

Analyzing The Identity and Dreams of The Displaced in Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty*

Aneesha.B¹, Dr. Priya Sharon Thomas²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, (Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore)

²Professor and Head, Department of English, Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, (Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore)

Abstract

The Indian writer Aravind Adiga, in his novel *Amnesty*, narrates the dreams and identity crises faced by migrants and displaced people through the life of migrant Danny. This work tells the story of a Sri Lankan who is forced by circumstances to become an “Illegal alien” after being a drop out from his “ripoff” college in Australia. Danny settles on cleaning and maintaining the sanitation in apartments in the suburbs of Sydney. The twist in the plot and the question of the immigrant's dreams being a success arise when Radha Thomas, a client of Danny, is murdered. Danny is aware of the murderer, who is another of his clients, Dr. Prakash. Danny is overwhelmed and ponders the dilemma of whether to inform the police and risk being deported or to remain silent. This ambiguous state of the migrant is analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: Adiga, migrant, identity, murder

1. Introduction

The novel *Amnesty* is set in Australia, where Adiga spent a few of his high school years. The displaced people may be migrants or, at times, even refugees who enter a foreign country in search of a livelihood. People considered illegals might have arrived as legals and stayed back due to unavoidable situations. The protagonist, Danny himself, can be considered a refugee rather than an illegal, as his asylum application was rejected just because he had not been smuggled in from his war-scarred, tsunami-ravaged Tamil homeland, Sri Lanka. Danny arrives in Sydney on a student visa and overstays for work and for his love. These are a few of the complex motives and impulses that make an individual illegal.

Amnesty brings to light the contradictions and hypocritical minds of Australians. In spite of immigration lending a helping hand to improving their economy, society cheers as the sea patrol arrests the incoming refugees. Adiga writes, “Easiest thing in the world is becoming invisible to white people, but the hardest thing is becoming invisible to brown people.” Adiga says the immigrants view each other very plainly. “There is a buzz, a reflexive retinal buzz, whenever a man or woman born in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Bangladesh sees another from his or her part of the world in Sydney—a tribunal pinprick, an instinct always reciprocal, like the instantaneous recognition of homosexuals in a repressive society.

Amnesty can be termed "a migrant's eye view of Australia, and he conveys how migrants and the displaced connect and adopt meaningful ideas about the country. The protagonist Danny, formerly known as Dhananjaya Rajarathnam, is an illegal immigrant who is denied refugee status after fleeing Sri Lanka on a student visa. He works as a cleaner and lives in a grocery store room in the sub-urban area of Sydney. His life is spent undertaking a series of subaltern tasks. Danny lives in the stockroom at the grocery store. When a regular customer says, "I've never seen you," Danny thinks, "because I'm just the brown man working at the back of the store." Danny has been trying to create an identity for himself for almost three years. He tries to stabilize and live a normal life by developing a relationship with his beloved vegan girlfriend Sonja, highlighting his hidden accent, and highlighting the color of his hair.

On a fine day, normal life gets disrupted as Danny comes to know that a female client of his has been murdered. The client was stabbed at a creek where Danny had visited her. A man's jacket was found at the scene, presumed to be that of the murderer. Danny follows the news reports related to the murder and realizes that he is able to identify the owner of the evidence. Danny identifies that it belongs to another of his clients, a doctor with whom the deceased was having an affair. Danny is forced to confront the situation and make a choice that would either disrupt the hard-earned identity that he has created in the displaced nation or disrupt his conscience. He can either represent and make aware of his knowledge about the crime and risk being deported to Sri Lanka or remain silent and let justice take a fall. The displaced Danny is well aware that if he comes forward with the information and helps the police solve the crime, he will destroy his own life in turn. This life had been a difficult one for him to build because he is termed an 'unauthorized immigrant'.

