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# Muslim English Literature



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# Urdu Diaspora in Canada: Unveiling the Transnational Experiences through Jawaid Danish's *Hijrat Ke Tamashey*

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## Abstract

Urdu Diaspora can be defined as the socio-cultural formation of the Urdu-speaking community in transnational spaces, which has migrated chiefly from the Urdu-speaking regions in India and Pakistan to various global destinations, including the EU, the Americas, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, African countries, and Gulf nations. The present paper endeavours to provide a concise overview of the global Urdu diaspora with special reference to the South Asian and specifically Indian Urdu-speaking Diaspora community in Canada. It also intends to describe the fundamental characteristics of the Urdu diaspora in relation to the other classical patterns of global diasporas. It applies literary analysis to the transnational experiences of the South Asians as depicted in the works of Indo-Canadian writer and playwright Jawaid Danish's literary work – cum – performance, *Hijrat Ke Tamashey* (Plays of Migrations). It is a collection of various plays based on the lives of immigrants in Canada. Danish is also popular for his solo play “Dastan Hijraton Ki” (Story of Migration). This story is a Dastan/goi, a traditional form of Urdu storytelling. The present qualitative research seeks to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of lived experiences, memories, the anguish of displacement, notions of belonging, and the challenges encountered by Indian and Pakistani Urdu-speaking communities during the transition into a different socio-cultural setting. It aims to draw parallels between the American dream and the Canadian dream, as well as the hardships associated with both. Furthermore, this study seeks to underscore the pivotal role played by the diaspora in preserving and promoting the Urdu language, literature, identity, and cultural heritage in transnational space concerning Canada.

**Keywords:** *Diaspora in Canada, Diasporic Identities, Global Migration, Transnationalism, Urdu Diaspora, Urdu Literature.*

## Introduction

Migration is an essential facet and integral part of human existence, spanning centuries, originating from the Prophet Adam and continuing till the present day, where every one of us migrant from one place to another for various reasons. Everett S Lee (1966) categorizes the driving forces behind migration as "Push and Pull Factors," encompassing social, cultural, religious, political, and economic motivations. These factors propel individuals or groups to leave one place and settle in another.

Today there is an increase in both national and international migration. In mid-year 2020, the global population of international migrants constituted approximately



3.5% to 4% of the total population, as reported by UNDESA. With a total population of 7.8 billion at that time, this demographic accounted for a significant portion of the global populace. Notably, India emerged as the country with the highest number of migrants residing abroad/diaspora, with 17.5 million individuals, followed by Mexico and China with 11.8 million and 10.7 million migrants respectively, as per data from the World Migration Report 2020. This increase is due to various socioeconomic, political, and environmental reasons such as growing unemployment, economic opportunities, war, natural calamities, globalization, etc. These migrants establish new socio-cultural identities, especially when they cross "new socio-cultural settings" (Chapparban 2020). The formulation of such distinct identities is called diaspora. This paper is also an intellectual attempt to add to the ongoing theorization of these emerging new global human conditions and socio-cultural formulations sparked by growing migration, rapidly evolving ICT, and globalization by thinkers like Robin Cohen, William Safran, Appadurai, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, James Clifford et al. It is also an attempt to think beyond the existing disciplinary boundaries.

Robin Cohen in his foundational book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997) defines diaspora as "signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. Other people abroad who have also maintained strong collective identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as diasporas, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution" (ix *Introduction*). He also provides some of the basic yardstick to define a diaspora community.

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade, or to further colonial ambitions
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity, even to its creation
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and the belief in a common fate
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (1997, 26)

It was in 1997 scholars like Cohen and William Safran attempted to define diaspora as a community *outside of their homeland* and in *transnational contexts*. The term was initially closely associated with the Jews and their dispersion based on a specific religion and cultural identity.



