



Displacement and alienation in the works of Julia Alvarez

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Abstract

Love for one's land is a natural phenomenon but due to circumstances an individual or a group migrates to a foreign land. This displacement is voluntary as well as forceful. In the current age of information and technology large number of voluntary migration takes place in search of green pastures. There are innumerable cases where individuals, families and communities forsake their land to evade large-scale violence, discrimination and subjugation. The forceful or state sponsored eviction and displacement destroys the lives of millions of people. The uprooted section never comes out of the nostalgia of its motherland. The natives never accept the immigrated section even after it embraces the new land, its culture and traditions. Although horrible the migration also provides new avenues for the displaced population. Julia Alvarez, a Dominican whose parents leave the land for the deliverance from brutal reprisal of the Dominican regime. The writer through her autobiographical works presents the agonies of rootlessness. The present paper presents how Julia Alvarez deals with the subjugation of woman and search for identity in the adulterated world.

Keywords: Alienation, identity, marginalization, displacement, subjugation and violence etc

Introduction

Every work literary or non-literary is written with a purpose. Some of it is written to communicate or share thoughts with the readers. Some written to provide or acquaint information and some works are written for providing different kinds of pleasures. Some are written for propaganda purpose or to persuade the readers so that they may affirm to or follow certain ideology and ideas. Julia Alvarez, a well-known novelist, poet, essayist and short story writer hails from the Dominic Republic of the West Indies or the Caribbean Islands. Born in a well-educated family whose father belongs to the medical fraternity and an ardent lover of poetry. So right from her childhood she was interested in art and literature. Although born in the liberal atmosphere of United States, her father returns to his homeland when Julia was just three months old. Although interested in literature because of her parental legacy in art and literature she was unenthusiastic about the academics. She is one of the well-known literary figures of the modern English who has written five well known fictional works, three children books and four poetry collections.

While establishing herself as a fiction writer she also proved herself in poetic works which is visible in her four poetry collections. Her poetic work *Homecoming* which was published in 1984 presents her feelings and her love for poetry. The dominant theme of her poetic works is disapproval towards the chores of family life, identity, displacement and rootlessness. Besides focusing on the domestic life in these works Julia Alvarez prominently sheds light on the pitiable and struggling life of the displaced sections of the people in the new land. Julia Alvarez belongs to a well to do family she was away from the struggles and crunches of ordinary life but due to her father's political affiliation which caused problems in her life; as her father was involved in the insurgent camp which aims to destabilize the current regime of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molino who ruled in an autocratic way from 1932

1961. Although the Dominican Republic gifted lavishly by the nature but the political leaders have made it fertile for uprooting the democracy and establishing autocratic and totalitarian states. Lands of more than 700 islands in the Caribbean Sea with tiny islands provide ample material to political instability.

Her father took arms against the dictatorial and corrupt regime which has butchered more than 50000 innocent people who raised their voice against the rule of Trujillo. Like other line of dictators and autocrats he used every means of violence and corruption to safeguard his rule, he not only involved in murder of his political opponents but also ended the lives of literary figures like Jose Almonia. This fear of assassination and extermination compelled Julia's displacement from her motherland. Her father leaves Dominican Republic and takes shelter in United States. The forced migration creates many problems for their family; as her family which has once enjoyed every comfort and luxury of life has to embrace the life of an immigrant in a foreign land. It is a sudden trauma the family members never forget in their lifetime. At the age of ten Julia has undergone this horrible experience of exile and displacement. The life of and immigrant is not an easy one, he or she has to undergo horrible experiences in the new land. The inhibition on the part of the natives in accepting the immigrants causes untold traumas: physical as well as psychological to the immigrant. The person alienates due to the rejection from the natives even after the migrant's attempts of assimilation and embracing the foreign culture, its language and etiquettes. Their endeavor to learn the foreign language and the imitation of the foreign accent sometimes frustrate the immigrants as the effect of mother tongue in the immigrant's language never totally evades.