Flashbacks and memories of the uphill path that had trodden fill his mind. He remembers fleeing to Australia from Sri Lanka four years ago. Danny was a member of the minority Tamil people and was tortured by the Sri Lankan police, who mistook him for being a part of a gang. Danny decided to never return to his motherland and escaped using a student visa, using which he attended an overpriced university, which was a sham. When the student visa expired, Danny applied for refugee status, which was denied by the Australian government. Danny decided to live the life of a mouse, hiding underground, as he was left with no other options. Adiga explicitly plays with the word 'ill legal' and makes it sound like the protagonist is sick but legal. Danny feels a little sick as each day passes. He's short and brown in the country of the tall and the white. Even though Danny has cracked teeth, he is not bad-looking. Danny does his best to assimilate and be a part of Sydney. He keenly observes society and decides to suppress his accent, aiding him to merge with the common folk. He dyes golden highlights into his hair. And he begins working as a house cleaner for a service that pays him. Each step that Danny takes is filled with hope and part of his effort towards living a normal life. He wonders, 'Is there not a place for me here?'. Danny not only makes efforts mentally but also physically to fit in. He practices his posture. He rehearses the words to be used in a conversation. The narrator says, "Never say receipt with the P. Be generous with me, I reckon. Add aloud Look - at the start of the sentence, and ridiculous at the end.". Practices and habits to be avoided are also learnt by Danny: "White people did not like the sound of knuckles being cracked.". He wishes to understand the concept that makes him surprised and feels awkward the most: the Australian irony. The nature of the work done by Danny provides him with a lens and the opportunity to take a look at his client's life. He observes and analyzes the powerful people in society. It was heartbreaking for him to witness the illogic of immigrants, who separated themselves

from one another based on the status of their immigration. The survival of the fittest and the cleverest was practiced among the immigrants.

Danny was close to the lady client who was murdered. She was an Indo-Australian woman, gifting Danny with the rare jewel of friendship. She never exposed his status as an illegal immigrant, though she was well aware of it. Danny in turn retained the secret from the lady's husband that the lady client was hiding her secret love, Dr. Prakash, in her second home. The ruinous game of gambling was a routine for the murderer Prakash and his murdered lover. They compare themselves to the title characters, Oscar and Lucinda, and the gambling obsessiveness in Peter Carey's 1988 novel. Adiga expresses his notion of gamblers: "It was an odd vocation, this gambling, very technical, full of numbers, pencils, and calculations, done by the kind of brawny men who did not seem to be otherwise into thoughtfulness or calculation." . Danny does not gamble and dislikes sports. Danny is referred to as an 'athlete of the underground' as he eludes capture and remains in Australia.

Prakash, the murderer, compares the living conditions of even legal people from India in Australia to some sea creatures. The doctor explains to Danny about the Great Barrier Reef with the pun intended: "You've gone in the glass-bottomed boat to see all the corals, right? And what do you see? There's that filthy stingray, hiding squat on the ocean floor, and kicks up mud as it goes fleeing under the glass-bottomed boat with its forked tail, just the most frightened vermin you ever saw. I'm never going to live like that." Danny recognizes the jacket of Dr. Prakash that was found in the scene of the murder. Danny is a pleasant character and confronts the killer over the telephone. While Danny knows the killer's identity, the killer knows details related to Danny's immigration status.

The balancing between the two stakes is the story of the *Amnesty* and a reminder of the legal and ethical. Danny faces an internal struggle about whether to inform the police or to protect himself. The question, 'Where does his loyalty lie?' is raised by the reader and the narrator. Despite the numerous compromises he has made to be part of the new life in Sydney, Danny prides himself on the integrity of his character. Honesty and truthfulness matter to him, as does the instinct to survive. Danny is torn between bearing responsibility for the societal order and whether he can come forward and represent it with any legal protection. This question raised by the protagonist explores universal issues like class dynamics, social contracts, and self-identity.

Conclusion

The author makes the reader experience 'what it is to be inside the brown skin of a man on the run in a white-dominated society'. Adiga is valuable as a writer, as he gives importance to how people think rather than how they should think. *Amnesty* has a lot to say the desires of the displaced. Adiga deftly presents the daily life of an immigrant, struggling for his identity and survival in a foreign land. The writer builds empathy for Danny's real life counterparts—the hidden community members in every part of the world. The life of an illegal immigrant is even more hard and terrorizing than the character of Danny as painted by Adiga. Critics opine that it may resemble the character in Jeanine Cummin's condemned novel, *American Dirt*.

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