The term "diaspora" originates from the Greek word "διασπορά," meaning "scattering" or "dispersion," and is an anglicized form of the Greek term. Its etymology combines the preposition "dia\_" meaning "over" and the verb "speiro" meaning "to sow." Initially used in ancient Greece to describe the exile of the Aegean population after the Peloponnesian War within the context of migration and colonialism, it later found a parallel in Hebrew with the term "galut," denoting the exile of Jews during Babylonian times and their dispersion from their homeland. In Roman times, the term became closely associated with Jewish history, symbolizing the situation of Jews living outside their homeland, particularly following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and their subsequent dispersal. Over centuries, Jews migrated to various parts of Europe, and their dispersion culminated in the Holocaust, and subsequently proposal for the formation of the State of Israel in the land of Palestine and the beginning of the *an-Naqba*/catastrophe since 1948, the Palestinian diaspora.

The concept of diaspora has evolved over a period of time and now encompasses major historical dispersals such as African, Armenian, Chinese, Indian, and Palestinian diasporas, among others. In modern times, it is broadly applied to diverse contemporary migrations of the 20th and 21st centuries, including incipient and juvenile diasporas as categorized by scholars like Myron Weiner.

Diaspora is defined in terms of a specific community identity based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, and race. Diaspora also manifests in multiple dimensions and roles, embodying a complex phenomenon, a distinct condition, and a state of living, being, and becoming. It encompasses diverse experiences and expressions, serving as a psychological and emotional construct, an asset in economic and educational realms, and a reflection of one's sense of home. *Home* within diaspora encompasses not just physical spaces but also home that one can feel at home when s/he finds his/her culture, language, culture, food, religion, taste, and sentiments when migrating and crossing his/her socio-cultural boundaries. Hence, for him/her culture becomes home, language becomes home, food becomes home, dress becomes home, religion becomes home, and taste becomes home.

In "Psychology of Diaspora" (2020) Sajaudeen Chapparban writes, "There could be a migration without diaspora, but there cannot be diaspora without migration; therefore, diaspora is a post-migration phenomenon. It starts formulating once the migration takes place from one *sociocultural setting* to *an/other sociocultural setting/s*" (Chapparban 2020: p. 1880). In discussing sociocultural settings, he referred to the *familiarity* individuals have with their environment, habits, close attachments to their locality (be it a village, city, region, state, nation, continent, or the entire planet), as well as their cultural elements such as language, food, customs, traditions, religion, ethnicity, and race. Today, our focus is on migration from one country to another, but in the future, we may also explore migration from one planet to another, recognizing that such experiences would inherently differ. What's crucial to grasp here is how diasporic sentiments emerge when individuals or groups migrate from their *familiar* sociocultural settings and attachments to new ones, whether at a national or international level. While some scholars insist that diaspora is strictly about crossing international borders, we must consider the diasporic experiences that occur without such border crossings.



Whether the migration is temporary or permanent, and whether it occurs within national borders or crosses international boundaries, diaspora emerges when individuals transition from one familiar socio-cultural environment to another markedly different one. For instance, consider the experiences of a Kashmiri or Manipuri individual who migrated and living in Delhi, Lucknow, Idukki, or Thirunelveli, or that of a Malayali or TAMILIAN in Kashmir, Manipur, Maharashtra, or Bihar. These individuals may feel nostalgic, and uprooted, yet maintain strong connections with their families and communities, including preserving their culture, food, dress, etc. They often establish support networks like the Kerala Samaj, Odia Samaj, Telugu Samaj, Marathi Samaj, Gujarati Samaj, and others within Indian states when they migrate elsewhere within the country. On the contrary, when someone from the UAE relocates to Oman, Qatar, or Saudi Arabia, they may not experience the same sense of uprootedness or encounter significantly different sociocultural settings, despite crossing international borders. A Qatari, for instance, migrating to the UAE or Saudi Arabia, often finds similarities in religion, food, language, culture, ethnicity, and race, minimizing the impact of migration on their identity because of similar socio-cultural settings. Their cultural elements remain same, and they are not at risk of cultural dis-rootedness or extinction due to migration. Consequently, they may not experience diasporic sentiments even after crossing international borders. Therefore, it is argued that merely crossing an international border doesn't constitute a diaspora and even crossing a national border in countries like India one feels diasporic.

