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A discourse on the problem of social acceptance of immigrants in Neil Bissoondath's 'A Casual Brutality'

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Abstract

It is quite difficult for any human being to keep himself/herself at a distance from the bandwagon of 'migration'- the movement of people from one place to another, sometimes over a long distance, widespread across the globe. The movement of people is ease with technological advancement and mostly for education, work, and career and often for permanent stay to become immigrants/emigrants for betterment from good and/or worst. The journey of aspired immigrants in other countries never runs or ends well though it began with zeal and zest from the 'homeland'. While (im)migrating to another nation, there is joy which gradually becomes a painful decision since the immigrants experience the dire realities of the 'host' country where the practice of 'marginalization' and 'oppression' is never been in off mode. Along with that the (im) migrants persistently face the problem of social exclusion, cultural alienation, racism etc. at the cost of their identity because the 'host' countries consider them as 'foreigner' and/or 'outsider' which leads to dilemma for the (im) migrants who are really worried about the survival and future of their 'second generation', so that sometimes they return to their 'homeland' where the question of commitment remains unsolved. Such problems and issues are very well depicted in Neil Bissoondath's first novel *A Casual Brutality* (1988) through the characters like Raj, Kayso, etc. who have (im)migrated to other countries especially to Canada willingly with optimistic views for the 'host' society but the reality is always harder than the dreams. Along with other major themes, Bissoondath has incorporated the problem of social acceptance and inclusion frequently faced by the immigrants in Canadian society where 'multiculturalism' is officially accepted!

Keywords: Identity, Immigration, Marginalization, Racism, Social inclusion

Introduction

The statistics of United Nations reveal that the number of international migrants is increased rapidly.

The number of international migrants- persons living in a country other than where they were born- reached 244 million in 2015 for the world as a whole, a 41 percent increase compared to 2000, according to new data presented by the United Nations.

[<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/01/244-million-international-migrants-living-abroad-worldwide-new-un-statistics-reveal/>]

The above figure really raises the concern regarding the problems and issues especially of social acceptance and inclusion continuously faced by the (im) migrants in the countries other than their 'homeland'.

Raj-the Protagonist as an Immigrant

Neil Bissoondath's first novel *A Casual Brutality* (1988) [2] tells is a story of Dr. Raj Ramsingh, an immigrant to Canada from a fictional, politically unstable Caribbean country called Casaquemada (Spanish for a house that is burning) who left the island at the age of eighteen to study medicine in Canada. He later returns to the island with his white, Canadian wife and son, practises briefly as a doctor, but during his stay, the political situation rapidly declines into revolution and chaos, in which his wife and son are killed; and Raj returns to Canada. It presents a tough portrait of both the societies. This novel is narrated in first person and a kind of autobiography of the author since Bissoondath also immigrated to Canada at the age of eighteen and experienced the same kind of harsh realities as far as the problem of acceptance by the Canadian society is concerned.

While searching the room for Raj in Canada Kayso, a young man and friend of Raj's uncle-Grappler prefers French-Canadians because they are 'the least racist' means Kayso has fear

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that the Canadian society will covertly practise the racism with Raj because he is from the Third World or one of the (im)migrants in Canada. Finally Raj has got a room in a house owned by Mrs. Perroquet, a French-Canadian middle aged lady, where he feels comfort. Mrs. Perroquet and her husband-Mr. Leonard were from a tiny town in northern Ontario. They came to south to fulfill their big dreams as French speaker since there were lots of job for Franco phones in south. However, her husband was a skilled man, but he had to work on construction site unto death without tasting the successful career. Her first son-Andy who hates black people once hit Mr. and Mrs. Perroquet, and neighbours called the police. Mrs. Perroquet is worried about Andy's attitude and behavior and his love for white people, which is totally different from the whole family. Mrs. Perroquet as well as Raj hates Andy, but Raj hasn't mentioned all these in letters to Grappler as he adapts himself to the situation. He has positive views about Canada but fears too much as he is alone in Canada. Once Andy comes and abuses Raj as 'niggers' and wants to fight which propels Raj's sense of insecurity.

Kayso as the Aspirant Immigrant

Also Kayso, a young man and immigrant with lots of dreams in Canada, comes to receive Raj on airport who misses life of Casaquemada and tells Raj that he used to go on holiday to West Indies for carnival. He favours Canada as a good place for living by talking about some good qualities but his dislike for 'cleanliness' and 'rigid work culture/ style' of Toronto which is totally different from the island's, is also expressed in his conversation. From his talks Raj compares Casaquemada as a centre of world culture in the matter of dirt. Kayso defends his argument by stating that without evil, there is no value of God, as both lives on different side of a same coin. Kayso is planning to return home Casaquemada and for that selling everything because he feels that life is easier down there. He wants to return with the sense of obligation to serve the country of his origin which helped him in making his identity, with lots of good ideas. He wants to be a reformer for island. Actually, Kayso is about to be a father and in this situation he feels a sense of insecurity for his next generation and so in the name of service to homeland, he runs away from Canada. Besides Kayso hasn't told this plan to others because he believes that people would discourage him. But Raj defends that those people know Casaquemada better than Kayso. Finally Raj realizes that Kayso wants to escape like him, but in different way as different people have different ways of escapes.

