

Peacock in the Snow: a journey of Maya from India to Canada

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Abstract

Indian English literature is the work of Indian authors who write in the English language, living in India and abroad, whose mother tongue or co-native language may be one of the many languages of India. It provides an emotional haven for its diaspora by discussing its own physical and emotional struggles. Themes like racial discrimination, cultural trauma and contrast cultural trauma, issues with assimilation and adjustment, orientalism, identity crisis, alienation and displacement, perplexity, despair, hybridity, and generational gap are the primary themes of diaspora literature. Maya and her family, in *Peacock in the Snow*, decide to move to Canada to escape from their dark family past. She is unaware that their past always follows them, and ultimately, she decides to confront the horrible past that exists for her. In this journey, Maya has to go through many obstacles in her personal and professional life, and her relationship with her husband has also been tested beyond its limits in Canada.

Keywords: Peacock in the Snow, Anubha Mehta, Canada, Maya, Indian English literature

Introduction

Diasporic Indian English literature has received widespread recognition in recent decades. The diasporic Indian English narrative plays a significant role in depicting the Indian diaspora throughout history. Inspired by the widespread prevalence of migration, immigration or emigration, diaspora literature gained prominence in universal literature in the backdrop of the post-colonial context and also developed alongside colonial literature. Diaspora literature is unique in that it is based on immigrants' personal experiences rather than theories or philosophy. It provides emotional support for its diaspora by sharing its own physical and mental challenges. Diaspora literature explores themes such as racial

discrimination, cultural trauma, adjustment issues, orientalism, identity crisis, alienation, displacement, perplexity, despair, hybridity, and generational gaps.

In diasporic English literature, two types of Indian migrants are depicted: those who emigrated to sugar plantations in Mauritius, Suriname, and Fiji during colonial times, and those who migrated to Western and Middle-Eastern countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia for better lifestyles. In addition, Overseas Indian English writers can discuss, review, and develop their literary works through associations and conferences worldwide. Diasporic Indian English literature addresses common issues faced by the Indian diaspora, including adjustment, discrimination, identity crisis, hybridity, nostalgia, and alienation. In recent years, diasporic writers have created a distinct form of literature that indulges in nostalgia, yet at the same time forging identity with a new location and people. Diaspora is no more a painful experience of isolation and marginalization for individual writers; in their writings, they have made rich and several responses to the experience of migration. One of the most important themes in diasporic literature is the feeling of homelessness and nostalgia. On the one hand, they mourn the loss of the nation they left behind, embodying it in mythology through nostalgia, imagery, and memory. On the other hand, they make it a positive act of overcoming migration and gaining a real outlook on life and the situation. In this way, the diaspora achieves the unintended purpose of celebrating the marginalized and virtually embracing multiculturalism and diversity.

Women diaspora experience is more intense than male diaspora experience. Unlike men, they change not only physically or geographically but also internally. The literature written by women of the Diaspora offers a different viewpoint; most of their writings focus on the issues of identity and Indianness. Their identity depends on culture, ethnic consciousness, religion, caste, language, sense of displacement, loss of home, desire to return, and many others. It can be challenging for the majority of Indian women living abroad to adopt both their local identities and Indian identities. They struggle with the problems that existentially confront women. Literature produced by migrant women creates a different perspective; the question, rather than an answer, question of identity and Indianness rule most of their writings. Their identity rests on a sense of displacement, loss of home, longing to return, culture, ethnic consciousness, religion, caste, language, etc. In foreign countries, most women find it difficult to adapt to both the regional identity and the identity of being Indian. They grapple with women's own existential dilemmas. Dr Anubha Mehta is an author, artist, and educator. Her writings reflect her experiences through the various roles she has played, much like how light reflects different hues. Anubha draws inspiration for her stories from her ancestors, childhood, and travels. It embodies the spirit of periods that were both peaceful and turbulent. Anubha has encountered countless people who have inspired

her imagination and come to life in her writing (The Writers' Union of Canada). In *Peacock in the Snow*, the journey of Maya depicts love, optimism, and the divine human power to overcome adversity. Anubha Mehta's work is filled with curiosity, imagination, and spontaneity, capturing life on both sides of the globe.

Maya's life-changing journey from India to Canada

In the novel, *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta depicts Maya, who belongs to a middle-class family in India, and how she feels trapped and suffocated in the affluent family of Veer. Maya often feels claustrophobic within the dark walls of Veer's mansion. Maya eventually discovers of Rajsinghaniya's sinister family secret, which haunts her and has an impact on her married life as well. Maya and her husband Veer make the decision to relocate to Canada. Maya has to go through many obstacles in her personal and professional life, and her relationship with her husband has also been tested beyond its limits in Canada. Unaware that their past constantly follows them, Maya ultimately chooses to confront the sinister past that is waiting for her.

Peacock in the Snow opens with the wedding ceremonies of Maya and Veer. Anubha tries to describe all traditional Indian wedding customs, such as Jai Mala, juta chhupai, the first letter of the groom's name in the bride's palm, playing the game of "fish the ring, etc. The marriage of Maya and Veer was magical. However, Maya consistently feels confined in Veer's mansion, like "a bird in a cage" (Mehta 20). Sheila, an old and loyal maid of the Rajsinghanian family, plays an important role in this novel. In Veer's mansion, she has been Maya's mother figure. She knew that Maya was becoming sick day by day because Veer's grandmother, Gayatri Devi, was haunting her. She is ecstatic when she learns that Veer must go to the West with Maya and their daughter, Diya.

