



A Critical Study of The Strategies of Acculturation Adopted By The First And Second Generations of Immigrants In Ravinder Ravi's Story *The Road To Marriage*

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the different strategies of Acculturation given by J.W. Berry and also studies the various characters of Ravinder Ravi's story *The Road to Marriage* in the light of this theory. It also seeks the reasons behind the dichotomy in the adoption of distinct strategies of Acculturation by the first and second generations of the Punjabis abroad.

Explanation:

The stories written by the emigrant Punjabi writers capture the pulse of the life lived by the immigrants overseas. They present the real narration of the hardships endured by the migrants there. The natives imagine the migrants to be living a Westernized, luxurious and comfortable life abroad and such imaginations compel them to hover around the immigration agencies with bags of rupees for the successful application of their visas. They, even, assume the migrants to be relaxing in the foreign lands in the warmth of the dollars and pounds, being the part of the Westernized and modernized circles and enjoying all the luxuries like the Whites. They are oblivious to the countless problems which migrants encounter while adjusting in the West. But the works of the diasporic writers are a way to shatter their fantasies and imaginations and to sketch before them the real picture of the hard and troublesome life lived by most of the migrants abroad.

Their writings also emerge as a medium to talk about the psychological and physical pressures faced by the migrants while establishing a balance between their family life and their lengthy work-routines. In addition, they are always under a psychological pressure to keep their children bound to their native culture and traditions and to save them from the impact of the Western society. Thus, the diasporic



literature talks about the losses which immigrants have to bear in the race for material progress. These books also present those readers, who cannot get the chance to visit these far-off lands to witness the actual plight of the diaspora, a second-hand experience of the lives of migrants.

The first generation migrants suffer from an emotional and a mental stress in their struggle for keeping their children intact in their native culture. However, this leads to a cultural and generational conflict with their children as their children appear to be more inclined towards following the culture and traditions of the society of their birthplace. The psychological stagnation of the first generation in their native land makes them incapable to understand the thought-pattern, emotions and necessities of their children. Their children always live a segmented life as due to their upbringing in the Punjabi households, they cannot completely ignore the customs and culture of the Punjab but outside their homes, the lifestyle of their White friends does not seem strange to them, as they have witnessed this Westernized way of living since their schooldays. So, they are in a dilemma which way to choose. This leads to a conflict between the parents and their children as these children, sometimes, cannot gather enough courage to leave one of these cultures completely. Thus, Ravinder Ravi's story *The Road to Marriage* is particularly chosen for analysis in this paper in order to understand the reasons behind the conflict between the first generation and the second generation of the Punjabis in the West.

Ravinder Ravi, a renowned Punjabi diasporic writer, migrated firstly to Kenya and then to Canada and established himself as an English teacher and a successful Punjabi writer there. He has contributed hugely to the Punjabi Literature by writing about the problems and the life of the diaspora. His experiences along with the life stories of his fellow diasporic Punjabis overseas provided substantial content for the themes of his stories. In his story, *The Road to Marriage*, the variability in the adoption of the strategy of acculturation by the first and the second generations of diaspora, mainly, leads to a dichotomy between them. Thus, the analysis of the psychology of these generations in the light of the theory of acculturation helps us to dig deeper in the lives of the diaspora.

Before moving further, the need is to understand the term *acculturation* and its different strategies. John Widdup Berry gives the definition of acculturation in his article "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation":

The classical definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p.149): "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which



result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Berry 7).

Simplifying further, in this process, when the dominant group (host society) and the non-dominant group (immigrants) come into contact, the non-dominant group is, largely, influenced by the society, culture, lifestyle etc. of the dominant group. While considering the differences in the attitude of the diaspora and the receiving society towards acculturation, J.W. Berry (2001) categories acculturation into four groups: marginalization, separation, integration and assimilation. Marginalization includes those migrants who distance themselves both from the cultures of their native land and the host land due to the discrimination suffered by them. Separation involves those immigrants who have strong attachment to their roots and their native country. Hence, they remain separated from the receiving society. Integration is the most balanced strategy of acculturation as this includes migrants who are inclined to be the part of both the native and the host society. In case of assimilation, the migrants have the full tendency to adopt the host land’s culture as they don’t have strong affection for their homeland’s culture.

