

Poignant Placement: A Study of Location and Marginality in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen*

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Abstract - *The objective of this proposed paper is to re-read the novel In the Kitchen (2009) by the Bangladeshi-British novelist Monica Ali with a view to pointing out the role and significance of 'place' and 'displacement' in the marginalization of individuals as well as communities in a globalized situation. Attempts will be made to assess Monica Ali's representation of 'Imperial Hotel, London' as a fictive locus that at once employs and exploits the veritable 'ends of the earth'-a set of foreigners and outsiders whose marginality is, by and large, locational; for social ills like human trafficking, ethnic discrimination, and economic disparity may, and do, place some at a disadvantage and some others in control. I shall also seek to show how displaced characters and misplaced ambitions complicate the human situation to such an extent that organized crime and bureaucratic incompetence hold sway over the innocent and the guilty alike.*

Keywords - Location, individual marginality, representation, situation

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INTRODUCTION

The story of the novel *In the kitchen* is about Gabriel, the protagonist and his other colleagues of the Imperial hotel at the heart of London. He thinks of last hours when he had a conversation with the Ukrainian porter Yuri about a month ago. He is unable to figure out any clue regarding the porter's approaching death since there were no problems till that period of time. But the sudden discovery of his dead body seems to destroy the ongoing prospect of the hotel. He remembers the moment when he saw that Yuri was laying dead on the pool of blood in this hotel. Even the workers don't know each other. That's why when the Police come for investigation, they fail to provide any information regarding Yuri. His whereabouts, his family, his background, Gabe only hands over the details of the agency through which Yuri had been employed. There is a conversation about the necessity of the multi-dimensional skills of a person since the World has become complicated. At this moment Gabe starts thinking about Yuri who, according to Gabe, was a multi skilled person. He seems to realize the absence of such a nicely skilled person since his sudden demise has created a vacuum in the hotel. Gabe gradually realizes that his ignorance towards non British people comes to him from his family. His family members used to look down upon people who belonged to different ethnic cultural origin and tried to avoid in every sense of the term. As a result, he has been habituated in keeping from others and never

feels that it is his moral responsibility to know about the workers in the hotel. But the death of Yuri becomes a turning point which makes him reassess his 'former self'. His stagnant notion of his fellow workers begin to change thereafter. In the course of his investigation about his fellow workers, he comes to know that many of the workers have higher educational qualification. These immigrants have come to Britain either to escape political detention in their native country or to gain economic prosperity. But in most cases, they become the victim of the situation and they don't get the minimum prestige as human beings.

Gabriel becomes successful in casting aside his conventional view of the superiority of British society and revolts against xenophobic attitude of his father and Nana. When Nana says that the immigrants come to Britain to rob of their cultural identity, Gabe replies that they are in Britain for work not to harm in any way. He takes pride in the liberal trend of London that includes ethnic and cultural identity in right spirit. According to him, the city bound everyone together or kept them equally apart. In the farm of the Norfolk, Gabe realizes that he is enjoying a sound sleep without interference of horrific dream that used to haunt him in London after the demise of Yuri.

Though the Imperial Hotel has become a melting pot of various legal and illegal immigrants, Gabe was not familiar with such alien cultural society in

London. Hence the social atmosphere in London appears to be an alien to Gabe. He can remember about some Pakistani fellows who stayed at some rented house here in Blantwistle. They used to work in night and take rest by the day. Gabe can also remember how his family member had negative impressions of the Asian people. Gabe's father was associated with the Asiatic people. Indeed, Gab was accustomed in his childhood to look at the Oriented as underdeveloped, weak, superstitious people.

As Gabe is able to break away from British supremacy, he is now curious to discover the mystery that besets in and around the hotel. His mission to reveal the mystery is reinforced at the sight of horrible dream. He seems to be in the underground and is crossing the endless passageways. In his dream, he becomes surrounded by the piles of food and thinks that he will have a delicious food. He seems to separate a piece of meat from the stack and pushes it between Yuri's lips. It implies that he should not make any delay in process of discovering the truth behind the mysterious death of the porter.

