

***The Theme of Immigration and its Difficulties as reflected in  
M.G. Vassangi's The Assassin's Song***

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**Abstract:** *The spread of worldwide economy and multinational culture has also been the ground for the beginning of immigration. The diversity of the world paves the way for the conflicts around the belongingness of the people in a nation. Being an immigrant and having a better identity in an immigrant land is not so easy. After migrating for a better living, the immigrant tries to cope with the new culture and new circumstances. As a result he forcedly loses his own identity and slowly gets assimilated into that new country and its culture. But also, at times, he happens to long for his homeland. Being an immigrant writer, M.G.Vassangi often deals with the problems of in-betweenness of his characters that get migrated to a new country. In this novel, The Assassin's Song Vassangi through the protagonist KarsanDargawala has brought out the difficulties of being an immigrant who seeks a better living. The aim of the paper is to contrive his difficulties that he undergoes for having a better life and the consequences that he faces.*

**Keywords:** Immigration, Vassangi, multinational culture.

The world has become so strong in global entrepreneurship and economy that the post-colonial literature reflects the after effects of globalization and cosmopolitanism. The acceptance and celebration of new culture led to the personal dilemmas and identity crisis. In a globalized world, the post-colonial writers concentrate upon the themes of quest for identity, in-betweenness, exile, aboriginals etc. So, those writers started focusing on relocation, immigration, political, and cultural opposition in the decolonizing nation and tried to bring out their mental and physical impacts through their writings. M.G.Vassangi is one among the writers. He was born in Kenya, grown in Tanzania, and educated in the United States.

Vassangi is a Canadian novelist and an editor. He has written countable novels. His works are translated into many languages such as Dutch, French, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, and so on. His writings mainly focus the situation of East African Indians. He deeply analyzed how the lives of his characters are getting affected when they seek better living in the migrated country. He has won many awards of which Canada's reputable prize called Giller Prize for his two novels The Book of Secrets in the year 1994 and The In-Between World of VikramLall in the year 2003. He is the first Canadian writers who won the Giller Prize twice.

Vassangi's The Assassin's Song is his sixth novel (2007). It was short listed for Giller Prize. In this novel the tale moves from a contrived thirteen-century village, which depicts current modern Indian State of Gujarat, then it moves to Harvard Yard of the late 1960s, then shifts to the Canada in the 1980s, and back again to the shrine of Pirbaag in Gujarat town in 2002, in which Vassangi through the protagonist Karson Dargawala has brought out the difficulties of being an immigrant who seeks a better living.

The word 'immigration' comes from Latin word *immigratus* which means 'the act of coming into a land to settle'. Root word is 'migrā'- 'to leave one place and wander to another'. The word became acknowledged practice in 1792 in America. So, immigration is the global drive of people into a target country of which they are not citizens or where they do not enjoy citizenship in order to settle or reside there, especially as everlasting residents or accepted citizens, or to take up occupation as a migrant worker or provisionally as an alien employee.

This paper mainly focuses on the three phases of the protagonist KarsanDargawala's life: a childhood phase that was subjugated by his father's firm conventionalism; years of academic progression, marriage and parenthood, then the dreadful loss in North America; and his disenchanted reentering to Haripir, resulting the death of his parents.

Karsan Dargawala is (the protagonist and the presenter of this novel) the eldest son of a Saheb of Pirbaag, who is the next to hold the position 'Saheb'-the Lord (i.e. Priest) and Custodian of the Sufi Shrine( the shrine is neither Hindu nor Muslim) after his father Tejpal. Karsan was born in the quarantined village of Haripir in Gujarat State in India. When he grew up, he went along with his father to the shrine and observed his father's rituals at the shrine. He worries that he himself is not up to such an important task. He knows that he is not capable of curing any one of the hundreds of disciples who line up at the gate every day, when he happens to hold the 'Saheb' position.

