
Quest for Self Liberation and fulfillment in M. G. Vassanji's *Amriika*

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Abstract

Amriika is a novel of disillusionment. In this novel, the protagonist migrates to America for his higher studies. The hero caught between the world of reality and illusion and underwent many changes to adapt himself with the people, culture and even language which lead the entire novel. By the end, the protagonist's restless, unrequited and unfulfilling love makes his days in America.

Identity and seeking comfort is one of the major themes in Vassanji's *Amriika*. The expectations in the novel include the universal concepts such as love, happiness, and sense of belonging which is something greater than one's self. The proposed paper entitled **Quest for Self Liberation and fulfillment in M. G. Vassanji's *Amriika*** aims at the life either to live or to exist after migration.

Key Words: Self Liberation, Migration, Sense of belonging, Reality, Illusion

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“*Amriika* yearns to be a profound reflection on immigration, displacement, history, memory, home, relationships, community and the quest for fulfillment” (38).

M. G. Vassanji is the first Canadian writer who won Canada's prestigious the Giller prize twice. He has written seven novels and a short story collection. *Amriika* published in 1999 has a complex nature of the diasporic narrative. The title of the novel itself shows the phonological hybridity where Ramji's grandma pronounces it as Amriika. “My people sought it first in Africa, an ocean away, where they settled more than a 100 years ago. But in time, this west moved further and became – America; or as Grandma said it: Amriika” (3).

The novel speaks about the homeland and the adopted home where Ramji moves to. The novel is written in the point of view of the third world immigrant to the world's richest country America as a student pursues his higher studies at tech. The protagonist Ramji belongs to a small Shamsi community in Dar es Salaam. Since his parents are dead, he has been raised by his grandma. Ramji and his friends decided to go America. “It was Sona who first brought up the idea of actually going to America, when those who could get away had always gone to England” (10).

Ramji and his friends have better idea about the world's richest country “a land of multiple choices, where even ice- cream comes in thirty one different flavours and every city had a colourful baseball team and there were a dozen television channels to flick through” (22). Finally they move to America as students. Vassanji has brought the protagonist's political and personal experiences as a single plot. But it was a strange nation where a middle aged woman who has a dread disease called cancer seduces a young man of her son's age. Ginnie says that

I don't do this all the time with any guest, you should know that, she said firmly but tenderly...but I love you. Her face looked puffed up, the makeup had smudged; and she was holding her blonde hair, a wig, in her hand. She could have been a clown. "Do you love me now?" "Yes I do." Forcefully. How could he not? It's from my chemotherapy treatment. I've got cancer in my abdomen. (60)

The political experiences undergone by the protagonist was that he was implicated in a bomb blast. He rescued a girl from that war and gave accommodation to her. Later when she was arrested by the police, she thought that Ramji had betrayed her and she cursed him. He could not find comfort elsewhere. To overcome his problem, he involves himself in spiritualism. He joins with the Satguru Divine Anand Mission. Ramji says about the mission that "He must have been some good to get in and divinity school is just theory who needs that? People seek the real thing. He's the son of the famous Anandaswamy" (139). Later, Sona and Ramji come to know that there is no such mission and he again disappointed.

In the next part of the book, all his friends from Dar got reunited. Jamila one of his dearest girls from Dar was in platonic relationship. It was the first time at Mustardseed Midsummer's party given by Jamila where Ramji married Zuli a girl from Shamsi community. Also the party of Jamila was the ultimate conflict for both the break up and renewal of Ramji's marriage to Zuli. Jamila helped him to get united with his wife. He gave birth to two children. When they were in Suburban Philadelphia during Jamila's party parents observe their children.

Their kids, they agreed, were still the main focus of their lives, but would not be so, for long what seemed remarkable, watching them, was how much their kids belonged,

in a way in which none of them ever could, here or anywhere else, despite their ardent protestations when the occasion demanded that they were fully American (178)

This sense of alienation denotes the cusp living of Ramji throughout the novel. The next part of the novel shifts to California where Ramji moved and worked for a radical journal called *Inqualab*. His love and affair shifted to Rumina which is incomplete. Ramji ended up sheltering a young man who had bombed a store in Michigan. In this bombing, there occurred death and the unknown man were rescued and sheltered by Ramji. Ramji's wife Zuli sympathized for the young man and believed that he was innocent, though Ramji knew very well about him. This creates a subtle rift between Ramji and Zuli. Later she got divorce where he lost his love for the second time.

In the end, the police caught the youngman who held Rumina's hostage. Finally the young man killed himself and Rumina disappeared. It is a result of inability to skirt around and negotiate this chash between his dream and reality that Ramji becomes a drifher- both in personal life and in his professional career pursuing girls and gurus, changing jobs and wives and converging towards an organization which all show that the novel has the elements of disappointments.

Ramji's personal journey his failure in the relationship with girls his loneliness and suffering are all so moving but partly convincing. Vassanji's America has a predictable cyclicity that adds little to its meaning Ramji loses all the women he moved with: Ginnie, who dies, Jamila marries another man, Zuli got divorced, Rumina disappears. Ramji is left with emptiness of his character and position with *Amriika*. He never belongs to one place entirely and not even stood back at a cause or movement.

Hence the novel reflects on immigration, displacement, history, memory, home, relationship and the quest for fulfillment.

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