



CONSTRUCTING TANGLED IDENTITY THROUGH DISPLACEMENT AND STRUGGLE IN *LIPSTICK JIHAD: A MEMOIR OF GROWING UP IRANIAN IN AMERICA AND AMERICAN IN IRAN*

SUKHVIR KAUR

Research Scholar, Department of English, affl. Punjabi University Patiala, Punjab.

E-mail: gsukhvir14@gmail.com



SUKHVIR KAUR

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Abstract

Azadeh Moaveni (born 1976) is an Iranian-American journalist and writer. She was raised in USA and received higher education from University of California. She worked as a reporter for *Time*, an American weekly news magazine and joined *Los Angeles Times* to report on the war in Iraq after three years. Azadeh published three books, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (2005) in which she found Iran culturally confused, emotionally anguished, politically deadlocked. The memoir is in the form of self-exploration as an immigrant in America and the quest to recognize deeper about Iran. Azadeh wrote her second book *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran* (2009) and third book, *Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS* (2019), depicting the exploration of cultural identity crisis in Iran and about Muslim women who migrated to Syria in order to help fellow Muslims living there. In an interview, Moaveni says that media is a forum for politics. The ills present in the society can only be changed by making them a part of media, as the latter is a forum of society. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the struggle of a diasporic girl through her memoir *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* and how she shaped her identity through displacement and resistance.

Keywords: diaspora, in-between, hybridity, third space, displacement, resistance, cultural-conflicts.

Introduction

This memoir dealt with the feeling of fear, perplexity, indecision and dilemma while living away from her native country and choosing to live in another country. I wish to describe an overview of a young woman of diaspora, searching for a homeland that actually never existed in reality. The memoir *Lipstick Jihad* by Azadeh Moaveni reckons or consider the major issue of tangled identity of diaspora. Being a part of Iranian diaspora, living in USA, she came across various dilemmas and cultural conflicts since her childhood. She continuously

compared her native Iranian culture with American culture. Sometimes she found her mother's habits so absurd because she always stressed upon maintaining Iranian traditions. Her mother wanted that Azadeh as a daughter should remain Iranian at heart like her.

As a girl raised on distorting myths of exile, I imagined myself as a Persian princess, estranged from my homeland __a place of light, poetry and nightingales__ by a dark, evil force called the revolution. (vii)

Nicholas Van Hear writes in his research paper "Migration" (2013), transnationalism is followed by a new kind of migrating population (Knatt.n.pag.). Their life encompasses both host and home societies, Azadeh Moveni's mother Maman also comes under this sort of migrated inhabitants. She had to manage family relations in both societies American as well as Iranian. Sometimes she oscillated between criticism of the host country and nostalgic about Iran.

Discussion

Azadeh always obtained filtered information of her country Iran, only through her mother Maman. She felt some sense of longing for her native place and wished to return back to Iran. Gauri Shankar Jha in his book *Current Perspectives in Indian English Literature* about the works by V.S Naipaul in which Naipaul writes about their tangled identity of homeless, marginalized people or expatriates. They found themselves disconnected and displaced when they have to migrate from native place. 'Homeland' becomes a symbol of freedom or independence, identity, bliss and happiness. They felt nostalgic about homeland. They have to fight for their survival while living in a foreign country and sometimes they are not able to survive with their dual identity.

Moaveni had an urge for 'home' and curiosity to know about the origin of her roots when she was living in USA, California. She dislocated herself to get connected. Gurdev Mehar in his article "Relocating Home in Diasporic Imagination: Translating Diasporic Desires" detailed study about the psyche of diasporic people. He said that diaspora is a phenomenon that has been taking place since human civilization. With the passage of time people came with the new definitions of diaspora. In search of new opportunities and better financial interest people started migrating across the world. "When individual are uprooted from their houses, they experience strong sense of loss and long for the thingness for the house, its qualified ability to be home" (Mehar 156). He described about the shifting phenomena of location, dislocation and relocation. He evolved a new concept of 'home' that "Home becomes a site where one negotiates belonging in

relation to the cultural identity which is firmly grounded in one's homeland" (Mehar155).

