

EXPLORATION OF MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES IN AKHIL SHARMA'S FAMILY LIFE

Mrs. S. Parimalah

Research Scholar

Department of English

*Mother Theresa Women's University,
Kodaikanal, Tamilnadu, India.*

Dr. S. Kanagaraj

Professor & Head (Rtd.)

Department of English

*Madurai Kamaraj University,
Madurai, Tamilnadu, India.*

Abstract

Literature is the chronological account of books that are written with creative merit. It is the creative art that fills the hearts of both the author and the readers. From generation to generation literature changes and shows its growth. One studies literature to understand the culture and custom of a nation. The book is a product of the author's thoughts, feelings and creative ideas. The author shifts the readers into the world of purity, divinity and knowledge. Every writer brings some new things to the world by incorporating them in their work. He shows his individuality. Each writer shows his growth, the place he occupies and his relation with the other writers in his writing. Each age has particular interest and different way of thinking. The writer who fulfills it becomes popular among the readers.

Key Words: *English, Country, Family, Exploration,*

The diasporas writings in English and produced by the persons who live outside their mother country at present. They differ in their themes. The first generation writers write mostly about their home country because they very well know its origin and culture. It reflects their attachment to the native land. The diasporic novels are the record of experience of diasporic community. It reflects the themes of immigration, emigration, nostalgia, cultural conflict, alienation and multiculturalism. It gives voice to the author's traumatic experience in the cultural clash and racial discrimination. The writers narrate their past life, memories of the home land, remembered histories. Through their writings they make their homeland popular. They identify themselves with the protagonist and other characters in the work.

Akhil Sharma is an Indian born American author. He is not only a novelist but also a short story writer. He has written two novels and a collection of short stories. He was born on 22nd July 1971 in Delhi, India. His family moved to United States in 1979. He was brought up in Edison, New Jersey. He had his Bachelor's degree in public policy from Princeton University. He won a Stegner Fellowship for writing a program at Stanford. He started his writings in late 1990s. he won the O. Henry Award twice in 1995 and 1997. During his college days he has written many short stories that made him receive many awards. As his early ambition was to earn more money, he becomes an investment banker. In the mid years of writing his

second novel *Family Life*, he quit his job to concentrate on completing the book. Sharma is now working as an Assistant Professor in Creative Writing MFA program at Rutgers University, New York.

The accident causes the collapse of the family. He tells how the family and the society react to it. The mother seeks for miracle workers and she sinks into alcoholism. The family's happiness and prosperity get scattered. The description of cultural differences and the problems faced by the family in the American society is the highlighting aspect of the novel. In the online article New York Times, the Dublin Award jury gives out a statement which states, the readers of *Family Life* were left with the sense that while reading you were actually at the core of human experience and what it is to be alive. This is the highest form of achievement in literature. Few manage it. This novel does. Triumphant. Luminously, Movingly.

The life of Ajay becomes odd and lonely. The books and the television fill his alienated life. He searches for his identity. Sharma tells how Ajay balances his life and made it into a prospective one. Sharma takes us to the motional world by using his own life experiences. It has the realism with humour. The novel is more flexible in diction and structure. It is well written and gives reader to find way of possible means in the tragic life. Sharma through his novel *Family Life* points out the problems of the immigrants and their loss of identity. Hence forth, he portrays how they explore the identity in the multicultural land through the protagonist Ajay.

The life of Mishra is extraordinary until the tragedy strikes them. The accident at the swimming pool makes Birju brain damaged. Ajay loses his own self. But he yearns to find his identity among all the ruins of life. Ajay feels lonely after the accident of his brother. He feels whether he will be the only son. Sharma points out how bitter loneliness is. It can be viewed from the psychological perspective. Happiness is completely taken away from the family when Birju meets with an accident in the swimming pool. Though the situations are not good, Ajay's family faces it with self confidence and hope.

Family Life is about the life of an eight year old boy Ajay. It deals with his life both in India and America. It portrays the suffering of the Mishra family. Sharma brings out how Ajay struggles in finding his own self. He takes steps to identify himself. Involving in the world of literature, Ajay escapes from the world of loneliness by reading and writing. While reading he immerses himself in the stories. It marks the turning point in his life. He gets inspired and fascinated by Hemingway. He reads books on Hemingway.

The immigrants cherish the love-hate relationship in the host land. In the same way, Mishra and Shuba develop the love hate relationship. The relationship between them gets flattened. Both are psychologically affected because of the tragedy that happened to Birju. They feel disturbed. They behave roughly by shouting at each other. Shuba shouts at Mishra for silly things. She scolds him for thanking the nurse who visits the home. The love and the care Shuba has on Birju makes her shout at certain moments. She expresses her emotions through anger. She says if they do not have insurance, Birju will be thrown out in the streets. She adds that the hospital will put her son in the street if she does not fight with the hospital administration.

Sharma portrays the web of relationship within a family. In *Family Life*, he shows the familial bond and the grandparental love. When Shuba gets airplane tickets to America she takes the boys to their grandparent's house to seek blessing for their new life in America. One seeing the boys their grandfather

becomes excited and says “who are these two princes? Are they saints who have come to bless my house?”. His grandfather informs them that he will not let both of them go. He will keep one of them with him.

Sharma exhibits the parental love. In India, Shuba takes the decision about her sons. But after their settlement in America, Ajay is surprised when his father makes plans for them. In America, Shuba is enthusiastic in taking her sons to movies and restaurants. She takes them for a walk in grocery store to show things that they have not seen before in India. Shuba feels proud when people invite Birju to their home to meet their children. Ajay checks the vocabulary of Birju on the day of the entrance exam to get into the Bronx High School of Science. He gets panic when Birju struggles to answer most of the words. When his parents notice it, Ajay’s voice grew quieter and quieter. The hope of the family is on Birju. So Ajay feels tensed on the day of Birju’s exam. They feed him healthy foods.

