

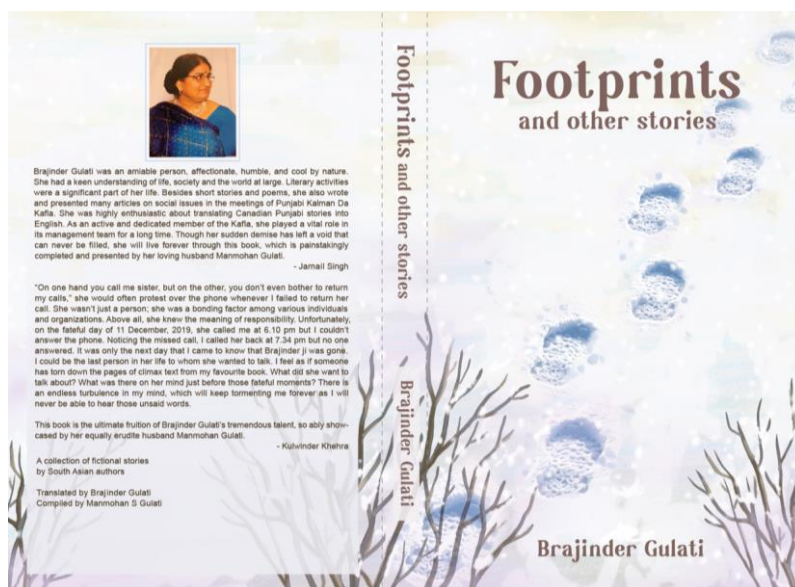
Footprints and Other Stories- An Anthology of Stories By Eminent Punjabi Writers

*Dr. Shamaila Amir

Received: November 2022

Accepted: February 2023

Available Online: March 2023



Book Title : Footprints and Other Stories
Translator & Editor : Brajinder Gulati, Indo-Canadian Author and Radio Host
Published by : Sapatrishi Publication, Chandigarh, India
Year of Publication : 2022; Price: US\$15, Pages: 272
Reviewer : Dr. Shamaila Amir

Abstract

The book footprints and other stories explores lives of Punjabis who first arrived in Canada during the late 19th century to work in the forest industry, and now their number is approximately 2.6% of Canada's total population originating wholly or partly from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. "Footprints and Other Stories" is an anthology of stories by eminent Punjabi writers, translated and edited by Brajinder Gulati and Manmohan S. Gulati. Published by Sapatrishi Publication of Chandigarh, India, the book contains 12 short stories that are meant to be available for a maximum number of people, specifically those from the Punjabi generation who are not very well aware of the language and customs of their forefathers. In addition, the book contains meaningful stories about the Punjabis in Canada so their readers can get insights into Canadian Punjabi life. Almost all the stories present Canadian life concerning an interaction of Punjabis with the country's varied culture, environment, and lifestyle, something which came to light through these stories because Punjabis migrated to Canada. The striking aspect of the stories is something familiar to the immigrants living all over the world, i.e. their contradictions with a way of life resulting in home-sickness, racial discrimination, generation gaps, difficulties of adaptation, etc. A crisis in the characters of the stories is evident while adapting to the western culture and values.

Key Words: Footprints, Stories, Anthology of Stories, Punjabi Writers

* Ph. D. (Linguistics), Head of Department, Bahria University, Islamabad Campus, Pakistan.
 Email: shaminhasan@hotmail.com

Punjabis first arrived in Canada during the late 19th century to work in the forest industry, and now their number is approximately 950,000, 2.6% of Canada's total population according to the 2021 Canadian census originating wholly or partly from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. "Footprints and Other Stories" is an anthology of stories by eminent Punjabi writers, translated and edited by Brajinder Gulati and Manmohan S. Gulati. Published by Sapatrishi Publication of Chandigarh, India, the book contains 12 short stories that are meant to be available for a maximum number of people, specifically those from the Punjabi generation who are not very well aware of the language and customs of their forefathers. In addition, the book contains meaningful stories about the Punjabis in Canada so their readers can get insights into Canadian Punjabi life. Almost all the stories present Canadian life concerning an interaction of Punjabis with the country's varied culture, environment, and lifestyle, something which came to light through these stories because Punjabis migrated to Canada.

The striking aspect of the stories is something familiar to the immigrants living all over the world, i.e. their contradictions with a way of life resulting in home-sickness, racial discrimination, generation gaps, difficulties of adaptation, etc. A crisis in the characters of the stories is evident while adapting to the western culture and values. The reasons for which most of the characters migrated are common, e.g. struggles to earn a better life and build a property back home. Probably everyone wants to return to their homeland to live a better life in the end, but the stories indicate that for the first generation of Punjabis, there are issues with returning to their homeland. The possibilities and chances of returning often perish when the next generation adopts the local life to the maximum.

The cultural conflicts presented in the stories focus on settling into a new culture and civilization or migrating to an entirely difficult country. The process of settling leads to several conflicts and tensions, including racial discrimination, breaking relationships, being materialistic and fewer chances of sticking back to their own culture and values. The old generation wants to stick to the old culture, but the new generation quickly adopts the Canadian culture and loses its Punjabi identity. The stories that aptly and particularly point out these problems are "A Slice of Sun," "The Inner Voids," "The Scarlet Sunrise," and "Privacy," focusing on the conflicting relationships between Punjabi parents and their next generation. The stories highlight that the new generation doesn't want to live as per the commands/values of their parents. The authority of parents over children, something common in Asian countries, has shifted from them to their children, who are their masters in western culture. Parents are desirous to guide their children according to their experience, but they are unwilling to be obedient. However, the acceptance of interracial marriage in "A Slice of Sun" and the deployment of the son with the peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan in "The Footprints" indicate that the new country has become their homeland, and they want to settle here, adopting the new culture and western trends. So if the nostalgia is there in these short stories, the cultural adaptation process is also visible with a message that both the local and the Punjabi values need to be flexible towards each other, for which understanding the uniqueness of both cultures is a must. Therefore, the mother in the story "A Slice of Sun," written by Balbir Kaur Sanghera, who fights for the devaluing joint family system of Punjab, finally accepts that in the form of Richards, "a slice of Sun is still visible, and its crimson hue is lighting the whole sky."