Karsan doesn't like his own tradition and being spiritual. He firms his future that should not get ended up into this spiritual life. He wants to live his life like other ordinary boys in his village and wants his life to be normal like them. He likes to play cricket and wants to play for his country. But, due to his future position i.e. Priest, he is refused to make his own choice by his parents. Here, we see that how his wishes were limited, and how he struggles with the burden of divinity. He wants to pave way for freedom from the iron bond of his family and also from the shrine. But his parents are constant reminders of the path which they expected him to follow.

However, other adult character plays equally important role: the sociable truck driver Raja Singh, who brings him heaps of news about the outer world. This is the first spell thrown on Karsan. It is also applicable to those who have the dreams about outside world. As a result, when he attained teenage, he made a secret visit to the library of Mr.Hemani which is nearby the city of Ahmedabad, where he happened to meet George Elias who helped him to send an application to Harvard Yard University of America for his studies. This part has brought out a drastic change in Karsan's life. He is accepted with scholarship to study at Harvard University. He was so surprised and astonished. He was not ready to give up this fruitful chance for anything. He, however convinces his parents. His parents halfheartedly allowed him to move on as per his wish. They were so disappointed and heartbroken, not because of the lack of 'Saheb' position but because of his departure from them to an alien land. Here we can clearly identify the mentality of Karsan like persons who get migrated to a new country. Dreaming that he would definitely have a better life, and he has more freedom in that new country. Karsan also feels the same as he got relieved from his cultural believes and custom. But he fails to realize the future happenings that he will undergo, after getting uprooted from his homeland to an alien land which would be totally new to him by tradition, by culture, by language, and by circumstances.

The second phase of his life begins in America at Harvard University. It deals with his difficulties and struggles to cope with the alien land. After getting uprooted into a new land Karsan feels that he got freedom from the bonds of his family inheritance. But at last his freedom gets ended up bitterly.

After Karsan arrived at Harvard University he feels that he has more to learn and absorb. And he calls that land as 'the city of knowledge'. He firmly believes that his newfound homeland definitely would bring him a kind of experience and he thinks that America is a far bigger world than Pirbaag. And he doesn't know it would be a bitter one.

On the one hand, he never got liberty from his tradition as he thought. It shadows him in America too. He remains in touch with his home. In America, he meets Premji who is a friend of Karsan's father from his community. He contacts Karsan and takes him to a prayer meeting and urges him to join the gathering, where other followers of the community were also presented. Their respect towards him as the heir to the shrine of Pirbaag touches his soul, yet he feels suffocated by the treatment accorded to him. Consequently, he starts distancing himself from his past, pulling himself further away from his tradition and from the world of Pirbaag. Here, we see that Karsan is torn between two worlds i.e. between the pull of his tradition as manifested through his father and the modern life of his present world. But, at last he prefers to live in modern world. That is why he decides to stop socializing with people who have connections with his old world and detached himself from his tradition.

On the other hand his decision to start a new phase at Harvard University disappointed him. His life there too provided a bad and bitter experiences. Karsan was studying at Harvard University of America against his father's wish. But, at college no one would understand anything about his background, this results in exclusion from fellow students. No one wants to share his thoughts and often mock at him for being unique and with funny accent. He often stands disconcerted and confused and shows opposition to the treatise of power in various

forms. His inability to communicate with fellow students brought him loneliness and alienation. He finds himself loner wherever he goes. He became heartbroken. He left friendless. And the teachers of Karsan's college too didn't have an attitude of assimilation. They leave no chance of looking down upon the minorities. As a result, he lags behind in his work, as he is not habituated to the culture of time, the fast moving culture, sarcastic, mischievous, playful, etc.

From this study, we can understand the difficulties of Karsan in order to survive and create an identity in that new country and cope with its circumstances. And also, we can see how language, culture and tradition brings down fall of the immigrants. Being a student in an immigrant land is not so easy. Because they go with a lot of ambition, but circumstances of their dreamland never allow them to go ahead as per their ambition. Their living there is like one in a darkroom, and unable to find a light to vanquish the darkness. All time, they want to go back to their roots.