## Method

In this qualitative literary research paper, we tried to conceptualize the idea of the Urdu Diaspora in the transnational context of Canada. We applied literary critical analysis method and interview method (with writer) to analysed the Urdu storytelling tradition of *Dastangoi* through Jawaid Danish's plays to narrate the experiences of being diasporic in Canada. Thanks to Jawai Sahab for sharing his play and views with us which worked as a primary data for our analysis. We also take the help of some of the existing literature and reports related to this research as secondary data. The thematically we have closely examined the theme of identity, migration, diasporic sensibilities, language and the select plays. His plays are unique not just for applying this century old narrative storytelling technique but also rejuvenating this dying tradition of traditional storytelling in diaspora. We tried to apply theoretical approaches from diaspora studies, migration, postcolonial and transnational cultural identity in this study. Both literary and the content analysis of language, motif, symbolism, and themes strengthen the argument of this study.

## Results and Discussions

### Urdu Diaspora in Canada

Urdu Language is "member of the Indo-Aryan group within the Indo-European family of languages. Urdu is spoken as a first language by nearly 70 million people and as a second language by more than 100 million people, predominantly in Pakistan and India. It is the official state language of Pakistan and is also officially recognized, or 'scheduled', in the



constitution of India. Significant speech communities exist in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States as well. Notably, Urdu and Hindi are mutually intelligible” (Britannica). Urdu speaking community itself is a transnational because of its presence in more than one country (India and Pakistan) and now because of diaspora it has stretched its presence beyond South Asia.

Urdu Diaspora which can be described as the post-migration socio-cultural formation or re-organization of the Urdu-speaking community in non-Urdu speaking trans/national spaces – which has mostly migrated from the Urdu-speaking regions in India and Pakistan to various global destinations such as Europe, America, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, African countries, and Gulf nations, etc.

Given that Jawaid Danish's plays *Hijarat Ke Tamashey* are set in Canada, this qualitative research paper aims to frame our study within the context of Urdu in Canada or the Urdu Diaspora in Canada. As we've discussed previously, diaspora can be understood not only in terms of geographic displacement but also in terms of language, linguistic communities, or regional communities. This is evident in various Indian linguistic and regional diasporas, such as the Kashmiri, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, and Malayali communities, among others. The Urdu diaspora holds strong community sentiments in transnational spaces. Individuals migrating from Urdu-speaking regions in India and Pakistan to various countries maintain a robust linguistic identity, preserving Urdu not just as a language but also as a cultural marker, a sense of identity, and a distinct taste. Urdu serves as a home for this community, anchoring their sense of belonging and heritage in diasporic settings. Moreover, these are not just Muslims but also non-Muslims like Hindus and Sikhs, Buddhist from South Asia. Now it is different fact that Urdu is also being taught and studied in other countries like Turkey, Egypt, USA, UK, Canada, Australia etc. out of academic, cultural, geopolitical and of course diasporic factor. The learners and speakers – other than non-Urdu diasporic background – posed epistemological question for scholars like us, in terms of categorizing them as Urdu speakers or Urdu diaspora. For time being they would be Urdu speaker or learners, but what will they be called as when they migrate from their country to another country? We need another paper for such scholarly discussion and further explorations.

M.H.K Qureshi (1990) in his essay “Urdu in Canada” writes,

Most Urdu-speaking people in Canada come from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent; they began coming here in the early 1960s. This emigration was a flight of young, educated, and ambitious people from the harsh, unsettled socio-political atmosphere and worsening economic conditions that were prevalent during the early 1950s. Those were hard times. Unemployment was widespread, and it was very difficult to attain a good and prosperous life. Consequently, almost everyone wanted to go to the "West," the land of opportunities. With optimism and surging enthusiasm, these people made their way to Canada and the United States, where they found a free society and abundant economic opportunities. (n.p.).

M.H.K. Qureshi provides one of the earliest organizational attempts to reunite and foster Urdu in Canada. He observes,



In the late 1970s, some like-minded people gathered to form the Urdu Society of Canada in order to promote the literary, cultural, and secular aspirations of Urdu-speaking people. The society was duly incorporated and registered with the Province of Ontario. For a small fee, membership was available to anyone interested in Urdu. Regular monthly meetings were held at different locations. In these meetings, literary articles, poetry, and other papers were read and these readings were followed by lively discussions. Gradually, as the audience became mature, serious scholarly papers were also presented. Very soon this society became well known all over the Urdu world. With concerted efforts, the First Canadian Conference on Urdu was organized in 1982. The theme of the conference was "modern Urdu poetry." Scholars, poets, and writers came from all over the world to participate. The three-day conference culminated in a "mushaira," a poetry-reading session, in which the most famous Urdu poets of the contemporary world read their poetry. The entire Urdu community thronged to listen to them. They were magical moments charged with electrifying joy. It was difficult to believe that it was happening in Canada". (n.p.)