More positive aspects of white people in Canada have been portrayed in Gurmeet Panag's "The Pancakes," exemplifying the mean nature of migrated Punjabis due to them being economically powerful and exploiting the weak Gayle. However, the good nature of the narrator and the mutual affection between the two exemplify the possibilities for a close relationship between the two communities. "Monique, we're also like mom to each other... we also enquire about each other's state and share our sorrows or experiences," she would console me. "The Breakup," by Kuljit Mann, also indicates the good nature of a Canadian lady who is

the girlfriend of a Punjabi practicing double standards set for himself and his wife back in India. With Helen, he is "*madly in love*" because her "*fair complexion*" turns him on, and he accepts that "*this sweet, velvety beauty was not going to listen to him,*" so he keeps mum while she is driving rashly. He lets go of his lovely family and emotions for the sake of this '*goree*' who may be the cause of his success in Canada. The story also tells that success comes at the expense of family life, a caring and loyal spouse, and sometimes a dear child. "So dear, what is so special in it," uttered by Raman when she came to know that her husband was taking classes from a female friend. It indicates that his wife trusts him contrary to his belief that in their culture, "*... even Raman might think that I might indulge in such kind of affairs.*" He does not want to allow his wife to have another man, but his Canadian girlfriend does not approve of these double standards. For Helen, who thinks of herself as having flaws because her husband and several boyfriends left her, he leaves his loyal, trustworthy, and loving wife, who is not even demanding the financial help a husband in her culture is supposed to provide. All she wants is to be called "Laatti" by her husband to feel as if goddess Saraswati has blessed her. The ironic account in '*Privacy*' written by Jatinder Kaur Randhawa also indicates the cultural differences between generations. Basics of Punjabi culture, such as looking at someone's house and being curious about others' state of affairs, are not nice to the daughter. Therefore, she mocks her mother for her '*typical aunties-like behaviour.*' However, the mother, who in her childhood is a witness to the death of a neighbour, believes that being aware of circumstances around can even lead to saving someone's life. The mother objects to her daughter's short dress, being late at night, and drinking. The daughter, being tired of these objections, decides to leave the house. Depiction of the scene when the daughter announces her moving out, independent and the way she blames her mother for this decision, is something in totality unimaginable by a "Pure Desi" old mom living in India. The reader here realizes that the mother and daughter's story reveals that the parent's decision to move to an entirely different country might result in abrupt cultural change. For a typical Punjabi family, Canadian life is the height of selfishness. "We have fallen in the vicious circle of money, jobs, and time and don't even ponder beyond it." Contrary to that, the next generation, which is obviously Canadian, declares that the typical thinking of the parents is due to the generation gap.

Major Mangat's '*The Inner Voids*' probably sums up all that a reader may read in different stories of this book. It answers questions that may arise in one's mind if permanently moving out. The parents in the story moved to Canada but brought up their children, Niti, and her two siblings, under certain restrictions like typical Indian parents. They were not allowed to wear, drink or eat according to Canadian traditions and environment. In addition, they were not allowed to marry outside the Jatt race. The girl wanted to be a doctor, but the father did not invest money in her being supposed to marry and leave. However, she rebelled and married a non-Jatt Punjabi, the son of a carpenter. Now the egoist Father Jatt is unable to accept her marriage into a low caste family even after twenty years despite that she is happily married.

The story gives some excellent lessons about how parenting should be in Canada. Parents have to earn hard to survive, but running for money and spending day and night earning at the cost of quality time with children can bring untoward incidents in their life, including suicide by a child or abandoning their parents' mansion. The best lesson the story could give is that the globalization of humans is the only race. For that matter, the following few lines are worth reading,

Before going to their hotel for the night, they had their dinner at Chilis, a Mexican restaurant chain. In their room, they kept chatting for quite late. They noticed that in the US, there are many people of mixed cultures. The Spanish, Jamaican, French, Chinese, Philippines, white, black, and brown were marrying into different communities and this way, resulting in mixed breeds.

This new generation of mixed races had no special religion, nor any particular culture, nor any particular language. They were all global citizens. Alisha said, "I like whatever is happening... this way, only one race will be there, and there will be no racism at all. For quite long, standing in the window, she kept looking at the large expanse of the ocean extending up to the horizon, in which hundreds of rivers merge and become one ocean."

'Globalization is also one such ocean,' Alisha thought.

From space, the earth is viewed as 'mother-earth.' Boundaries of castes, races, and countries are erased, and the earth appears as one planet. Keeping this in mind, and prevailing quite similar cultures in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, I want to recommend wider circulation of this book so that not only Indian Punjabis but people in Pakistan and Bangladesh can also read it. I loved this book and strongly recommend translating these stories into Urdu and Bengali languages. Other than pleasure reading, it will also serve the purpose of informing people in these countries about the pros and cons, the sorrows and joys, of shifting abroad for the sake of earning money and the heavy price that parents might pay if they do not adapt themselves according to an entirely different culture.