It is found in the writings of Julia Alvarez wherein she honestly sheds light on the difficulties faced by the migrants in learning the new language. She in an autobiographical way presents her own condition while learning the native

tongue. She says that in an effort to assimilate oneself in the foreign culture first thing the native has to do is to learn the language of the embraced land and while learning English the migrant has to break the cultural ties with his or her homeland. Learning the native's language is although a necessity the novelist never ignores its benefits. She states that without learning the native's language the migrant's life can't be at ease. It is the first and compulsory step that the migrant needs to take. While highlighting its benefits Julia also sternly criticizes the treatment meted out to the migrant by the natives. She compares her own learning the foreign language with that of her displacement. The cheap comments because of her Spanish accent by the native boys in the classroom are as horrible as that of her eviction from the motherland. Julia Alvarez presents the experiences in a very realistic way and this portrayal of events from her personal life do not stop her of portraying the naked realities of family and personal life. Sometimes she has to face bitter rebuttal and straining of relationship among her family members.

Her first fiction *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Ascent* to was published in 1991, here the novelist does not follow the chronological order for presenting the happenings of the events; she presents the story in a reverse order where she presents the story of a family of four sisters in an autobiographical context. The novel opens with the adult life of four sisters and concludes with that of their childhood days. In this work Julia Alvarez presents the transformations that took place due to the assimilation of different cultures, it is a difficult exercise on the part of the individual who tries to strike a logical balance between the two altogether different ways of life and shibboleths. Sometimes the individual succeeds in adjusting the new way of life in which he or she is voluntarily placed. The individual while adopting the traditions of the new culture is hesitant in severing the ties with his or her culture. This socialization in the new land has positive as well as negative effects on the life of the individual. This novel beautifully presents the hardship and the efforts of the immigrant in adjusting with the new cultural contacts. While presenting the migrant's attempts of socialization Julia also focuses on the plight, frustration and alienation of the immigrant community. This work is a testimony of the writer's talent who presents her own experiences in such an artistic way that it seems that this work is a work of every Dominican. through the story of the family which is displaced due to political apprising at home and moves to United States for survival. The portrayal of personal experiences does not go well with her family, as they never expect the exposure of their personal life by their own daughter and sister. The novel which is divided in three parts presents the life of Garcia sisters, their displacement and the hey days of their life in their motherland. The novelist presents the political turmoil which has taken heavy toll of many innocent lives in the regime of Trujillo.

Generally all over the world the resistance to autocratic regimes and the dictators comes from the males but Julia Alvarez's female protagonist take arms against the totalitarian and undemocratic regime of the Dominican ruler. The novelist in her historical novel *In the time of the Butterflies* presents the valour and protest of the Mirabell sisters against the exploitation of the then Dominican ruler. The three sisters who are like butterflies sacrifice their life on the altar of deliverance against the despot. It presents how the opponents of the unjust regime are tortured and

finally hanged by the merciless monster. Julia's main focus is the female struggle against all unjust and inimical circumstances of exploitation and discrimination. Alvarez's every work is devoted to women's cause. Although her female world is not a world of butterfly where everything is moving in a very merry manner; instead the world creates innumerable problems and hardships for women. her woman is valiant and never bothers to sacrifice her own life and she never yields and cares of her own life. It is the devotion and dedication of the marginalized weaker section which is appreciated and receives place of prominence in her works. While portraying the female characters and their endeavor against inimical forces Julia not only acknowledge their sacrifice but also legitimize them by presenting the course of events in such a way that the readers find some kind of familiarity with the literary world of Julia.