It was in 1997 that the Canada Urdu Association (CUA) was established in British Columbia, Canada with a similar interest in celebrating, preserving, and promoting the Urdu language. One of the objectives of this organization is to "cultivate harmony, peace, tolerance and understanding in local, national, and international communities by promoting the value of oral and written communication with special importance to native languages. Especially, of course, our beloved Urdu. For encouraging, promoting, and expressing the rich art and culture of the Indo-Pak subcontinent". (n.p.) CUA also engages diverse communities from Islamic, Sikh, and Hindu faiths in its fold.

According to the 2016 Census of Canada, the Urdu-speaking community or Urdu diaspora in Canada is estimated to be around 2,43,090 individuals. This includes people who speak Urdu as their mother tongue and those whose parents are Urdu speakers. Urdu serves as a lingua franca in both Pakistan and Central and North India. However, due to various cultural and linguistic politics and policies, the language is systematically discouraged and is at risk of extinction in India. Following the partition, people from Urdu-speaking regions of India and Pakistan began migrating to Canada in search of job opportunities, education, and other prospects. According to Joshua Project "Urdu-speaking people began living in Canada around 1960. There was much unemployment where they were living. Those with a good education came to Canada. Many Pakistani Canadians live in Ontario. They speak Urdu and English, among other languages. Toronto is the city with the biggest Pakistani community. Vancouver is growing in the number of Urdu speakers as well". (n.p.).

The allure of Western opportunities is undeniably captivating for young people from the Global South, especially those grappling with internal crises, violence, discrimination, economic hardships, unemployment, low wages, and other pressing issues. However, upon reaching these glittering and promising destinations, they often encounter a different set of social, emotional, psychological, and cultural challenges that leave them feeling lonely, nostalgic, homesick, and grappling with identity crises, ultimately leading to a sense of diaspora. Jawaaid Danish sheds light on such *Canadian dreams* through his performances of Dastangoi, which for some, transforms into a *Canadian nightmare*.



### Dastan of Dastangoi

Before we began with diasporic life of South Asian in Canada though Danish's Dastangoi, it is pertinent to know about this art of telling stories. Dastangoi is as an art of storytelling originated in Persia (Iran) in the 13th century before being introduced to India in the 16th century. It encompasses the rich tradition of storytelling, blending elements of drama, music, and oral narration. The term is derived from the Persian word "dastan" meaning "story" and "goi" meaning "teller/narrator," and encapsulates the essence of this captivating practice (Mishra 2021). This art form is an amalgam of formats of storytelling largely including tales drawn from epics, fantasies, etc. to engage audience attention. In the bygone era when digital media was unheard of, Dastangoi was a great source of entertainment and also enlightenment. One of the most captivating aspects and transformative experiences of Dastangoi is its ability to immerse the audience in scenes through words, expressions, actions, sounds, and music, allowing them to imagine and become part of the story. Dastangoi, is a unique way of telling or narrating, which everyone can easily understand as everyone is an actor in his/her own story /dastan of life. "The roots of Dastangoi delve into the realm of ancient epics known as Dastans, which were often orally transmitted tales featuring elements of adventure, magic, and heroism, akin to medieval romances. These narratives traversed new worlds, encountered mystical beings, and delved into profound quests, embodying both the mystic and mundane aspects of human experience. Notably, the story of Amir Hamza, (Dastan-e-Amir E Hamza), an uncle of the Prophet Mohammed, emerged as a prominent narrative within the Dastan tradition, marked by fantastical elements such as fairies, djinns, and prophecies" (Dastangoi.in 2018).

