
**Female Migrants and Postcoloniality in *The Final Passage* by
Caryl Phillips**

Anchal Maheshwari

Research Scholar

School of Studies in English

Vikram University, Ujjain (M.P.)

E-mail- anchalmaheshwari01@gmail.com

Abstract

Due to the globalization and multiculturalism many people migrated to England from their native place. People migrated with a hope for their golden future but gradually their hopes scattered when they came to know about the reality of the crucial behavior of the host countries. During the migration, people always swing between two cultures, the native culture and the culture of the host country in which they migrate. Apart from the cultural problem migrants have to face a lot of other barriers in building their future or identity. Migration is the major theme of the postcolonial literature and herewith the paper will reflect light on the condition of female migrants. It is true that all migrants suffer during the process of migration but female migrants have to suffer more because of their inferior sex, as regarded by the society. In this paper a scrutinized study will be done in the terms of the predicament of female immigrants of Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage*.

Keywords- Migration, Female Migrants, Postcolonial, Multiculturalism.

In the context of postcolonial culture, Helen Tiffin claims in his essay *Postcolonial Literatures and Counter Discourse* that “Postcolonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity” (95). Postcolonial literature gives voice to the silent characters and expresses their predicament throughout the world. Every kind of literature always deals with some autobiographical elements. As Edward Said remarks in *The World, the Text and the Critic* that writing is the “the complex and generally orderly translation of many different forces into decipherable script, forces that all converge on the desire to write which is a choice made over the desire to speak, to dance or sculpt” (129). This means that literature always spreads the message of the author to the world. Literary works are created not only for the pleasures of the society but the aim of the literature is also to bring a change in the society. Through the powerful voice of the author, people come to know about the social and political visions. Therefore, whenever a writer creates his work on a particular theme, the work is always inspired or influenced by the writer’s own experience of life and this is what Caryl Phillips has done in all his writings who is a post-modernist writer with multicultural background and wide travelling experiences. His works express his experiences and knowledge about the condition of migrants during migration which he observed through his journey all over the world. Phillips has produced the experiences of displacement,

rootlessness and recognition of Blacks who were implicated in slavery and mass fluctuation from the African territories to the Americas, Europe and Caribbean Islands.

Caryl Phillips is a versatile genius of Caribbean origin who later settled in

England. Phillips was born in St. Kitts to Malcolm and Lillian Phillips. When he was only four months old, his parents moved and settled in Yorkshire, England. After the completion of his graduation in 1979, he had an urge to visit all-over the world in order to survey the condition of migrants and black people.

As he had migrated in very early age so he came across the condition of migrants. He has felt the pain, suffering and nostalgic experience which can be find in his every work. His short journey to United States plays an important role for writing on such themes like colour discrimination, slavery and identity crisis. As Benedict Ledent points out in his *Master of Ambiguity*-

“His experience at Oxford and a short journey to the United States in 1978 during which he discovered the writing of Richard Wright, had indeed provided him with a further insight into the duality of the society in which he was brought up, reinforced his resistance to all forms of exclusion, and above all aroused in him the need to come to terms with “the cultural confusions of being black and British”. (1)

Caryl Phillips has credited literature by his several precious gems of fiction, non-fiction, anthologies, plays, radio plays, film and translations. In all these works he has

expressed his own experience and psychic or physical trauma of the migrants or slaves. Diasporic experience is one of the major aspects of all his writings. He has written eleven pensive novels: *The Final Passage* (1985), *A State of Independence* (1986), *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997), *A Distant Shore* (2003), *Dancing in the Dark* (2005), *In the Falling Snow* (2009), *The Lost Child* (2015) and the most latest novel *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018).

Indeed, Caryl Phillips is regarded as the most prolific writer who belongs to the group of second generation postcolonial authors. One can easily place him with the prominent postcolonial authors like Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer, Hanif Kureishi and Margaret Atwood.

In the social context of English society, the issues like discrimination, migration and employment became vicious till the end of the 20th century. These issues are faced by each and every human being who takes migration. Female migrants are not far away from this discrimination. On the contrary female migrants are more victimized because society always regards women as inferior and when they move from their native land to elsewhere in order to get satisfaction, they always become the victim of their host country.

Caryl Phillips has deeply analyzed the problematic circumstances of female migrants through his characters. The female immigrants of Caryl Phillips always look hopeful for surviving in England or in the other host country but several hindrances and

their boycott in that country exhausted them. Ultimately either they chose to remigrate to their native land or decide to live the unsatisfied or unhappy life.

