



SHOBHAN BANTWAL'S THE FULL MOON BRIDE AS THE MANIFESTATION OF THE INDIAN DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES

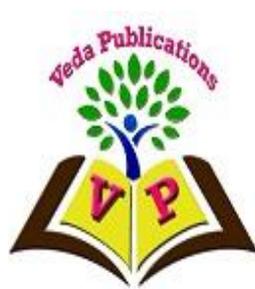
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ABSTRACT



Diaspora is the band of people who are dispersed from their homeland and live in a different geographic and cultural scenario. Indian diaspora are found across the globe especially in USA who still continue their ethnicity while warmly accepting the culture of the immigrant land. Thus, they bear a duality in their identity, culture, habits and thought-process. This duality of the diaspora has always been the trending topic in literature by Indian Diaspora. **Shobhan Bantwal** is one such writer who brings out the experiences of the Indians settled abroad, especially in USA. She is known for her proficient blending of Indian nuances into American situations depicting the dilemma of umpteen Indian immigrants. Her novel **The Full moon Bride**, a 2011 release, deals with the perplexities of an Indo-American professional, **Siya Giri**, in her attempts to get married adhering to the Indian ethnic practices. It also mirrors adeptly the difficulties of **Rajesh** aka **Roger Vadepalli** in taking up an off-beat career diverging from the routine Indian tech-medico careers. The novel also delves deep into the psyche of the parents of Siya and Rajesh who are professionally Americans but personally Indians yet. Moreover, the novel also highlights the psychological digressions of latest Indian immigrants in USA.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Immigrants, Ethnicity, Duality of Identity, Ethnic practices.*



INTRODUCTION

The story of Indian immigrants in America dates back to late 18th century. It was an eventful and momentous saga. The Indians had multitude of identities in America from being the most reliable and accomplished workers on the farms to the most hated and discriminated lot and then grew to be the diligent representatives to the Senate. Over the time, Indians had varied experiences for being Indians in an alien land. They experienced both the wrath and the warmth of the natives. The adaptability, endurance and dedication of these Indian immigrants - the Diaspora - gained them the material and cultural success overseas. The adeptness with which the first generation Indian immigrants amalgamated into the foreign culture laid a red carpet for the second generation Indian to make their living in America.

But the journey of these Indian Diaspora was series of communal and emotional upheavals. The journey of the immigrants in any foreign culture is well defined by Uma Parameswaran into four phases which is as follows...

“-----first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have ‘arrived’ and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues.” (Parameswaran, 165)

In toto, the above quote puts together that these Diasporic Indians had to undergo severe cultural shock in the process of assimilating the foreign

culture for their smooth existence abroad. In spite of the cultural shocks, Indian retained their ethnicity in their personal spheres while attaining an American outlook in their professional and social spaces. This duality of identity became the major concern in the lives of the second generation Indians in America i.e., the off-springs of the early Indian immigrants. Indianism at home and a cosmopolitan American culture in their social life boggled the minds of these young settlers creating quest for their identity and search for their roots.

The outcome was that at a time they had to survive both - the ethnic Indianess which gives them the sense of security and the Americanism which gives them the social mileage. All this resulted in duality, search for roots, quest for self in them and made these heirs of the Indian settlers struggle to establish their identity both in their personal and social spheres.

These maniacs of the Diaspora in America had been a much pondered upon topic in the literature by Indians as well as by the Diaspora. The diasporic writers dealt with these psychological predicaments more proficiently as they had a firsthand experience themselves.

Shobhan Bantwal is a contemporary diasporic writer from India who has settled in New Jersey, USA after her marriage. She carried a deep-rooted Indianism with her to abroad. In the new nation she had proper experiences that of any immigrant like rootlessness, loneliness and a quest for self. Bantwal in America had experienced all facades of an immigrant life – a woman, an immigrant, a home maker in a foreign culture, a student who knew the real America in the campuses and an employee



working for the state. Above all of being a mother to a girl child of Indian parents in a foreign culture. All these experiences have prepared her for her writing career which she started very late in her life, at the age of 50. One can surely assume that all her experience in her life abroad helped her to become a seasoned writer who truly represented the upheavals in the lives of immigrants with women in the forefront and as protagonist. Her works revolve round the contemporary Indian women in foreign lands and concern about women issues like arranged marriages, dowry, pre-marital sex, gender based abortions, cross cultural issues which affect women the most. She was listed as 'The Bestselling author' by the New York Times nearly every time she released a novel.

"The Full Moon Bride" is a 2011 publication of Bantwal brought out by Kensington books in USA and by Fingerprint Publishing in India. It is a novel which revolves round several strings attached with marriage especially an arranged marriage in Indian culture. The novel has been applauded by Mary Manroe of *New York Times* as "a gem" and Caridad Pinerio as "Dazzles you with desi culture in America".