Changing borders and cultures influence people in different perspectives but the feeling of contentment is only fulfilled at their original homeland. " Thus, the position of the diasporic representation is an ambivalent one and the members of the diaspora find themselves to be suspended to a space where they are torn between two contradictory force-allegiance to the native land and affiliation with the new land of settlement" (Mehar156).

Azadeh grew up, she felt caught between two worlds. She as a journalist, once got a chance to go to her roots. Then she found her belongingness to her native place 'Iran' and called it 'Homecoming'. This displacement from USA to Iran brought changes in her life. In her mind she took Iran for granted and thought that she could easily adjust in this society. But by the time it became impossible for her to cope up in such orthodox world. Moreover she was not able to lead her life according to the rules and customs of Iranian society and it was like a culture shock for her. Finally, she realized that she does not belong completely to this new world and will never think of Iran like its natives.

She went through many harsh experiences in Iran and gradually recognized that Iran cannot be her permanent home. She resisted against Iranian culture and could not allow any kind of injustice against women. Moreover, she found the hypocrisy of Iranian system when she came across women who adopted two different behaviors one inside the home and another outside. She also found youth of Iran resisting against the Islamic Republic oppressors by following western lifestyle.

Moaveni was finding it impossible to cope up in the hypocrite regime of Iran where veil was a symbol of patriarchal subordination. It was also a sign of stereotypical religious and cultural governance over women. Navdeep Kahol in her paper "The Multilayered Veil: Reading *Lipstick Jihad*, An Iranian Woman's Memoir" writes that "It aims to segregate men and women and minimize their frequency of interaction. The physical veil is only an embodiment of psychological veil – the veil of

silence" (68). The Muslim culture in Iran guides male not to look at females. The Shah of Iran barred veils in 1936 in order to westernize the Iranian civilization. But within few days of the Islamic revolution in 1979, Khomeini forced women to wear veils. Azadeh elucidates this during her stay in Iran, veil became a questionable practice for her. It was very hard for her to drive with a veil. "The veil impaired my sideways vision, and I constantly feared it would slip off while I was driving" (79). Once her scarf slipped around her shoulders and a guy noticed her and laughed at her, "Khanaoum (lady), you've lost your Islam!"(79).

She felt disheartened when language became another issue, which is an important part of her identity, Moaveni could not validate her identity without complete knowledge of Farsi. She could not merge between her two identities. Her mind became the centre of divergence. In his book *The Undiscovered Self*, Carl Jung writes about such 'split consciousness':

It is as if two different persons were making statements about the same thing, each from his own point of view, or as if one person in two different frames of mind were sketching a picture of his experience... it is evident that the latter is suffering from a mental dislocation, i.e., a neurotic disturbance. In view of this, it does not matter at all if one partly pulls obstinately to the right and the others to the left (Jung53).

Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" justifies the emotional divergence in case of Moaveni's individual experiences of Iranian diaspora on the whole. Bhabha describes that there is an 'in-between' space that lies between the host country's identity and native country's identity. Hybridity represents that "third space" which gives a substitute third position. The result is an identity that is shaped with the amalgamation of two or more cultures. Azadeh Moaveni also found herself entwined between two worlds, one that belongs to Iran and another that belongs to USA.

Conclusion

Unable to manage with Iran, Azadeh Moaveni finally decided to leave this country and settle in USA. Continuing life in America, she confronts in a 'Third space' where she is neither completely Iranian nor American. She also comprehends that American lifestyles never allow people to save time for their sick kith and kins. The mechanization of people seems like 'American nightmare' and the supposed temporary stay of immigrants becomes permanent.

To wind up, Azadeh accepts her hybrid identity. The earlier attempt at being 'pure' Iranian resulted to be a failure. Consequently as a hybrid now, she is accomplished and she must celebrate this identity. She would keep Iran alive in her notions. She would also take pleasure in liberal American life. Her displacement to Iran had taken her back to her 'self'. Stuart Hall, in book *Identity, Culture, Community and Difference* (1990) writes, "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 223). The transformation of Azadeh Moaveni also takes place when she believes in her new identity in the host country and she is no longer bewildered about her identity and origin.

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