

**Nergis Dalal's *the Girls from Overseas*: Cultural Displacement and its  
Psychological Implications**

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**Abstract**

Cultural Displacement is the process of a culture being physically uprooted from its origins or having another culture imposed upon it to eclipse or replace it. Literature of all the languages in the world has been influenced by the word -Diaspora. Diasporic writers deal the sense of loss and alienation that resulted from migration and expatriation in their works. Diasporic literature typically addresses themes of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness and exploration of identity. It also discusses problems with the blending or breaking apart of cultures. Myriad of writers have disclosed the implications of physical as well as cultural displacements. Writers like V.S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri have vividly picturized the effects of cultural displacement and the migrants' quest for their own cultural identity. Among these writers, Nergis Dalal plays a vital role in portraying the cultural displacement and how these displacements affect the people and their daily life, especially their inter-cultural marital alliances. *The Girls from Overseas* by Nergis Dalal proves the above by showing the lives of five culturally displaced girls from five different nations as well as cultures who have married to Indian men. Because of the cultural disparity between the girls and their husbands, they always tumble in despair.

**Key words:** Displacement, Implications, Uprooted, Alienation, Disparity

Indo – Anglican literature holds a special place in India's literary landscape and is an essential component of English literature. The influential critic of Indo – Anglican literature, Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar talks extensively about the literary contribution of India to English literature. While male writers shaped and maintained Indian writing in English, women writers fought to carve out a fresh, uncharted territory for themselves. They have indeed accomplished amazing things with words that well-chosen and well spoken. Their attitudes demonstrate that

they appear to be freeing in a number of ways. The Indian English novel prominently features the image of women and their quest for individual identity.

The process of a culture being physically uprooted from its origin or having another culture imposed upon it to eclipse and replace it, is known as Cultural Displacement. It results in cultural confusion and it refers to this process of learning and encompasses the complete range of emotions, from conflicting feelings during an inter-cultural encounter to the rare serious disorientation and ensuing melancholy known as culture shock.

Being a refugee in India, Nergis Dalal knows more about cultural displacement, to which she, herself is a victim. Dalal is one of the Parsi writers in India and her contemporaries are Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Firdaus Kanga, Deshpande and Kelkar so on. The word *Parsi* means inhabitants of Persia and thus ethnic Persian is a demonym in Persian.. Parsis are the followers of Zoroaster. The Parsis, whose name translates to Persians and Persians are descended from Persian Zoroastrians who fled religious persecution at the lands of Muslims by settling in India. The Quissa-i-Sanjan states that Parsis came as refugees from Greater Iran to Gujarat and Sindh during the eighth and tenth centuries.

International females generally project the awareness of non- natives who articulate the common identity of being uprooted. This book contains Dalal's picturization of India and Indian culture. Dalal explores the issue of cultural displacement in conjunction with marriage and the meeting of East and West cultures. Her characters are set in a place where there are vast socio cultural displacements. Dalal has presented in this book five case studies of culturally displaced people coexisting in one nation but still longing for their former homeland. The characters are constantly missing their native and its culture. The narrative centres on five foreign girls who are now married to Indian men. These girls have a hazy understanding of life. Everything is tinged with a sense of alienation and melancholy.

The five alien girls in the book are significant female characters, each with their own cultural background. These are the following: Sandy (American), Gertrude (British), Louise (Canadian), Michelle (French) and Jane (British). These women's manners and behaviours serve as representations of their varied racial and cultural identities. They share a sense of unity in this strange land called India, but it is based on the knowledge that India is not their home. They can't accept India and Indians as their own despite their comfortable and very sophisticated lifestyles.

**Children working ten hours a day, little girls getting married off  
before they are out of the school room, animals roaming the streets  
with no one to care for them, and beggars, lepers and mutilated people**

**begging for alms, like in medieval times. (45)**

This demonstrates how alienated they feel from one other and how they band together to make up for it. Thus, these girls get together for coffee at one or more of their homes once a week.

Another issue that strains relations between Eastern and Western cultures is the way these foreign girls mingle at social gatherings and at their homes. They don't find it strange at all. Together, they sip alcohol to celebrate and decompress their suffocative mind. On the other hand women are not allowed to drink in Indian conservative society, nor is it accepted. Conflict between cultures is the outcome. The following instances show how the cultures differ from one another.

