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DISLOCATION AND COMPLEXITIES OF MIGRATION IN SHARON BALA'S  
*THE BOAT PEOPLE*

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Abstract

Refugee crisis and the emergence of its study has gained significant space in the diaspora writing. The crucial issue of refugee life, forced migration and asylum seekers has made a space in the literature of the diaspora writing. The craving for the recognition and the search of safe place to live has become an unavoidable to a certain amount of citizens of every country. The characters of the novel display the mental and psychological effect on the individual of the condition aroused due to the circumstantial dislocation. The loss is beyond words – the people have lost their loved ones, lost their jobs, their possessions etc. This paper analyses the issues related to the policies related to refugees and asylum seekers.

Keywords – dislocation, asylum, identity, migration laws and refugee experience etc.

Migration has long standing history in human life. Humans have to migrate for various reasons which have given them numerous experiences, new vision and outlook. Humans have to migrate for reasons like livelihood, to escape religious and racial persecution, to escape from poverty, political and religious repressions, trade purposes and some migrations are solely voluntary. Journey and diaspora are the interrelated terms. The term 'diaspora' has relation to Jewish dispersion. Journey is inevitable in human life; may it be for various reason but a close look at the human history shows the traces of humans undertaking journey. The movement to a foreign land creates a hyphenated life. The diaspora community always feel alienated from their roots in the foreign land. They have to live at their own cost of identity and have to struggle to

get recognition. Hence the search for a true 'home' is always sought after.

The term refugee can be defined as; refugees are the migrants who have fled from their countries of origin to escape persecution or to escape the threat to life and finds asylum in another country. The novel *The Boat People* explores the issues of belonging, empathy, justice and identity. It portrays the experiences of the refugees, who leave their country due to persecution and internal conflict. On arrival in Canada, Mahindan and his son Sellian had to face the interrogation and manhandling. Mahindan was expecting a humanitarian approach towards the people who seek refuge and expect asylum. Mahindan sees the atmosphere in Canada which is politically motivated and the issue of national security had come in their way of respectable welcome in the country. This novel also

comments upon the issue of refugee policies. This novel also throws light on the issue of detention centres for the migrant people. These detention centres become the centres of ill treatment to the refugees and in turn they become the centres of criminalization of the refugees. The ill treatment in the detention centres in a way provokes the refugees to commit criminal activities and these criminal activities lead them to the prison. In the novel, the objects which the people carried with them were stripped off and the saddening scene of Mahindan's belongings which he carried with him – the beloved memories of his – keys of his house and the keys of his garage, his wife's death certificate, his wedding album. (Bala 2018,11)

Mahindan has strong belief in the Canadian immigration procedure. He thinks that Canada will accept himself and his son. He backs the 'special procedure' (25) of the government towards them. He does not lose hope and has faith that one day his son and he will be released from the prison. Mahindan has a small dream for his life. He thinks that after being released from the prison he will get a job and it could be anything like changing tyres or working on the petrol pump and for this he is ready to learn English, so Mahindan took every effort to be one with the new culture and surrounding.

The novel throws light on the refugee laws. Gigovaz who is Mahindan's legal adviser tells about the process of getting refugee status as,

'..the first step was to prove their identity. The government would inspect their documents. There were many forms to fill. ...And then another hearing to see if they would be given refugee status. It was a process, and the process would take time. No one could say how long. (Bala 2018, 26).

The wait was unbearable for a person who is seeking refuge in a country where such policies create obstacles and create dehumanizing circumstances.

Identity is the crucial issue for both Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. Tamils were considered outsiders and they were in a struggle between them. The conflict between them has given rise to the

feeling of alienation, and the atmosphere of hatred. Many people have lost their lives due to the ethnic strife. Due to this, the protagonist of the novel has to dislocate and has to face the similar situations in Canada.

Priya who is young lawyer of Sri Lanka origin, looks after Mahindan's case. She has been associated with the refugees and their stories. She has closely observed the conditions of the people in Sri Lanka and the situations when they have to take refuge in Canada. We also meet Grace who is a Japanese – Canadian adjudicator of immigration board is assigning the task of looking after the cases of the refugees. Grace herself has family history of interment, is moved by the tales of refugees. The flashback into Mahindan's life gives us glimpses of the tortures in Sri Lanka and the remarkable understanding of his son Sellian, though being so young, undertakes the journey and endures the horrors of detention with heroic characteristics. We encounter the refugees and their plight through Mahindan's character. The novel brings to the front the immigration policy of Canada. The manhandling of the boat people, denial of hearing of the boat people, and the denial of refugee status has affected the asylum seekers on the boat. In one incident, Mahindan expresses his condition, he says that, he was neither a militant nor a part of army, and says further that his family was a victim of the conflict. Mahindan's wife was pregnant at the time of attack and her subsequent death. He describes the horrors of the civil war. These conditions made him to escape from Sri Lanka and made him to seek refuge to other country and on the contrary rather than getting peace and refuge, he met with the same fate. He now became a man who has no rights of living.

The policies of immigration have gone stricter with the times considering the threat to the country's security. Over the years, humanitarian outlook towards the refugees is rapidly decreasing. Countries have become hostile towards the refugees and giving rise to illegal immigration and subsequent complexities. The task of finding out the real threat in guise of an intruder is arduous, and hence it affects the refugees who do not have any indecent intention towards the host country and have only fled to escape persecution in their own country.

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Asylum seekers are the ones who are in search of protection in other country.

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