This research paper will discuss about the predicament of female migrants in the postcolonial England through *The Final Passage*, a most celebrated novel of Caryl Phillips. Like all his other works, this novel is also dominated by one major theme that is migration. Caryl Phillips has completely obsessed with the issues of migration and identity crisis. This obsession shows his concern and sincerity towards the colonized or migrant people because without this contemplation it looks impossible to deal with these themes for such a long time and this shows his anxiety towards the situation of his people. Caryl Phillips himself has faced this critical situation after the migration. Once in *The Guardian*, Phillips himself has remarked- “ I belong not only to the British tradition, I am also a writer of African origin and for people of the African Diaspora, ‘home’ is a word that is often burdened with a complicated historical and geographical weight”.

Caryl Phillips first novel *The Final Passage* is a debut novel and revolves around two female migrant characters, one is Leila, the protagonist of the novel and other is her mother. Both characters take migration from a Caribbean island to England in the quest of peace and better health as Leila assumes that “England was going to be a new start after the pain of the last year.” (15) The novel is organized in five parts and a series of flashbacks which depict the struggles and critical situations of Leila’s life. Leila is a young girl married to Michael Preston against her mother’s will. Her mother rightly says about Michael- “he loves himself too much and he will use you” (34). But Leila refuses

to her mother's decision and thus all the quandaries come into her life. Although before the marriage, Leila's life was not too happy because she always felt inferior due to being a 'mulatto' girl. After the marriage this story of humiliation doesn't come to an end but takes more terrible form. Not only Leila's mother rejects Michael but also Michael's own behavior shows that he is not a proper match for Leila. At a place in the novel, it is stated that "Michael threw the flowers at her feet and before she could stoop to pick them up he spat on them". (34)

Despite all these indications, Leila marries with Michael and chooses a taciturn life for herself. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has remarked "For the 'figure' of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class difference are subsumed under that charge." After her marriage Leila tries to compromise with Michael but she fails repeatedly as Michael is a womanizer and drunkard. He remains engaged with a prostitute named Beverley. Meanwhile, Leila conceives and gives birth to a baby boy named Calvin and her mother also decides to migrate to England for the treatment of a prolonged disease. In order to give a better future to Calvin and to meet her mother, Leila also migrates to England. Leila assumes that she would enjoy a satisfactory life in the mother country than in her native island. With Michael, she aspires a comfortable life but again destiny repeats itself and Leila's dreams shatter in the mother country. Leila sees a board with the note – "No vacancies for colourdes', No blacks, No colourdes" (156).

Thus, Leila becomes fail in achieving both of his objects. She neither meets her mother nor succeeds to provide a better life to her son. Michael also leaves her alone to survive as a migrant. In the novel, she always receives card from ‘nobody’. Despite living for a long time in England Leila doesn’t feel any sense of intimacy and doesn’t find any satisfaction. England provides her nothing but a lot of disappointment. Leila’s mother also claims to Leila that “London is not my home”. (124) In this state of disappointment Leila decides to remigrate to her own island after her mother’s death.

Because of being a female migrant Leila doesn’t find any kind of honour in the whole life from her husband, society, her mother and from England. When Michael makes relation with a woman in England, she doesn’t say a single word in opposition and continue bears all the discriminations. On the other hand, in the case of Michael, he finds his sensual or sexual satisfaction in England even after being an immigrant. Phillips has presented Leila as a puppet of the hands of Michael and England. Till the end of the novel she waits for Michael and searches a place which she can call home. The final image of Leila within *The Final Passage* stresses the extensive sense of homelessness and seclusion that dominates her.

Due to the dark complexion, the black people can not be equal to the white people. They are always deprived from their rights such as right to live a glamorous life as Leila observes that “coloured people did not drive big cars or wear suits or carry briefcases, that they seemed to look sad and cold.” (121). After seeing the poor condition of Blacks, the complex of inferiority fixes in her mind. The issues of recognition and

familiarity arise in her mind and she gets entrapped in a dilemma about her own identity and existence.

Migration does not give any kind of satisfaction especially in the case of Blacks. Migration proves horrible for both male and female but it becomes more inhuman when it is taken by a female. This unforgettable work of Caryl Phillips presents this thought very well through Leila as she loses her identity and leads an unrecognized life in the double-edged and nugatory world.

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