The bond of love in the family of Mishra is carried out by Sharma in Family Life. The family members surround Birju during the break to feed oranges to cool him and almonds to give him brain strength. He analyses the brotherhood in addition to the relationship of husband wife and parenthood. The beginning of the novel shows Ajay in eight years and Birju in twelve years. In India, they play together and have a good bond of brotherhood. The author portrays the brotherly love and care. Ajay feels surprised when Birju informs his parents about Ajay being bullied by his friends on his way to school. The sibling relationship is carried out here. Birju helps Ajay in doing his home work. Ajay narrates how Birju takes care of him when the mother is at work. He tells, Now, Birju was expected to take care of me until she returned from work. He was supposed to boil frozen shelled corn for me and give me a glass of milk. He was supposed to sit with me and watch me do my work as he did his. Till America, I had some how not paid much attention to the fact that Birju was older than I was. I had thought that he was much bigger, but not more mature. Now, I began to understand that Birju dealt with more complicated things than I did.

Shortly before the school reopens, the boys go to their aunt’s house in Arlington, Virginia. On an August afternoon, Ajay watches television and lies back on the sofa with a book. Birju goes to the swimming pool at the nearby apartment building. While diving, he hits his head at the bottom of the pool. He remains there unconscious for three minutes. It brings out the catastrophe of brain damage. Shuba reaches Arlington. One seeing Birju in the hospital bed with railings, she burst out. The family takes care of Birju very much. Their love toward him increases. It is seen when Shuba cuts Birju’s finger nails, kisses and speaks with him in a childish voice. She treats him like a little child. She calls Birju by playful names.

Nostalgia is pondering over the past experience in a place or a period with happy personal association. It gives the belief where one feels past is better than present. It pacifies them when they think about their homeland. Nostalgia is the psychological uneasiness of the displaced people who are overwhelmed with the obsession of returning home. The book Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction: A Perspective, points out the condition of the immigrant. It states the immigrant, alienated from his homeland, his people and his family, feels the wrench of separation. He had been pushed violently out from the nest of this birth. It proved a shattering experience and he longed to be back yearning for the security and the warmth of the feathery place. In his struggle to spread his wings and learn to bear his weight, he ventured to far off places, saw new people, new places, but could not cease to dream of home, could not cease to regret the loss of security.

In the process of writing, Ajay writes about Birju with exaggerations. Reading inspires Ajay to become a writer. Ajay chooses literature to come out of his loneliness and the pain he undergoes in his life. Ajay is the portrayal of Sharma himself. He writes to break the silence around his life. It gives him a sense of relief.

Sharma brings out the multicultural world. He portrays how the people discover their self in the multicultural society. The parents dream and hopes on Birju have scattered because of his brain damage. Ajay has to make his life happy. He wants to be successful in his life. He applies to join in various universities. He does not succeed in his attempt to get into Bron Univeristy. He feels ashamed that he is not able to make his mother proud by getting it the university. He gets rejected many times. He feels a lot and worries that he fails to make his parents proud. He has been interested in writing stories. While applying for the Princeton University, he submits the copy of his own short story with the application and sends it to the university. Finally, Ajay gets into Princeton after a long struggle. He feels as he had achieved something.

The novel represents the acceptance of the reality of life. Thus in the novel Family Life, Sharma has highly dealt with many aspects of multiculturalism. Shuba finds herself a job in America. Among all the discrimination and the struggles, Ajay has identified himself in the multicultural society. He creates his own space which leads him to get the identity. He feels satisfied that he has filled the dreams of his parents. He gets satisfied with the pleasures of his life.

WORKS CITED

1. Chandra, N.D.R. Introduction. Multicultural Literature in India: Critical Perceptions. By. Chandra. New Delhi: Sarup, 2010. vii-xix.
2. Deraniyagala, Sonali. "The Repercussions". New York Times. N.P., 3 April 2014. Web. 23 Feb. 2018.
3. Dwivedi, A.N. "Diasporic Writings in English". English Literature: Voices of Indian Diaspora. Ed. Multi Agarwal. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2009. 1-11.
4. Girija, S. "Indian Customs and Conventions depicted in the Writings of R.K. Narayan". New Insights into the novels of R.K. Narayan. Ed. M.K. Bhatnagar. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008. 5-58.
5. Jha, Gauri Shankar. Yatra of Indian Writing in English after independence. Jaipur: Yking Books, 2013.
6. Llobrera, Kairos G. "Immigrants and Illness". Public Books. N.p. 13. Feb. 2015. web. 28 March 2018.

7. Prasad, B. A Background to the Study of English Literature. Delhi: Macmillan. 2013.
8. Rathor, Ila. "Tight Rope Walk: Relationships in Multiethnic Space". Ethnic Literatures of America: Diaspora and Intercultural Studies. Eds. Somdatta Mandal and Himadiri Lahiri. New Delhi, Prestige, 2015. 168-76.
9. Shea, Christopher D. "Akhil Sharma and Lisa Mc Inerney Win Book Awards". New York Times. N.p., 9, June 2016. Web. 21 Feb. 2018.
10. Tandon, Sushma. Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective. New Delhi: Sarup, 2004.
11. Yadav B.L. "The Making of a Writer". Critical Response to R.K. Narayan. Ed. Yadav, Delhi: Mangalam, 2010. 128-131.