Karsan also feels the same. At times, he thinks that he should have to go back to his roots. But, his ambition doesn't allow him to go back. Karsan often dreams about people at home who granted him freedom from responsibility. This shows his longing for his homeland and the guilt in the mind of the migrants like Karsan who have denied their tradition and their people for the sake of their ambition. His state is almost intolerable and regrettable one. He could not bear his situation of being alone. And his loneliness create an adverse effect on him. The tormented mind leads him to abnormal action. He began to drink often in order to heal from the pain of being alone. Here, we can understand his agony which leads him to seek alcohol. But, at the same time he refuses to go back to his homeland.

He worries for his state and seeks the help of a psychiatrist at last to get rid of it. The psychiatrist advises him to write outspokenly to his father about surrendering his status as 'Saheb' and says that the title be given to his younger brother Mansoor. This was the end of his communication with his family.

Later, he became so strong in his ambition. Slowly he adopts himself to the situation in college, after he meets Marge, a girl of Indian and American background, whose friendly gesture makes Karsan to feel contented and after sometime he falls in love with her and marries her at last and fathers a son named Julian and finally settled in Canada. There he worked as a professor by altering his name into Krishna Fazal and lives a delightful life. And at the same time the urge to visit his roots kept on haunting him.

But he could not hold his happiness in Canada for a long time. Unfortunately, his son Julian dies in an accident and his wife eventually abandoned him. He again pushed back to his lonely state. He tried to secure his happiness, but he could not. And finally he lost everything that kept him happy. And now he has nothing. In this state he came to understand his father's feelings towards him. Yet, the fear of accepting the old tradition didn't allow him to make contacts with father. However, he goes back to his roots during an emergency.

From his second phase, we can clearly understand Karsan's difficulties that he underwent to get assimilated with the immigrant land. And how he forced himself to get rid of his own culture and tradition, and how he tried to mingle with the new surroundings. He was torn between negating the memory of his home country and adopting to the new country. He loses and realises the need for leading a blind folded life.

The third phase of his life is about his return to his roots with dissatisfaction and with guilt. After thirty years of separation, Karsan returns to his homeland. By the time he returns, a tragedy was waiting for him. His father was killed in communal riots in Gujarat and Pirbaag was no longer in existence. And, his younger brother Mansoor became one among the Muslim practicer, discarding the neither Hindu nor Muslim tradition of Pirbaag by changing his name into Omar. During communal violence and devastation, Mansoor was in need to take sides to protect oneself. However, Karsan brings Mansoor back as he was before. And finally he takes back his father's position of 'Saheb'- the Lord and caretaker of the Pirbaag shrine. From this phase of Karsan's life we can understand his sensitive attitude that he has towards his roots. Because of the fondness, he returned to his roots where he belonged.

M.G.Vassangi, thus has persuasively portrayed the problems that the immigrants undertake in a new land. The protagonist Karsan Dargawala lived in a self-imposed exile-he neither gives up his past nor accept the present. He believes that one must break with the past in order to pave in the flow of the present. He has a troubled relationship with his past and is confused about his identity. He is complicated in an internal struggle to forget his past. Repositioning and acceptance of the past is necessary to adopt to a new culture. As long as one does not accept his roots, he will be destined to have a lonely and isolated existence.

Vassangi believes that one must ends up reaching the same point from where one begins his life travel. This has been proven in this novel through the central character KarsanDargawala. The protagonist's choice to return to his land of birth clearly shows his acceptance of the past. And, it is interesting to know Vassangi's portrayal of the immigrant experience from his point of view, who himself an immigrant. Those who torn between the pull of their own tradition and their ambition i.e being double minded can never sustain liberally in one path that they wish for. The separation of physical bond and touch that a migrant has with his family impels him to go back to his home country. Thus, the novel analyses the causes of the journey to an alien land and the consequences of both physical and mental alienation.

## **REFERENCES**

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