In South Asia, Dastangoi transcends mere entertainment, intertwining with religious, cultural, and moral dimensions. It serves as a medium for conveying profound truths, moral lessons, and historical events, with stories ranging from the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to the allegorical tales of *Hitopdesha* and *Panchtantra* (Dastangoi.in). Furthermore, Dastangoi became a courtly ritual in North India, flourishing particularly during the Mughal era, where it found patronage in the court of Emperor Akbar (Navali 86). Despite its decline in the late 19th century, Dastangoi experienced a resurgence in modern times, spearheaded by Mahmood Farooqui and his team in May 2005 (Navali 86) and Syed Sahil Agha. Farooqui's revival efforts, coupled with performances alongside Danish Husain, who breathed new life into the art form, adapting it to contemporary sensibilities while preserving its essence (Navali 86). Mahmood Farooqui was a leading figure in the revivalism of Dastangoi. Mahmood Farooqui and his 'Dastangoi Collective' led to the revival of Dastangoi in India. (Kharbanda 2021). Farooqui penned "*Dastan-e-Chauboli* and *Dastan-e-Karn Az Mahabharat* and many other plays for the stage" (Kharbanda). Shruti Mishra writes that Farooqui was "a writer, artist, and director performing dastangoi since the early 2000s. He has also written and directed a number of dastan goi performances, including the critically acclaimed 'Siyaah Haasil'". She also notes



Another leading figure in the revival of dastangoi is Danish Husain. Husain is a storyteller and theatre actor performing Dastangoi since the mid-2000s. He is known for his energetic and engaging storytelling style. The revival of dastangoi has been welcomed by critics and audiences alike. Dastangoi performances are now regularly held in major cities all over the world. Dastangoi is also being taught in universities and other educational institutions. Dastangoi is a unique and vital art form that deserves preservation and promotion. It is a way of celebrating the Urdu language and culture” (Mishra 2023).

In India, this art form of story-telling saw its zenith in the 19th century, led by Dastangos Amba Prasad Rasa, Mir Ahmad Ali Rampuri, Muhammad Amir Khan, Syed Husain Jah, and Ghulam Raza. Mir Baqar Ali was another leading practitioner of Dastangoi that received a setback with his death in 1928. However, the art form saw a revival in 2005 thanks to the untiring efforts of the Indian poet and Urdu critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and his nephew, writer, and director Mahmood Farooqui, who played a significant role in the revival of Dastangoi in the 21st century. Shruti Mishra (2023) observes that “Dastangoi was formerly a prominent form of entertainment in India, but it faded in the early twentieth century. This was due to various circumstances, including the growth of new kinds of entertainment, like film and radio, as well as the collapse of Urdu”. She continues that “Dastangoi has seen a resurgence of attention in recent years. This is partly thanks to the work of several current dastango artists, including Mahmood Farooqui, Danish Husain, and Naseeruddin Shah. The traditional dastangoi framework has been altered by these dastangos to tell new and modern stories. Dastangoi has also been performed in several languages, including English and Hindi”. (n.p.).

#### ***Dastan Hijaraton Ki – Hijarat Ke Tamashey***

Jawaaid Danish, an Indo-Canadian Urdu writer, and Aligarh Muslim University alumni, is gaining fame for popularizing Dastangoi, a traditional storytelling form, in transnational contexts, particularly in Canada. There are numerous forms of narrative story telling but Danish aptly and wisely chose this form which suites to express the engaging narratives of immigrants and the diaspora, who have journeyed to distant lands. He not only brought these rare stories of Urdu speaking diaspora into mainstream and academic discissions but also brought a life to this dying art of storytelling i.e. Dastangoi. This form showcases its enduring power to bridge cultures and captivate audiences with enchanting narratives and rich cultural heritage. Danish's efforts have attracted audiences from both the Western and Eastern worlds. Based in Toronto, Canada for over three decades, Jawaaid Danish is not only a renowned theatre personality and poet but also the Founder and Artistic Director of the Rang Manch, an organization that promotes Indian theatre in Canada. He also spearheads the annual Hindustani Drama Festival, showcasing the diverse and vibrant heritage of Indian theatre, with participation from leading theatre personalities from India. Additionally, Danish is a celebrated author with 12 books published in Urdu. Through his Dastangoi he is trying to present the lives of South Asian migrants in Canada. His online shows, available on YouTube channel, “AWARGI with Danish” has more than 200 episodes on various topics.