In this story, there are six characters, namely, Mohini, Inder Singh, Bachan Kaur, Sohan, Joginder and Sunder Singh. Mohini, a girl of 16 or 17 years and her 14 or 15 years brother, Sohan, have always followed the customs of the Punjabi culture for their parent’s happiness. They emerged as “exemplary children” (Ravi 54) among the Punjabi families. But Mohini has a widened vision to see equality among all humans and to enter the multicultural world of Canada. Her father, Inder Singh, and her mother, Bachan Kaur, are firmly attached to their roots due to which they remain isolated from the host society. They cannot comprehend the progressive ideas of Mohini, who is also in love with Joginder, a lower caste Punjabi boy. The real conflict between Mohini and her father emerges due to her question of marriage as she wants to marry Joginder but her father wants her to marry some jatt boy in Punjab as he strongly believes in the evil of caste-system. Despite, the repeated arguments between the father and the daughter, she is forcefully engaged in Punjab. Sunder Singh, Joginder’s father, is the only character in the story that has a broader vision to view the world. Mohini and Joginder see the only hope in him due to the openness of his opinions and perspectives. He, even, tries to make Inder Singh understand the situation of Joginder and Mohini, however, he fails. This compels them to consummate their love before marriage as they felt that their unborn child will pave the way for their marriage. Thus, Inder



Singh is the fixed character whereas Mohini and Sunder Singh are delineated as the progressive characters in the story.

In the story, Mohini opts for the integration strategy as she wants to be an integral part of both cultures-native and hostlands' for a balanced living. She, confidently, feels that the multicultural society of Canada will definitely absorb the migrants by considering them to be its constituent part. The words used in the story, like multiculturalism and collective consciousness (Ravi 60), point towards the inclusion of all. That is why, she argues with her father on the question of her marriage and tells him to accept her existence in the multicultural world of Canada. She asserts that:

Canada is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. People from every country of the world have made it their home. Each immigrant has a separate and distinct identity.

Nevertheless, as Canadians, they also have a collective identity. You have never tried to see us as a part of this collective consciousness. We were born in this country. We grew up and studied here. The larger circle of life in Canada is a vital part of our individual lives (Ravi 60-61).

Mohini wants a harmonious collaboration of both the Eastern and the Western cultures in her. In the due course, she never goes to the extremes of any of them. She neither demands the open and free lifestyle of the West nor does she support the constricted belief-system of the Punjabi culture.

Mohini, who is a sensible and an intelligent girl, also raises a crucial issue of identification and recognition of individual's space in the text. She feels that the elaborative words like roots, culture and homeland cannot provide an identity to a person rather a person's identity emerges out of his/her existential space. Even, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines identity as "who or what somebody/something is" (770). Thus, she resolves the conflict arising out of the question of roots, ethnicity, traditions, belongingness, culture and identity by accepting the existential space provided by the Canadian multicultural world. In a way, multiculturalism and integration are interlinked as they talk about the process of inclusion and collaboration. Her demand is for a similar neutralizing point where all the divisions among the humans on the basis of caste, colour, creed etc. dissolve. So,



multiculturalism and integration are the considerable solutions to resolve the disputes and problems between the diasporic parents and their children. Mohini does not choose to assimilate with the Western society because in this, she has to abandon her native culture and traditions which doesn't cater to her psychological bend. So, she inclines for a multicultural society where all the diversities nullify to construct a new whole.

It is important to note that Mohini and Sohan's lack of physical interaction with the real Punjab hinders their complete identification with it. Femke Stock states that unlike the first generation migrants, homeland can never be a 'starting point' (Ravi 26) for the second generation children of the diaspora as these children have not suffered any losses of native place, family, culture or roots like their parents. Femke Stock writes in her article "Home and Memory":

Later generations have not experienced migration and have no memories of the time before it (Brah 1996: 194). They are their heirs to diasporic memories that are told and retold, reappropriated and reinterpreted in light of the here and now. Throughout their lives they construct their own diasporic narratives of home and belonging out of these memories, together with their own experiences, their 'migration routes and migration roots' (Stock 27).

Hence, it is necessary that the words like roots and culture should not be imposed on these young minds as it may completely distance them from their ancestral culture. Thus, the characters like Mohini voice the feelings of the diasporic writers like Ravinder Ravi, who want to suggest some solutions for the issues of the diaspora in their works.

Even Mohini makes efforts to broaden the constricted vision of her father, Inder Singh, who is in the tangles of the strong memories of his homeland and who cannot look beyond the word-- roots. For him, roots are the main basis for establishing the identity of a person. On the other hand, Mohini feels that the other parts of a plant like stem, leaves, flower, branches etc. are equally important. Her perspective pertains to the emotions, feelings, relations, experiences, desires etc. of a person as a human being's identity is the product of the combination of all these. She thinks that roots only carry the name of one's clan instead of the complete identity of a person. She says, "Should we focus only on the roots and forget that there is so much more besides the roots? How about the tree, stem, branches, leaves, flowers,



and fruits? Should we chop away the whole tree to cling to the roots?" (Ravi 61). But Inder Singh is not stirred by the holistic way to view an individual as he says "...roots should be important for us, child" (Ravi 61). Thus, she fails to provide a new dimension to Inder Singh's thinking which aggravates the conflict at their home.