**It was impossible to escape one's background. Louise was convinced of it. Five years in India, five years of being married to an Indian, and she was herself, alien, separate. (1)**

Dinesh married a Canadian girl, named Louise. She had spent five years in India. Despite her sincere love for her spouse, she felt mentally detached. She observed a communication gap of sorts between herself and the other family members in her husband's home Louise expressed in a situation her inability to adapt to Indian culture and its people and she has expressed her distaste for so called backwardness inside the nation. She believes that in India, girls marry young stray cattle roam the streets, youngsters are compelled to work excessive hours. Despite all of this, she makes an unsuccessful attempt, to fit in with the society to which completely alien.

The foreign girls' perspectives did not align with those of their Indian families. They experience alienation due to this difference in thinking. Nergis Dalal illustrates the disparities in thinking through Louise and her mother-in-law. The Indian system of arranged weddings astounded Louise. She claims that in India, horoscopes are consulted to arrange weddings, between young men and girls who are complete strangers. Louise thought this marriage structure was immoral. The statement of Louise projects her aloofness:

**You know foreigners marrying Indians should be given an orientation course. (2)**

However, her mother-in-law disapproved of love marriages with the same fervour as Louise. Hence, this is one more conflicts in the eastern and western cultures.

Despite spending forty years in India, Michelle, the French woman, married to General Raj, has managed to resist Indian influence and maintains her own French identity. It appeared as though Michelle had adapted to her environment, her kids, and even her spouse, rather than the other way. The foreign girls' lifestyles and attire were unmistakably indicative of their alienation

from Indian society. The author of this novel, of cultural displacement, has shown her case by way of Gertrude. English woman Gertrude married Mr. Das before she was thirty years old, but she struggled to fit in with the customs and culture of her new country. She never donned the Indian traditional garment, the saree. On special occasions, four of the five women donned sarees, but they were ill-fitting. Their superiority complex is another factor mentioned in the novel that led these foreign women to reject Indian culture as their own. With Gertrude's assistance, Nergis Dalal alerts the readers to this. During one of the gatherings, Gertrude encouraged her pals to maintain their uniqueness.

Nergis Dalal deftly alludes to the cultural variances by citing the ways in which homes are embellished and various deities are revered. Jane had made many of the desired changes in the house when she married Dr. Sunil. It is best to speak according to her culture. She painted the walls white and plain instead of their original dark tone. She removed all the coloured pictures of Gods and coloured items in the in law's house. The following excerpt does a good job of illustrating the eastern culture and what makes it unique from other cultures:

**Here they hung pictures of Krishna, sporting with the gopies and filled the small alcove with garishly coloured plaster statues of the Gods. Here they burnt pungent incense sticks. (127)**

It seems that all of the foreign women's attempts to fit in with Eastern society have failed, and as a result, they have felt detached. Foreigners, visiting India, encounter peculiar cultural norms and social customs that strongly evoke a sense of being in a foreign country. As a result, Nergis Dalal, the novelist, expertly captures, the protagonists' sense of alienation, which results from emotional and cultural gaps.

American Sandy is a talkative extrovert, who is married to wealthy jeweller, Dilip. Given that the woman is considering a divorce, simply a week after her wedding, one can immediately surmise what a dismal partnership this is. The way the book addresses the cultural differences between East and west is really distinctive. Sandy's portrayal is significantly more important than the others.

Nergis Dalal has handled very uniquely as well as cleverly the East-West cultural encounters. In *The Girls from Overseas* there is always a longing for home, which is not fulfilled till the end. To Jane, the idea of home is more imaginary, than its in real. To Gertrude, home becomes, "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination". Sandy attempts to regain the lost happiness out of wedlock, through nostalgic recollections of the past and she makes home her

product of speculation and imagination which can be retrieved only in memory. According to Bill Ashcroft:

**The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place displacement and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity area feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English. (9)**

These migrants adopt various identities when they come into contact with them. They make an effort to create identities based on class and gender. Despite being uprooted, they attempt to forge a complex, transient new identity. The girls bemoan cultural differences and problems in India at the start of the book, as well as their Indian husbands and family. All of the others, with the exception of Gertrude, have ultimately come to understand, appreciate, and adore their family life because to Dalal's storytelling. An understanding of immigrant sensibility is one of the best ways to the scrutiny of Dalal's fiction. Initially, her exposure of cultural hybridity works as a key to enter the plurality of her fiction. The extent to which hybridity has influenced Dalal's aesthetic decision and provided insights into psychological analysis astounds one.

#### **Works Cited**

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