Kayso suggests him to visit Kensington Market which is like Lopez city where the dirt is same and which seems 'real' as there is no 'fake'-artificiality. But Raj likes cleanliness because he knows that dirt and charm can never mix with each other properly. Raj's classes have started and he reaches to the college through bus and sub-ways but still he hesitates to explore the city on his own because he has fear of a new place. Gradually he comes to know that the streets of city are less menacing and so his confidence grows. He observes that the city is of multi-cultural people whose behavior leads Raj to experience social differences and clash between two cultures, a Canadian and a Casaquemadan. He tries to create his own comfort in the bright city. After six weeks, Kayso calls and tells Raj that he is about to leave. Instantly, Raj thought that now only Mrs. Perroquet knows him in Toronto. Raj receives Kayso's letter on Christmas who had visited Raj's grandparent's home for Sunday lunch with his wife.

Most of the letters of Kayso are in contemplative tone which reflects his psyche in which dream is more valuable than truth and though he writes to Raj, he secretly communicates to himself. It is kind of situation in which Kayso is not whole-heartedly accepted by the society of his own country only because of his stay in 'foreign' country. It is like the people questions about immigrants' return and their commitment. Raj doesn't reply to Kayso's letter because he doesn't wish or have anything to tell. Kayso's letters are a curious record of dispassion in which life is projected in pieces and his demand to send 36 photographs of Kensington Market which reflects his incompleteness in which he is struggling with dissatisfaction of his decision to return to the island.

Raj is curious to know about what Kayso had made of himself on the island. Kayso has put on weight and dyes his hair to look young because for him, a lawyer should look young, as opposed to a doctor whose old age reflects his experience. Raj admires him for doing great things in the island by writing a column for the sake of human rights of the people. But Kayso tells that he worked only at the surface level. He needs experts like Raj because there is scarcity of them on island and so he wants help from Raj in his fight against corruption. Kayso does not have any regret for returning to the island. He tells that he used his skill to expose the corrupt which is not liked by the people of island who threaten him to kill him and even the police do not help him, so he has filed a law suit against them. Kayso can't go outside without his two bodyguards-Smith and Wesson. Actually, Kayso has paid a price for his social work as his wife leaves him, and in reality Kayso has come to visit his kid.

Surein in England

Surein, Raj's cousin whose personality and attitude are different from Raj right from their childhood. As a child Surein likes adventures and supports English team because he believes that only Englishmen are best in this Cricket. Several boys and even school teachers are surprised by Surein's support for England and some of them suggested that Surein wrongly thinks that he is 'White'. Raj had to change his position time-to-time for Surein -the perpetual insider, but he didn't like it. He warned Surein about racial hatred might increase against him where people might consider him as a 'traitor'. On the contrary Surein considered Raj and others as 'traitor' because they supported a West Indian team in which few Indian were there only because of partiality in selection procedure because they selected the players only from their race. From the instance of Cricket there was a gap between Raj and Surein. Though on the surface nothing had changed, inwardly Raj felt loneliness/ alienation. Later on Surein goes to England for studying law and Surein returns with a degree along with hatred for English people-their food, weather and specially racism.

Jan- Raj's Wife on Island

The third letter is from Kayso who is still asking Raj to return to help him to expose big medical scandals as he is about to expose a big man. He has expanded his business with two new partners. He suggests Raj to call him or write if he has any doubts or questions or hesitations in taking decision to return to the island. Jan is curious to know Raj's reaction on another 'pull factor' which also drags him to island. Jan who likes adventure accompanies Raj to Casaquemada with the hope to enjoy and gain to achieve

something in life. But Jan, being a white woman is not accepted in Hindu family especially by Raj's grand-mother. Moreover, due to her views about the island and its people result into the clashes with Surein and feeling of alienation.

Conclusion

Everyone desires to be a part of the group or majority and such feeling reaches to its peak when someone is in 'foreign' country as an immigrant away from his/her homeland. The practice of marginalization and social exclusion leads the immigrants to rethink about their decision and futuristic aspect in such awful situation. An option to return guarantees nothing and to remain abroad is unbearable. By and large, the augmentation of any country is based on social acceptance and inclusion rather than 'exclusion'

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