him at the Cambridge University and suggests that Canada can offer him 'an excellent career'(109). He accepts the invitation but he has been given a position in the department of chemical engineering which he could not accept as he had to go to Bangladesh due to his brother's death in a car accident. When he returns, he does not get any opportunity and lives on unemployment benefit for eight months and suffers from 'mental exhaustion, at times bordering on a complete breakdown' (110). Having nothing to do, he wanders the streets of Ottawa. As he has no choice, he returns to Bangladesh though he fears the 'unsettled political climate of that country'(110). When he has applied, he has come to know of the interference of so many officials that he remains jobless. He has been allured on intellectual ground to become a wanderer in the street. He belongs nowhere and the intellectual achievement bears no relevance for his security.

An Indian with Ph.D. in Political science and having worked for years at the university level migrates to Canada and ends up working as a waiter in Toronto restaurant but the uncongenial atmosphere drives him to death. Another Ph.D. holder from India works as a security guard in Vancouver. In Montreal, Reghu Nath has met a person from Pakistan, a Ph.D in Computer science from a university of France, wanders on St. Catherine's with two other Pakistani boys of similar predicament. Working in a library, Prabha perceives the discrimination that many Indians face in the land. When Reghu says that an Indian gentleman, who is M.A in Hindi from Benaras university, India, is permitted to do D.Phil in English Literature, Prabha adds an Indian lady, a postgraduate in sociology is doing Ph.D in English literature. A week after their last meeting, Prabha commits suicide by 'jumping from a tower of the parliament buildings' (103). Many rumours spread after her death. In spite of being an M.A in library science, she has been offered a cataloguer's job, less qualified person have been given better positions; and the workers around have been 'antagonistic'. 'She was being tolerated as a cancer in their main body'. It is the 'discriminatory policy' that has led her to end her life (105). Reghu ponders: 'she was brave to kill herself, rather than lead an undignified existence'(107). Her life is devastated; her parents' investment for her development and their hopeful aspirations have been shattered; and finding a space in the alien borders has entangled her life to the point of destruction. Educational system is highly structured and it does not seem to maintain objectivity in the case of diasporans. Prejudice pervades and operates against diasporans. Reghu Nath is not able to complete his doctorate programme. He has been unable to put up with 'mental torture' and it is 'intolerable' to be seen by 'hostile professors, with scornful smiles and enemy stares'. He has been 'pressured into taking few extra courses' and the professors do not keep up their appointments. A professor has interfered and so Reghu fails to get the scholarship. Reghu Nath feels that is a 'mockery of education'(30). After this ordeal, Reghu gives up and leaves the university. Registering his name with private employment

agencies, Reghu Nath waits to get employed. He hates living on the Welfare scheme. Once he gets a chance to be a substitute teacher for a noisy class that ignores his presence and the following day he is not asked to return. Even the teaching permit he got from the Quebec Ministry of Education has not helped him in securing a job. Though he has given his credentials of having served for many years in India and Africa, the principal informs him that he has found a Canadian teacher to replace him. In the above mentioned incidents which are related with the academic area 'institutional racism' manifests itself in different ways. Institutional racism, Braziel defines, as the 'resilient forms of race prejudice and ethnic bias that were historically formative in the structuring' (134) of law, policies, academic disciplines and other forms of knowledge. In the academic line as well as in the job hunting process, the diasporans undergo deviant systems for they are forced to take up a course that is not exactly related to their previous educational qualification; secondly they are given jobs arbitrarily that the job and the qualification do not correspond; they work totally in unrelated area; thirdly they are discriminated and not given jobs based on subjective rules that are framed on the spot to justify. Citizens consider economic migrants to be the cause of increased unemployment. The migrants are the scapegoats in the host country for the hatred of dominant population and casual factors for the ills of society. Two hippie – looking boys working in a factory get picked up by police on St. Catherine's street as they wait to board the bus. The police lock them up for two days without telling them the reason. The police do not even ask the boys if they have committed any criminal act nor the individuals are let known the cause of their arrest. The boys are ignorant of the crime imposed on them. 'Violent racism, results in brutal acts of violence, even murder, due to profound levels of prejudicial hatred' (Braziel, 134). In the case of the boys, they are barred entry in the province, and stay in the cell for two days. They are silenced and left in the dark. It is the racial prejudice that operates in arresting the boys. A frustrated artist and a Jew, Mrs. Wallace claims to be a writer. In both fields, she has failed as a professional. Playing minor roles on TV shows and having published some articles in local newspapers, she moves around in a kind of depressed state. A woman invites her to attend a meeting of women journalists in a hotel. She enters a wrong room where the men have a meeting and orders whiskey. As she drinks it and wonders at the absence of women, the waiter forces her to leave the hotel. As she protests, they drag her to the street and two constables force her to get into the police car. She narrates, 'they locked me in a cell, without giving me an explanation' (51). The cell is meant for the prostitutes. In the morning she is taken to the court and the judge fines her fifty dollars for disturbing the peace.