Jawaaid Danish's literary performance, a collection of five plays *Hijrat Ke Tamashey* (Plays of Migrations) is a collection of five plays including an eponymous *Hijrat Ke*



*Tamashey, Kunwari Bhaley, Bada Shayar Chota Admi, Eid Ka Karb* and *Andhi Mamata*. This paper tries to analyse a play *Hijrat Ke Tamashey* (Plays of Migrations), which delves into the intricate layers of lived experiences, memories, the anguish of displacement of one of the first generation South Asians (Indian and Pakistani) in Canada and their quest for belonging, and the myriad challenges confronted by the Urdu-speaking communities from India and Pakistan as they transition into new socio-cultural environments. Despite the allure of the Canadian dream, the narrative poignantly portrays the inherent hardships entwined with its pursuit.

"*Hijrat Ke Tamashe*"/"Plays of Migration" unfolds against the backdrop of downtown Toronto, with the stage set at the Indo-Pak Community Centre, a bustling hub where the lives and dreams of millions from the South Asian community converge. The drama vividly portrays the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of those embarking on the daunting journey of migration from the Subcontinent to Canada.

The characters in the play are diverse, reflecting the diasporic experiences of a myriad of communities engaged in various professions, age groups, genders, and backgrounds within society. Raheel Akhtar, a devoted social worker at the Asian Community Centre, grapples with the complexities of assimilation and identity as he aids those seeking solace and support in their new homes. This center serves as a beacon of hope and support, shaping the lives and alleviating the distress of South Asians residing in Toronto. Accompanying Raheel is Sister Shanti, his steadfast fellow social worker, whose compassionate presence offers a guiding light to those in need during their journey of adaptation and survival in a foreign land. Mohamed Noman is a ten-year-old student, whose quiet demeanor belies a world of untold stories and unspoken fears. Shahryar is a newly arrived refugee, grappling with the weight of displacement and the longing for a sense of belonging. Dr. Rahim Khan, a Pakistani doctor whose qualifications are unrecognized in Canada, embodies the challenges faced by many skilled migrants striving to rebuild their careers in unfamiliar territories. His wife, Shazia Khan, stands by his side, embodying resilience and fortitude in the face of adversity. Comrade Khizr, a progressive poet, and a modernist writer, lends his voice to the collective narrative of migration, weaving tales of longing, loss, and hope. Professor Sarmadi is a troubled retired philosopher, navigating the existential questions that migration often brings to the forefront.

In the midst of this diverse community, we encounter Shabrati Mian, a tandoorchi in an Indian restaurant, and Abubakar Batliwala, a young man from Bombay finding his footing as a waiter in a foreign land. Their journeys intertwine with Ashraf Ahmed, a Gujarati elderly citizen whose life's journey mirrors the ebb and flow of migration's impact across generations.

The opening scene of the play features a program titled "Self-Help is the Best Help," symbolizing the frequent and essential need for support among migrants abroad. Additionally, a poster bears the word "Welcome," which serves as a poignant symbol of the irony surrounding arrivals in a new land. Rahil Akhtar leads a weekly meeting at the Indo-Pak Community Centre in Toronto, which serves as both a social hub and a psychological healing space. Through shared experiences, the Center functions as a place for those navigating life in a new land without an established social network.



Raheel elucidates the purpose behind establishing the Centre, emphasizing its role in providing socialization and psychological healing for the community members. Raheel says,

The population of the Asian continent is increasing significantly, Consequently, their needs are also increasing. The existence of self-help programs has become necessary so that none of us feel any difficulty in understanding mental complexities and achieving a sense of life's purpose, At the same time, there should be no sense of alienation. Neither I nor Sister Shanti are experts in psychology, However, we are seekers of knowledge in psychology. (22).

