

THE DIVIDED IDENTITIES IN *THE GOSSAMER FLY* AND *LAST QUADRANT* BY MEIRA CHANDA POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Human beings live and progress in societies. Primarily, he is bound to family, which is a miniature society. The societies, in which one is a member, help and influence the formation of one's identity. Change of societies either forcefully or wilfully affects the identity of humans also.

The advent of colonialism accelerated the isolation of native people from their mother country and the people of a particular native formed Diasporic communities in the new places in which they found themselves. Consequently, the communities and the individuals began to face hybridity and fluidity of identities. Postcolonial theories deal with the themes of identity, hybridity, homelessness and rootlessness.

*Meira Chand, through her novels, *The Gossamer Fly* and *Last Quadrant*, tries to address the themes of rootlessness, belongingness and home. The characters in her novel show the never-ending struggle of coping up with the changed situations. The processes of assimilation and integration all play roles in this sophisticated endeavor. The identities they possess are qualified with dividedness. Meira Chand calls for 'a joyous combustion' and to strive to get into the modified and dynamic rhythm of life.*

KEYWORDS: *Postcolonialism, Diaspora, Identity, Homelessness, Home*

INTRODUCTION

The human being lives and progresses in societies. Primarily, one is bound to family, which is a miniature society. The societies, in which one is a member, help and influence the formation of one's identity. Change of societies either forcefully or wilfully affects the identity of humans also.

The advent of colonialism accelerated the isolation of native people from their mother country and the people of a particular native formed Diasporic communities in the new places in which they found themselves. Consequently, the communities and the individuals began to face hybridity and fluidity of identities. Postcolonial theories deal with the themes of identity, hybridity, homelessness, and rootlessness.

Postcolonialism, according to Simon Daring, in "Postcolonialism and Globalisation: a Dialectical Relation after All?", is defined as the self-determining the will of decolonized peoples to safeguard their cultures from western encroachment. By making use of categories like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence post colonialism seemed to be a reconciliatory approach rather than being critical (31). Diasporic writings explore these postcolonial themes and try to

highlight the effects of colonialism and its far-reaching influences.

According to Nayar, Diaspora, the word has its roots in Greek Language, meaning 'to disperse'. It may be understood as the voluntary or forced movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions. When the people are put in the new geographical and cultural context, they negotiate two cultures, their own and the new one, resulting in a mixed and amalgamated culture and lifestyle (189).

Mimi Banerjee Dhar, in "Indians in Japan: History and Dimensions of Relations", throws light upon the fact that often a few spheres of people's lives are touched by migration. She suggests that perhaps the longing for home is an oddly thing (124).

Gautam holds the view that in the process of getting along in the new country the people in Diaspora resort to processes like assimilation, integration and discrimination. Assimilation is more of losing one's own culture and being merged into the host country, whereas integration addresses the attempts to integrate the new culture. But at the same time, it tries to make sure that the roots are maintained (6-7).

Kakali Bhattacharyya, in *Search for Identity: Indian Native and Diasporic Writers*, tries to elucidate that the question of identify becomes difficult. Instead of giving up the past identity and adopting the new identity fully, she puts an alternative possibility of creating a balance between the two worlds, the old and the new (11).

Meira Chand is one of the diasporic writers, who have tried to address the dynamism of migration, memory, identity, adaptation and belongingness. She has got an Indo-Swiss origin. She was born in London and had her high school education there itself. He was the student of St. Martin's School of Art and Design in Japan before turning to writings. Chand has secured her Ph.D. in Creative writing from the University of Western Australia.

She moved to Japan with her husband and then to India for five years and returned to Japan in 1976. She wrote her five novels having setting in Japan, two having setting in India and one in Singapore. Later on, she moved to Singapore and got settled there. She released a novel in January 2018 having an Indian and Singaporean background.

Her novels tell the stories of belonging, dividedness of identities, home etc. She was in continuous dialogue with different cultures and their dynamic interventions in the identities of people. The people of diaspora always experienced pointlessness in the course of their lives as on where to cling to and where to belong to. Meira Chand in one of her articles in the newspaper, "A Strangely Mixed Bag of Possibilities", writes,

In these modern migratory times, the concept of home has become negotiable. Home is where the heart is, they say. And identity? Well, identity has always been a strangely mixed bag of possibilities. For me, the whole business only gets evermore surprising. From the beginning, I was constructed not to belong, yet I have only just diagnosed my malaise, but this is what life is like. It takes the better part of it to sort out the simplest of things.

In this paper, the researcher tries to analyze the two novels of Meira Chand, viz. *The Gossamer Fly* and *Last Quadrant*. *The Gossamer Fly* tells the story of Natsuko and her family. Her family consisted of her English mother, Frances and a Japanese father, Kazuo Akazawa. She had a brother named Riichi. Frances having English origin found it difficult to cope up with the Japanese way of living. She was not able to incorporate herself into the Japanese styles and customs. She did not want her children to follow Japanese life. When Kazuo wanted their son Riichi to be trained in the sword fight, Frances never wanted it. She was against it and makes it clear when she says,

I've told you before, I no longer care about what you consider right or wrong... It's unethical and horrible deliberately to direct a child's mind to things of violence, and at so young an age. I cannot bear it. I cannot take any more of anything here. And god knows, I've tried. (Chand, *The Gossamer Fly* 30)

She was completely against sending Riichi to learn sword fighting. At the same time, for a Japanese boy, it was quite befitting to learn the same. Kazuo also wanted his son to be trained in it following the Japanese custom. While trying to convince Kazuo, Frances reveals the tension and agony that she had been undergoing in Japan. She expressed her dissatisfaction here in Japan and also swore that she had tried her level best to adjust herself to the life in Japan.