The novel depicts the dilemmas of the Indian diaspora in America. It presents the psychological trauma of the protagonist **Siya Giri**, a well-settled attorney in the process of finding a right husband through the ethnic Indian 'bridal-viewing'. The novel also dissects to the readers the financial as well as the mental upheaval underwent by **Rajesh Vadepalli** to make his way to the Broadway ignoring the lucrative tech-medico careers. Also the novel analyses the troubles experienced by the parents of Siya and Rajesh to bear with the cross-cultural

behavior of their children. The main plot is well complimented with the events from the lives of other immigrants who take off-beat decisions due to their dual identity.

The Giris are a well-to-do Telugu immigrant family in the elite settling of New Jersey. **Mr. Giri** is a high earning and reputed Cosmetic surgeon and **Mrs. Giri**, a home maker who is well-versed with the American culture in which they live. They are so much into America and its culture that they even celebrate the 'Thanks giving' and erect a Christmas tree – but with a picture of Goddess Laxmi instead of the star. Yet they adhere to Indian ethnicity in all important aspects of life. So, they wish to get their only daughter **Siya Giri** to be married to a Telugu Indian guy through the traditional match-making and bridal viewing. They are very keen on Siya accepting the process and choose her life partner accordingly. Though they have given Siya all the independence like any other American youth, yet they are quite vigilant over her social life and relationships. They disapprove of her late night parties, booze parties, bikini dresses and are cautious about her long drives. They openly object her prospective relationship with an Afro-American Lou Draper, a colleague of hers. This clearly states the duality the Giris are subjected to.

Siya Giri is the only daughter of the Giris who is a well-settled attorney and the apple of her parents' eye. Her marriage is the only major pre-occupation in their family. She is an American in her beliefs and ideologies, but an Indian by nature. This is evident in her muted acceptance to attend the volley of bridal-viewings, even though irritating to her, with a strong belief in the success of arranged marriages. She



displays courage to take up the off-beat Environmental sector for her profession as an attorney, but like a true Indian lass, could not dare to marry Rajesh Vadepalli who is not into a secured career though seems promising through his aspirations. She like any other American youth who prefers independence and privacy, but wants a reliable and dependable husband, not one who is yet to make his mark. She wishes to have an upper hand over her spouse, but did not like the proposal of Rajesh's financial dependence on his would-be wife. She gives way to the flirting of Lou Draper, but could not allow him to capitalize on her through physical relationship. She disregards the ethnic Indian rituals but deeply believes in the spirituality of India. All these snippets from the life of Siya Giri truly illustrate the duality and the rootlessness suffered by the Indian diaspora in America.

Rajesh Vadepalli another important character of the novel is also a prey to the several psychological maniacs which the diaspora suffer in an alien land. He is the son of a well-settled business man, **Mr. Vadepalli**, who dreams of a bright career for his only son either in Technology or Medical sectors which Indians are usually crazy about. **Mrs. Vadepalli**, though far above the middle class, still does her shopping in sales and convenient stores. Their hopes were burnt to ashes when Rajesh forgoes a Medical seat achieved in merit and goes for Dramatics as a career. Like any other Indian parents, they are apprehensive about the decision of their son and dissuade him by not financing his play.

Rajesh was caught in the cross fires of fulfilling his dream and fulfilling his parents'. True to his American brought up and sense of liberty, he chooses

to be a playwright. This brings him a train of difficulties both in his personal and professional spheres. But he is determined to achieve his dream even at the cost of inviting the anger of his orthodox father and displeasing Siya who liked him as a man but disliked his actor-writer facet.

But deep inside even Rajesh carried Indianness which was his true identity. His respect for his father's dictum to attend the series of bridal-viewings against his will highlights his obedience for the parents. His esteem for Siya's opinion when she rejects him, his incessant trials to safe-guard her and her feelings shows his respect for women. His conformity to his financier's request to maintain secrecy displays his reverence for the elders and well-wishers. All of which are truly the Indian ethics. So, we understand that Rajesh like Siya and many other second generation Indians is torn between being an American and surviving his Indianness.

Also the novel displays similar difficulties of immigrants from several other countries. The saga of **Lou Draper**, a widower, working as an attorney for the Department of Environment is also divided between being an American while retaining his ethnic African identity. He struggles to reach to a respectable position in America and believes that he has turned to be an American. But deep inside he still carries the African culture and likes to be identified accordingly. His respect for Siya's Indian roots and his attempts to acculture himself into Siya's Indian world shows his camaraderie for fellow immigrants. Yet his flirting, dating and other such activities prove the strong American influences on him. These American influences and his innate ethnic



values draw him into a confused state, because of which he tries to establish an affair with Siya.

Thus, Shobhan Bantwal highlights the predicaments of diaspora through her novel "The Full Moon Bride". With her first hand experiences of being a diaspora herself, she is able to bring in the reality into her fiction and show how the diaspora suffer because of their American exterior and Indian interior. She knits around the characters life-like situations which break open the hearts and minds of the characters at a time revealing to the readers the several upheavals underwent by these immigrants because of the duality in their identity.

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