Gabe discusses with Charlie the problems of the present day British society. He agrees with Charlie's view that their perceptions are often monitored by the media. In every age, there may be some problems that need to be viewed in and handled with right spirit. But instead of looking for the enemy within, they are accustomed with the habit of blaming others for their own problems, for example the British people always blame the third world countries for the global warming instead of reviewing their own contribution in this respect. The moment Gabe feels the absence of his mother who always stood by him in the well and woe, he regrets to think that he was twenty-eight years old when his mom passed away due to heart attack. But nobody in the family informed him about the miserable accident. He also realizes that he has not cried for many years but he fails to cry seriously despite his several efforts. But the horrible dream becomes a turning point and makes him realize how he has become mechanized and emotionless. In fact, his dream in the form of psychoanalysis has cured his mental illness as well as his arrogance towards the others.

Gabriel thinks of Fairweather and Rowlinson who are uneven pair but they did not involve in the clash of ego since they were brought up with different tastes. Gabriel becomes thankful to them when he realizes that the healthy relationship between his two friends will be helpful for their prosperity in business. Gabe's experience in the hotel where he has been serving for years is not a happy one. The environment was holistic and violence was not uncommon in the hotel. His experience was very pathetic and the surroundings full of hindrance that was too much for an apprentice like him. He remembers: "He had been poked in the ribs, kicked in the shins, and once squarely up the arse. The chef at the Brighton Grand, an ex-trucker with a sweet little dog fighting hobby,

was a hair puller, an eye twister, a ball grabber..." (*In the Kitchen* 117).

Gabe comes in contact with another lady named Lena after the death of Yuri. She was in hotel under the custody of Yuri but she becomes dislocated once again as a result of Yuri's death. As she has been in the underground of the hotel for a few years, she knew about the unholy relationship between the hotel and illegal activities of human trafficking chains. Lena informs Gabe that she is from Belarus. She is reluctant to provide additional information about her. At one point, Gabe seems to have lost everything he has possessed especially after the separation from Charlie. That's why he doesn't want to lose further, he doesn't want to spend more time on Nicolai or with other fellows or even he doesn't want to go home to have some time to meet Lena. The only thing he wants is to become united with Charlie and restart their relationship. Gabe's mental strength decreases day by day, and the moment here reaches to an extreme point, he questions about his own existence. It raises several other questions regarding his relevance in the society and the purpose of living on the surface of this planet. He becomes completely restless since he fails to get any suitable answer to pacify his tormenting heart and mind. He starts questioning himself: "who am I? A nobody? A nothing? A zero? Am I hollow man? He was angry. He was furious" (*In the Kitchen* 478).

Ted speaks of uniqueness of the British characters and laments that these qualities are dwindling away day by day as a consequence of the arrival of the immigrants. Gabe mentions certain qualities such as tolerance; fairness etc. reminds his father that these are British qualities in reality. He asks his father to visit IMPERIAL Hotel where people from all corners are working together without any contempt against one another. Ted may look at the characters of people as individuals instead of speaking in political term. He may take care of personality of individuals and he should never talk otherwise.

Vasco, café owner in Mamarrosa, has a habit of cleaning the counter of his café with stamina to welcome his guests and takes extra care for those who belong to his same rank. He inherits this habit from the legendary saint who used to practice this as a barren in province town of the United States of America. Through he innovates his own way of cleaning; he is using the same unwashed rag for all purposes. As we know that the past shapes our present action, this can be exemplified in case of Vasco. Vasco remembers about his grandmother who was less than five feet high and could do practically nothing. She had only four teeth and she could eat a whole raw onion. She knew the secret of curing mammary gland in the udder of any woman or a cow or a goat but she never told anything how she prepared the medicine. She took pride of her knowledge and used to pretend that

she knew everything certainly despite her little achievement. Psychological contradiction of the owner of the café is explicitly visible in the portrayal of Monica Ali. Vasco thinks that his mother did not love him enough since he feels that certain unfulfilled desires haunt him all the while. If somebody's mother does not love him properly, he must fill the gap with something else. He also remembers that his mother never left him alone rather she showed him some extra passion and probably this makes him needy.