Kazuo, knowing the plight of Frances 'he wished she would stop fighting the society in which they now lived' (Chand, *The Gossamer Fly* 32). But Frances was not at all happy with the life, 'she said she must retain her identity. He was tired of it all' (Chand, *The Gossamer Fly* 35). Following her sickness and admission in the hospital, things lead to Frances' return to England. This remedy was sought hoping that it would help her to get better. Hiroko, the maid at the house of Kazuo remarks, "She'll never be better, as long as she lives in Japan. That's what they say. None of the foreigners can live here. Sooner or later they all have to go home..." (Chand, *The Gossamer Fly* 48).

Natsuko was torn between two worlds, the western world represented by her mother and the Japanese world, represented by Kazuo and Hiroko, the Japanese maid. Hiroko cross-examines her asking,

"Is your mother American or English? It is strange you're blonde like her, and don't have your father's Japanese hair. My sister once worked in an orphanage for half-blood Japanese children, after the war. I went there once... I saw all kinds of weird faces, especially the ones with negro fathers. But I never saw any with hair like yours. Hiroko looked at Natsuko critically, and gave a sudden harsh laugh. (Chand, *The Gossamer Fly* 10)

Natsuko was not able to cope up with the behavior of Hiroko, who always disturbed the little innocent mind of Natsuko. Natsuko was in tune with the refined and gentle way of approaching things as shown by her mother. For her, everything from the part of Hiroko seemed to be strange, irritating and disturbing. As much as she wanted to get out of the chaotic influence of Hiroko's presence and the painful absence of Frances, she was helpless and the enigma encompassed her.

The last *Quadrant* tells the story of Akiko, a girl who had the parents from an American man and a Japanese mother. Her mother was Kyo an orphan, who gave birth to Akiko from her relationship with an American and later turned to prostitution. Dr. Eva Kraig who had been settled in Japan and running an orphanage had adopted Akiko as her beloved daughter and never wanted to lose her. In the course of time, Kyo returned and tried to claim Akiko. As things proceed, there came a storm which affected the orphanage and the lives of all those involved in a very significant manner. Akiko finds her existence as a tussle between the demand by Kyo and the affection of Eva.

Being one who was born out of a relation of parents from different cultural, social and biological backgrounds the children of mixed blood always suffered discrimination in the society. They were treated in a very different manner which often put their self-confidence at stake.

Akiko always felt the enigma of being half Japanese and half American. Besides being an orphan, she was one of mixed blood. Children of mixed blood had been always put to the contempt and discrimination. And Akiko was never an excuse. Akiko while addressing Jiro, thinks that “she knew him. Inwardly he was like her, divided, dissolved, yet of one hard shape” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 23).

Eva when she was discussing about Jiro, a new recruit to the orphanage, made it clear that even the names of such children pull them to difficulties. Jiro had a Japanese mother and a Korean father. Though he had a Korean name on his records, still he was given a Japanese name so that “... he would not show up like a naked thing on a printed register. In that way, he might for a while postpone the hate he must receive in Japan for the double sin of being of mixed blood and also Korean” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 23).

Akiko always felt some sort of rootlessness in her life. She had tried in vain to figure out who was her father. All that she had a clue of her father was that he was an American. Thus she had been trying to find him in mottled newspaper photographs. She was trying to find him in the families whom she came to know through Eva. But what remained was ‘a dry discarded dust, and loneliness in her veins’ (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 24).

Akiko was put to embarrassment right from her childhood. One such painful memory is of Mrs. Okuno’s senile mother. She remembered the old lady saying,

‘Little *konketsu*, mixed-blood one, come here.’... ‘You should not have been born. There is no place for you here. Your mother should have killed herself with shame... She left you in a box on that English woman’s doorstep. Yes, your own mother didn’t want you, you shameful thing.’ (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 26)

For Akiko, this was a painful memory and the trauma of this incident often taunted her. She is seen desperately attempting to describe to Daniel about her fate of being one of mixed blood, “It is difficult here, as it is nowhere else, for somebody like me... half American, half Japanese” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 62). Her agony of not belonging to neither side is very much clear in her words to Daniel,

‘The Japanese feel themselves a race apart. This you must understand. I love Japan. I was born here of a Japanese mother. I have grown up here. And in spite of Eva, I feel Japanese. The mirror tells me so each morning, I see my eyes, I see the shapes that make myself. I want to be Japanese. But I am not and never can be, because there is no place for me here. In the eyes of the Japanese, I am an unthinkable adulteration, I do not belong to them. They have told me so in many ways, again and again.’ (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 63)

Akiko hovers on her own destiny “In some unhappy way this country has absorbed us” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 63). She was disheartened by the approach by the society towards the children of mixed blood who was born post-war. She felt herself “she was a ball of thread, unwinding infinitely” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 65).

The displacement and dislocation affect not only people like Akiko. Even the so-called people, who went to different places other than their own, often had got the feelings of estrangement. Sister Elaine who was asked to serve in Japan, felt alienated here and she prayed wished to return as soon as possible. She lamented over her fate, “how long she thought. Dear Lord, how long will you leave me like this, abandoned? Three years. How much longer can I go on?” (Chand, *Last Quadrant* 51)

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