Furthermore, her reference to the concept of multiculturalism is a mere means to cause the psychological acculturation of Inder Singh. However, his stubbornness and ego hinder the development of this vision in him and he remains at the stage of separation from the host land. She, herself, has undergone the psychological acculturation as she has liberated her soul from the narrow divisions among the humans. She says: "At the end of the day, all that matters is the human being. This is the philosophy enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib at the Gurudwara" (Ravi 63). As a result, she insists upon marrying Joginder by evading all social, cultural, physical and economic restraints. Unfortunately, the unyielding attitude of Inder Singh is the only reason behind her movement towards the "fertility test" (Ravi 64) with her lover, as practiced in Kenya before marriage. Earlier in the story, Mohini tries her best to make Inder Singh understand her thoughts and situation. However, the sternness of Inder Singh is the only reason for compelling her to move from the stage of integration to assimilation as the "fertility test" undertaken by Mohini is her step towards assimilating with the West.

Though, acculturation invites people to respect humanity by changing their ideology and by being tolerant towards people of other cultures, religions, races, castes, and nationalities but the adamant migrants like Inder Singh don't show any interest in developing a bond with the foreign culture and prefers to remain isolated from the foreign society. They never see this place as their real home rather it's only a source of earning and leading a comfortable life for them.

In the text, Inder Singh never allows his mind to comprehend the perspectives and desires of his children, who want to integrate with both cultures for an easy survival. However, the memories of the loss of his homeland have a strong hold on the psychology of Inder Singh due to which it becomes hard for him to mingle in a new society. Thus, his memories and emotions become an obstacle in the way of his integration with Canada. His problem can be sorted out if he lets loose the hold of his memories and creates some space in his mind for the acceptance of new ideas and customs like Sunder Singh. Even he never appears to be flexible about the question of identity. Pramod K. Nayar writes that "Identity, therefore, is constantly shifting, liminal and displaced" (Nayar 168-169). He seems to be



afraid of this change. When Mohini says about identity that: “Not once have you made an effort to connect with us, to really know our identity as individual”, he promptly replies: “Your culture is your identity, child” (Ravi 60).

Therefore, a solution for the cultural conflict between the first generation and the second generation of immigrants is difficult to be attained because the first generation migrants, satisfactorily, reside in the secure boundaries of their memories. They are also satisfied with their isolation from the Canadian society. They are oblivious to the threatening results of their inflexibility and stagnation as the children like Mohini, who prefer to integrate with both cultures, will automatically assimilate with the West, where their individuality and thoughts will no more be suffocated.

Moreover, Inder Singh’s adamancy is obstructing him from comprehending the real cause of the problems at his home. He cannot understand that his strong adherence to the Punjabi culture and his outdated beliefs are the primary causes for his family disturbances. The irony is that though Inder Singh shows great affinity for his homeland but he will never be ready to return to his birthplace at the cost of leaving behind his comfortable life in Canada.

He cannot understand that the two words i.e. belonged and belonging are separate. He belonged to Punjab however, now with his present home and family in Canada, he has established belongingness with this nation. He needs to acknowledge the multi-layered concept of multiculturalism as it offers to adjust together the people belonging to diverse lands and cultures. In addition, he needs to find a way to get closer to his children as Mohini says: “But, Daddy, you have to try to understand what your children want in their life. You have never cared to do so. You fixed standards for us and we continued to live up to them. Willingly or unwillingly, we have walked the distance to meet your expectations” (Ravi 60).

Interestingly, inspite of living in the same foreign land for years, both the first generation and the second generation migrants have different levels of cultural contact with Canada. Mohini, a second generation migrant, thinks integration as a means of an easy survival for the immigrants overseas. While referring to multiculturalism, she tells her father that: “The larger circle of life in Canada is a vital part of our individual lives” (Ravi 61). In contrast, Inder Singh, a first generation migrant, is lost in the memories of his native land and resists to adopt the culture and the practices of the West as he sees Canada as a “decadent society” (Ravi 61).



Furthermore, Sunder Singh is the only first generation character in the story that serves as a mouthpiece for the writer, as he has risen above the crippled conventions of roots and culture. His psychological development is depicted by his dialogue:

All these notions of culture and roots have been invented by man. Conventional rites and rituals are the result of one's endeavour to mould life according to common norms and practices. But when conventions begin to weigh one down, they should be changed or discarded (Ravi 64).

Due to his positivity he turns out to be a pillar of hope, strength and also a perfect example of integration for Mohini and Joginder. Actually, Sunder Singh understands that the words like culture and roots are the products of human psychology so its limits can be expanded by us.

Finally, the possible solution for the dichotomy between the attitudes of these two generations is in the advanced and positive behavior of Sunder Singh. Unlike Inder Singh, he doesn't opt for the separation from the Western society whereas he adopts the advanced psychology and customs of the Western society. Thus, he is addressed as "a liberal and sensitive individual" (Ravi 63) by the writer. Therefore, a hopeful solution for bridging the distance between the first and second generation of immigrants, lies in the beliefs of Sunder Singh. But for this, both the first generation and the second generation have to join hands and come out of their respective stages of separation and assimilation.

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