Gabe once learn from a parliamentarian friend Fairweather about the forced labourers. He came to know from him how the immigrants were forced to work in various industries to keep the price of products low. The immigrants are generally forced to give extra labor and their passport are sometimes snatched away to treat them as illegal immigrants so that they cannot rebel against the exploitation. In Norfolk, Gabe finds strategy of exploitation. At this, Gabe remembers how his once colleague Gleeson used to say about his growing up here in Norfolk. He thinks that this Gleeson must be a relative of his colleague and there is a definite link between the two persons in the illegal activities. When Mr. Gleeson comes, he compels him to leave the farm after asking him few questions. Although Gabe becomes failure in his attempt to unite Lena with Pasha, he achieves success in tracing the link between the Imperial Hotel and the farm and decides to eradicate such malpractice by informing his parliamentarian friend Fairweather. On the Onion field, he also realizes another pathetic scene where he has a direct conversation with the laborers. In this way, their past memory and future planning are completely destroyed. Gabe's mind is full of misery when he compares his life with that of the laborers. The whole scenery appears to him: "London was slipping away from him". (In the Kitchen 370).

Gabe discusses with Charlie the problems of the present day British society. He agrees with Charlie's view that their perceptions are often monitored by the media. In every age, there may be some problems that need to be viewed in and handled with right spirit. But instead of looking for the enemy within, they are accustomed with the habit of blaming others for their own problems, for example the British People always blame the third world countries for the global warming instead of reviewing their own contribution in this respect. They admit that the policy of war on terror has done away with nothing in reality but it only increases more terrorist activities. So, they need to be more realistic in dealing with the complicated situations instead of blindly following the trodden path of biased media and racist and xenophobic sentiment which they inherit from their own family. Charlie confesses that they have always been in doubt regarding the workings and intentions of others but she has realized that there is a problem in the way they think of others. Gabe also holds same view that they should be more careful about their internal threat by stopping pointing out at others for their shortcomings. In this way, a reader of this

novel is able to discern Gabe's transformation from a Eurocentric biased person to a responsible citizen with magnanimous heart. Now, he is eager to look at his own shortcomings to have a better understanding of the world.

Gabe gets completely changed from his former selfish attitude to a generous person who is likely to dedicate himself for the welfare of the people around him. He is now motivated by a sense of purpose and realizes that one can do anything if one opens up his/him to heart. Now, as he is willing to demolish the barriers that he built around him to keep himself out of reach of the common people, a drastic transition occurs in Gabe's mind when he adopts the utilitarian concept of universal brotherhood by leaving behind the Eurocentric idea of white supremacy to decide to tell about her to his sister Jenny and his father. There is a sea change in the life of Gabe who was totally arrogant towards the immigrants and now, he wants to be united with the desolate girl Lane who has been exploited and turned into a metal condition and is portrayed in the novel with passion and sympathy. He now realizes that he informs his father and sister about his affection for Lena. Had he informed them earlier about this, he would not have become the victim of anxiety and restlessness.

Indeed, there has been a positive change in attitude of Gabe. Now, he is curious to know about the background of everyone around him and promptly asks Benny about his past history despite the fact that he is unwilling to be burdened with bitter experiences of his colleague. Benny is actually from Liberia and he fled the country when there was a civil war in Liberia. He went straight to Cairo as they heard about kindhearted treatment of the Egyptian authority towards the Liberian. Two years later when he was interviewed by officials of the United State, he was offered to settle in meanwhile, he gained authority in communicative English.

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