As woman is exploited and becomes subject of extermination and discrimination from the ages the woman is not only silenced because of her gender but also subjugated in the name of cultural dogmas and traditions, this exploited and silenced women is asked to speak by providing a suitable platform. The apathy and ignorance of male in acknowledging the female contribution in the progress of civilization is easily visible in the dominant patriarchal framework. This void Julia attempts to fill by giving spaces to female characters and their concerns in her literary world. Most of her works present the life of female characters and her writing is dominated by women characters. It is through her writing she attempts to provide voice to that section of society which has been silenced from the time immemorial. Julia Alvarez's fictional word revolves around her homeland that is Dominican Republic. While presenting the life of ordinary as well as brave and sturdy women she never forgets to admire and appreciate their struggle, she also encourages and never lags behind in inspiring her counterparts. She also alleges that the male writers from the mainstream knowingly or unknowingly ignore the hardship experienced by the women in society and as a result of these women characters have given subsidiary role in their literary works. by highlighting the contribution of Mirabell sisters she urges all the women to rise against all forms of injustice and exploitation, she not only calls the Dominican women for political uprising also appeals to women from all over the world to fight for the causes of female participation in political affairs which most of the women think the exclusive zone of male and the dominance.

By giving prominent place to the female characters, the novelist is successful in providing the identities to her female folk which are struggling for the individuality like her female counterparts. She also portrays the powerful female characters taking arms against all forms of inequalities and subjugation. Her woman is seen fighting against the dominant forms of male dominated world single handedly. Her females are seen in search of their own world wherein they are the decision makers of their destiny. Although her woman is not adamant to learn from the past experiences while making one's own world woman takes inspiration from her kith and kin and pursues her own way and finally succeeds with utmost struggle and hardships. The task of providing a prominent position to woman and her experience is somewhat absent in the works of Dominican writers who provide subsidiary stature to women in their works. The major chunk of their description is

devoted to the males who right from the genesis of human beings control most of the things of family and communal life but Julia Alvarez intentionally ignores this aspect and moves towards her country's past where she finds ample resources for her literary career. Her woman is from historical context but she is not a mere imitation of the historical characters, besides taking her woman characters from the historical world of Dominican Republic she provides flesh and blood to the fictionalized characters.

The feministic strain in her literary works compels the novelist to present the feminine world with sturdiness and strength like the other male figures in the literature. The woman while pursuing her dreams never lags behind or absolves her from the familial duties and responsibilities like the male member who becomes the center figure in every patriarchal family order. Alvarez's woman proves herself as strong as male members. In this way the woman which is once restricted to the kitchen and household is brought in the limelight and shown to the world that she is not inferior but an equal like her male counterparts. The woman which was one of the elements of subaltern section receives center stage in her works. Her woman never accepts the patriarchal notions of motherhood and she strongly opposes that women is just a child producing machine and an object for the gratification of male physical urges. Because of the idealized notions of motherhood women right from the genesis of human life are subjected to innumerable exploitations and subjugations. The traditions and cultural acceptance to a mother and dislike to a barren woman make woman's life miserable. The woman because of these dogmas regarding fertility accepts the fate without protesting it; even a childless woman is scorned and hated by another woman who is mother of children. It is the motherhood which provides a perpetual tool by the traditions to the patriarchal world which facilitates the unending chain of women's woes. But Julia Alvarez defies this tradition by portraying women characters who are unwilling to marry and remain unmarried and childless throughout their whole life. Her girls like Garcia sisters never succumb to the whims of their males. Her woman struggles not only for her but also for the freedom of next generation. She wants her children to decide their own future and she never tolerates her husband's interference in it.

Conclusion

In this way Julia Alvarez presents various issues like female subjugation, discrimination, assimilation, search of identity and feminism in her major works. Her works present the female attempts of individuality and the characters are from the history of Dominican Republic. The novelist succeeds in fictionalizing the historical figures to suit her literary work. Her dominant theme is of migration where the immigrant leaves his or her land for escaping the genocidal violence perpetrated by the oligarchs and totalitarian regime of the rulers like the Dominican Despot Trujillo. Like the male her women also rebel against the state sponsored violence and torture.

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