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LIVING WITHOUT RIGHTS- ISSUES OF MIGRATION IN ARVIND ADIGA'S AMNESTY

VIVEK DINKAR KHABDE

S. S. Dhamdhere Arts and Commerce College,
Talegaon Dhamdhere, Pune.



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Abstract

Arvind Adiga's *Amnesty* is a tale about an illegal migrant Danny who struggles to make space to live in Australia initially with the help of student visa and later by illegal stay. The novel deals with many aspects of diaspora conditions - felling of loss of one's identity, struggle to get recognition of one's own, attempts to adapt to the new ways of life etc. The novel deals with protagonist's moral dilemma. It is about the inhospitable conditions of the protagonist who is migrated to Australia. The status of the protagonist is illegal migrant, which is also termed as 'undocumented', 'unauthorised' and hence is considered as unlawful. The protagonist is under constant threat of being caught by someone one day and his illegal stay will get revealed.

Key words – migration, citizenship, human rights, identity crisis, Illegal immigrant, etc.

Dhananjay Rajaratnam, Daany living as an illegal migrant in Australia. Danny is from Sri Lanka and is migrated to Australia due to persecution as a Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. From four years Danny works as a cleaner in people's home. Another character in the novel is that of Sonja, whom Danny dates. Danny one day notices police activity and come to know that a lady named Radha Thomas is murdered. Radha is a Australian citizen. Danny is accustomed with Radha and is confident about the fact that the murderer is Prakash Wadhwa. Prakash is a legal migrant. He has insecurity about racial and ethnic prejudices. He is also troubled, as he could not get desired professional positions due to not getting the citizenship of Australia. Radha and Prakash had an affair but had a tense relationship. Prakash comes to know that Danny knows about the murder of Radha so he calls Danny and restricts him from telling police about the murder.

Danny has told Radha about his illegal status and Radha has shared this information to Prakash, hence Prakash blackmails Danny that if Danny tells police about the murder, then he will also talk about Danny's illegal overstay in Australia and thus Danny will be deported. Danny now is confused and is caught into the dilemma and does not know what to do. If he talks about the murder incident to police then Prakash will talk about his illegal status to police. Prakash repeatedly calls Danny and tries to convince him about not going to the police.

Danny's first migration was to Dubai. He worked there as a hotel receptionist. He understood the vastness of the earth upon visiting a faraway nation. He considered his identity as a Tamil which is a low number population minority in Sri Lanka.

'..... a Tamil from the east of Sri Lanka, a minority within minority – he dwelled'. (p69). The

novel talks about the conditions and issues of illegal migrant and their struggle to get assimilated in the host country. Danny was always in the fear of being caught by someone and his illegal status will be found. He was always pre occupied by this fear. The novel has flashbacks which describes his memories of past life and experiences.

‘..... becoming invisible to white people, who don’t see you anyway; but the hardest thing is becoming invisible to brown people, who will see you no matter what. Since they must see you, Danny thought, let me be seen this way – not a as a sacred illegal with furtive eyes but as a native son of Sydney.....’ (p.49)

The examples of exploitation are seen in the novel at various levels,

‘He gets poor Malaysians to water his plants, pick his cherries, pack them in boxes, and then ships those boxes to Kuala Lumpur, where rich Malaysians buy them, paying any price that’s demanded, because they think white people grew those cherries.’(p. 223)

The exploitation at the works level is also seen from the lines,

‘All the immigration officers are rotten, right. They just watch the whole season while you work, and the day when you are supposed to get paid, the farmer phones immigration – and immediately they come, with their dogs and vans, picking you up’. (p.223)

The novel also has reference to the saturation of workers and competition. There was also a threat of losing the work in Danny’s mind as there were many workers from China who were ready to work on low wages.

‘...Two-man, three-man Chinese teams were spreading over Sydney offering the same service, at the same price, in the half time. And let’s not talk about the Nepalis. Four men at the price of one’. (p.5)

Danny could not accept the fact that his existence in Australia is illegal and his prejudices against the legal migrants and he could not feel one with them is seen in these lines,

‘The brown man in a white man’s city who is watching other brown men. Danny had studied all the ways this was done, from the amiable glances of the Western Suburbs Indians, smug in their jobs....’ (p.49)

Danny is keen to show that he is a true Australian for not being caught by any one. One sympathises about Danny’s struggle and is distressing for the readers. He has listed the dos and don’ts for easing his stay in Australia,

‘...the tongue of an Australian. Never say receipt with the P. Be generous with I reckon’. He always buys a ticket for not getting into the complexities of scrutiny and interrogation. He works honestly, efficiently and he has decided into his mind that he will not go back home.

‘I am never going back home’. (p.38)

The death of Radha Thomas has changed the course of life for Danny. The dead body was in leather jacket. The jacket was of Prakash Wadhwa who is gambler. Prakash was Danny’s employer.

Danny’s stay in Australia was undocumented and was illegal. He has not committed any direct criminal act like physically harming anyone or stealing or disturbing any social atmosphere in Australia. Though Danny faces harassment. This fact also comes from the fact that Danny belonged to the lowest working class. Arvind Adiga brings to light the pathetic and abject condition of the migrants to the fore through the character of Danny. The economic condition of Danny is also one of the reasons for the exploitation and rejection. If Danny would have been a rich businessman or someone who has strong economic background then the condition would have been different and then he would not have faced the conditions which Danny faces in the novel. There are various reasons for Danny’s miserable condition like his minority Tamil status in his own country Sri Lanka, he survives by fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka which lasted for twenty-six years. Secondly his poor economic condition too has an impact over his illegal status. He has to move from one country to another in search of solace, from Dubai to Australia he moves

from one place to another. The novel also describes other migrant characters like Radha, Venkatesh and Prakash etc with their own struggles to survive in the host country. Hence deprivation and rejection of rights on the basis of race, colour and religion is unacceptable to any humanitarian society.

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