Veer informs Maya that they might move to Canada in order to establish and expand their business. Maya is still hesitating to leave her homeland, loved ones, and friends. Maya makes the callous decision to relocate to Canada. Gautam Uncle took them to his small townhouse in the suburbs where he welcomed them as "new immigrants." Maya observed the cold weather and traffic rules of Canada. She was surprised to see no one on the streets while there is not an inch of uninhabited space in India. Maya found it difficult to endure her first winter in Canada. She always felt chilly at the tips of her toes, regardless of how many layers she wore. The frigid wind that came in through the window also rendered their home's heating system ineffective. Maya's first night in Canada was terrible when Gautam tried to rape her, but she somehow managed to escape. Maya was so frightened by the incident that she hesitated to go downstairs. Gautam took advantage of Veer's trust and made several attempts to seduce Maya whenever he could. Consequently, Maya felt increasingly anxious to escape from Gautam's home. Maya got emotional after seeing Veer welcome her

traditionally in their new home on the first day, “.....I saw a vase full of puffed rice cantered in front of the door. I toppled the rice vase with my big toe, stepped over the stren grains and walked inside” (Mehta 161). Veer gifted a car to Maya so she wouldn't have any trouble dropping Diya off at school.

Veer was not pleased with Maya's decision to work, but Maya found it tedious to spend the day by herself at home. Maya began working in Lucy's clothing store, where she met Samantha and William, a tall, handsome man with blue eyes. Veer showed no interest in hearing what Maya had to say about her upcoming fashion show, her co-workers Lucy, Samantha, and William, or even about herself. Maya found it challenging to balance her married life and career. A misunderstanding developed between Maya and Veer on the day of the fashion show when he saw Maya with William backstage. While Veer's mother called him, he claimed that Maya had changed into one of them, “.....And then I saw her backstage in the dark with a tall, blond man. She is one of them now” (Mehta 180). Maya felt that she had adapted to this strange country faster than Veer, and now she was paying the price for it. Maya tried to convince Veer, “Veer, we both are just trying to keep our heads up in this new country. We are in a different world now. But I don't want to live in a different world with you while under the same roof...” (Mehta 181). However, it appears that they were living in a different world at the time.

Maya struggles to understand Veer's behaviour; at times, he completely ignores her, while at other moments, he demands an apology from her. "Yes. Maya. I am sorry for dragging you here, and I am sorry for my behaviour” (Mehta 189). Maya noticed Suzi was frequently attempting to get closer to Veer, and Gautam also added some spicy information that Veer had purchased a second piece of property for his company. On the other hand, William was attracted toward Maya and tried to seduce her, “Maayaa.....Maayaa, always the optimist. What would I have done without you?” (Mehta 240). Maya objected to his attempts to kiss and hug her and left after that. It was merely a friendship for her, and she knew that no one could ever take the place of Veer. Maya quit her job the following day. Maya's marriage is beset by issues like a lack of communication, doubts, and misunderstandings. Through Maya, Anubha conveys feelings of isolation and rootlessness. Despite her best efforts to blend in, Maya still experiences loneliness even when she is with Veer. While Maya makes an effort to assimilate more quickly than Veer, Veer's character illustrates how difficult it can be to do so.

Anubha resolves all the doubts and misunderstandings between Veer and Maya in the concluding section of the novel “Forever, Life”. When Maya discovered that Diya was missing due to an avalanche, she headed to Veer's job location. He consoled Maya and went

with her to look for Diya. Sadly, Veer did not return with the rescue team and the other survivors after he accompanied them in the search for his daughter. Maya was not ready to accept that Veer had passed away. She recalls Veer's love and words for her. Veer was aware of Maya's love of music, but she was prohibited from playing music because of the status of his Rajsinghaniya family. She recalls the words of Veer, "Someday you will play music, Maya..... Make sure you do" (Mehta 271). He wished she would pursue her dream of playing music someday. She was checking unopened Veer's emails, letters, and bills; she got a letter from Veer's grandmother Gayatri Devi Rathore's childhood friend (and potential lover), Sachin. Maya has discovered a dark family secret from Gayatri Devi's diary and Sheila – that Gayatri Devi's husband murdered her because of her relationship with Sachin. Maya tries to begin a new life after the death of Veer, so she decides to start a studio where people could practice and compose music. For the class, she had her participants. She continued to feel insufficient and alone, though. Suddenly she recalled the words of Anernerk, "The wild love from an ancient land flows in the blood of youth. Let the darkness guide you to revival in a new life" (Mehta 314-315). She instantly recognised it and decided to go there. She travelled to Tuktoyaktuk by train, ran into Aippaq, and asked him if she could meet that person. She was astounded to see him, he was none other than, but Veer. She felt complete after seeing Veer again, and they were now both free from their pasts.

Conclusion

Anubha beautifully depicts Indian culture, tradition as well as the struggle and life of Canada. She shows the class differences through the love story of Maya and Veer, in which Maya belongs to a middle-class family whereas Veer is from rich family. Maya's journey has not been easy neither in India nor Canada. Everyone in Veer's mansion looks at her strangely, as if they have seen a ghost; she feels like someone is following her, and she does not understand Veer's strange behaviour. Maya's first night in Canada was terrible, as Gautam tried to rape her, but she somehow managed to escape the situation. However, she was so frightened that she was even afraid to go down the stairs. Throughout the novel, Maya's married life has been filled with challenges, hardships, and confusion. In the novel, we can see Maya's transformation from a perplexed Indian Maya to assimilate into a new culture more quickly than Veer. Maya tried to balance her married life and career, but all her efforts increased tension between her and Veer. Maya tried to assimilate into the new culture and socialize by working, but Veer thought she had become one of them. Veer was the only person in Maya's mind and heart, and no one could take his place; whatever she had done, it was only for Veer and their family. Maya felt isolated and lonely even in the presence of Veer. Maya's life has been filled up with ups and downs in her life but in the end, she and Veer are freed from the family curse.

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