Mrs. Wallace's condition brings in another painful diasporic predicament. Serge Liberman differentiates *Golah* and *Galut*. *Golah* refers to expatriate state where they maintain strong affinity with the homeland and it is not a painful experience. On the other hand, *Galut* 'carries with it a more painful notion of "choiceless Choice" of living in the Diaspora on sufferance, more specifically of living uprooted,

displaced and dislocated – in short, in Exile – from one's home following flight or expulsion as refugees....' (480). Mrs. Wallace has undergone a humiliating experience. Neighbours cause a rumour that after her husband's death, her sex appetite has increased and that she behaves in a queer way. She has to go through the nation's enactment of law upon her and suffer the punishment for her ignorant act. Yet she cannot make a choice to leave Canada. Critiquing the experience of immigrants in Canada, Stephen Gill gives an exposition that Canada accepts ethnic groups both on the social and political levels. The ethnic groups on the other hand exclude and alienate themselves into their own ghettos. He asserts that Canada does not accept them is merely their assumptions. 'Immigrants are treated equally before the law' (84). In spite of the assertion, the situations illustrated in the novel do justify that the discriminatory policy is maintained with the diasporans. Stephen Gill justifies that the migrants have freedom to move around and government provides funds for cultural and language activities. However, the narration of the participants presents a dismal condition. David Crystal posits 'Linguistic markers of ethnic identity are especially powerful..... questions of ethnolinguistic identity in fact arise most often in relation to the demands and needs of those who are in an ethnic minority within a community.....' (302) Reghu Nath laments over Indian educational system that makes students most often listen to lectures and lacks opportunities to develop speaking skill. Though he is proud of the wide knowledge of Indian students, he identifies the problem of Indian students whereas students of North America participate in discussion and succeed in getting good grades. But the Indian scholars are 'poor conversationalists in English' and that is the root cause for their failure in the academic field. Reghu Nath is tired of the 'intellectual snobbery' (99) of the Department and he fails to complete his doctoral programme.

The linguistic marker isolates the Indian minority in the community for the lack of effective communication. Electronic Mediascape is engaged to assault the ethnic group. Reghu manages to escape while he drives on the road and consoles himself that the accident is preferable to an actual fight. He is deeply disturbed and meets his friend, who tells him 'hate against Asians was propagated on certain telephone numbers' (122). Even the parliament member and the police are not able to stop it. Since there is no law against such manipulation of the media, the assault continues. Asians find the police supporting the Whites and they argue that they are politically weak unlike the Italians who are strong and have a member in the parliament. Aggarwal expounds his long history in Canada. He and his wife take different courses to get a job and his conclusive remark is that the employers prefer to hire White men. He shudders at the thought of racial attacks and adds 'In their (white) heart they think us barbarians non-cultured' (131). The newspapers print 'stories of racial slogans and attacks on Asian' (116). The Asians become the scapegoat of the dominant race's hate. These racial attacks attest that the skin of people and their nationality are the determinants to get discriminated in the land of adoption. Gilles Deleuze explicates "Thought "makes" difference, but difference is monstrous. We should not

be should not be surprised that difference should appear accursed, that it should be error, sin or the figure of evil for which there must be expiation' (37). In the Canadian context, difference causes violence leading to brutal attack and Toronto seems to be the origin of 'racial prejudice and discrimination' (119). These scenes of attack indirectly convey the complexity of the state that it bars entry and resorts to ways of forcing them out of the country. The York University research report indicates that 51/% of people have racist tendencies. As Deleuze points out expiation for this evil is needed but it almost seems beyond reach. Mac, whose real name is Basant Lal, impresses people with 'spectacular success' (143). But, he extorts money from many Asians and offers attractive projects only to turn them out in the end. Sanjay files a suit against them. Vachan is not able to get immigrant status but Mac allures him that if he pays seven thousand dollars to become a business partner with him, he can stay on. Vachan coaxes his brother to get a loan for him. Both the brothers in their needy state accept the deed drawn in favour of Mac, who accuses Vachan of stealing money from the shop within a month. The police are informed of his 'illegal stay' and he gets 'arrested and deported' (145). The veteran Mac exploits the pathetic plight of immigrants. Besides exploitations, he serves almost as an agent for the police in sending Vachan to his home country. Dev Singh, an engineer from India falls a prey to Mac's scheme. Within the ethnic community, there are individuals who cause cleavage and misery unto the fellow migrants. Racism spearheads in different ways and the advantages of modernity and transnationalism are strange factors for many migrants in the Canadian context. Braziel quotes Thomas Holt who argues that 'racist ideas and practices are naturalized, made self-evident, and thus seemingly beyond audible challenge. It is at this level that race is reproduced long after its original historical stimulus.... has faded' (144). Racism is not erased, instead it is perpetuated. Attributing negative qualities to different racialized categories, the society permits the inconsistencies in dealing with the migrants. Diasporic communities become victims of government policies but the tool of narration becomes counterhegemonic to the power of any state.

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