Raheel tells those who join the program,

You should not hesitate to connect with us; we are all travelers on the same ship and towards the same destination. (22)

Mohammed Noman, a reserved and timid young boy, attends the meeting with his father. Through this character, Jawaaid Danish explored the experiences of children in the diaspora. Sister Shanti warmly welcomes Noman and tries to introduce him to some of the new guests. Noman often felt lonely and struggled to make eye contact when interacting with others. This behavior stems not only from his inherent shyness but also from cultural teachings that emphasize avoiding direct eye contact with elders as a sign of respect. However, his experience in Canada differs as his teacher interprets this behavior differently. During the meeting, Noman expresses his hesitation at making eye contact, prompting Raheel to suggest that he should communicate this to his teacher. This would help the teacher understand that Noman's lack of eye contact was not a sign of disrespect or avoidance but rather a gesture of respect according to his cultural norms. Here we observe the cultural differences in behavioural patterns between the East and the West. Noman also shares that his mother restricts him from meeting his friends, which adds to his feelings of loneliness. Raheel reassures Noman that this cultural difference is not a significant issue and encourages him to discuss the matter with his teacher. By doing so, the misunderstanding could be resolved. Raheel also promises to speak to Noman's parents to ensure that things will be resolved and that Noman will feel more comfortable in his new environment. Raheel continues his meeting with the immigrants who join the program and remarks,

Migration is not merely about physically moving from one city, country, or region to another; it is an experience where both joy and sorrow are intertwined (22)

Professor Sarmadi interrupts Raheel and recites the following *Sher/an* Urdu couplet:

The fire of longing burns within us, regardless of the distances between cities and countries. What significance do our journeys hold in this ever-changing world? (23).

Raheel is a major character in the dastan who tries to make people understand the reality of life. He explains how the journey of migration is filled with happy and sad moments:



I was conveying that in the journey of migration, one must face not only happiness, comfort, and freedom but also sorrow, dilemmas, and challenges. Some of us become anxious by these challenges, while others continue to churn on the path of traditions. However, those who endure these trials in the furnace of challenges emerge as refined individuals. It is solely based on your self-confidence and adaptability. If your experience is successful, your enlightened personality will help to show direction to your future generations.

As you know, the world is shrinking day by day, and the process of migration continues. Wherever we settle, we strive to make it a city of dreams. (23-24).

Sarmadi (intervenes and reads from a book sadly).

Death's shadows were cast on every face, and black lines were drawn on foreheads. Seeing these people, I felt inquisitive and asked, tell me honestly, are you, not the ones who considered this country as an abode of peace and traveled long distances to settle here? They replied, O man, you've recognized well; we are from the family of the uprooted. I asked. O uprooted. How do you find the abode of peace? They reply. By God, we saw dawn in the oppression done by our own.

I laughed, laughed loudly, continued laughing, and they became more and more puzzled. The news spread throughout the city that a man has landed in the city of regrets, who laughs ....(starts laughing (24)

Raheel explains to Shabrati

Brother Shabrati, this is not a madhouse; we are gathered here to find solutions to psychological dilemmas. The concern is that if these psychological issues are not addressed, they may lead to a bout of madness later. However, everyone present here is mentally sound. Yes, each one of us may be facing some confusion or obstacle in adapting to new environments and cultures. Now, we need to understand why these dilemmas exist and what effective methods we need to adopt to reduce them.

Raheel further elaborates that each person should share their personal story and problems, allowing the group to collectively find solutions and strive towards a happier life. The primary purpose of these meetings was to identify ways to address challenges and improve overall well-being.

Abubakar also shares his regret about his alcoholism, a habit he had picked up after moving to Canada. He expresses deep internal turmoil and a strong desire to break free of this addiction and lead a fulfilling life. He saw himself not as someone who drank wine, but rather as someone consumed by it, and he yearned to overcome this habit. Additionally, he felt nostalgic about Bombay and the qawwali programs at Haji Ali Dargah. Raheel extends his support to individuals like Abubakar, helping them break free from such addictions and move towards a healthier lifestyle.

Most of the dastans narrated express the harsh realities and challenges faced by migrants, especially those lured by promises of a better life but end up in exploitative situations. Shabrati, another narrator of Dastan, expresses his regrets about coming to Canada, and shares his feelings in Meeruti Urdu:



Destiny struck a blow. I was happily making chappatis. I shifted to Bombay scared of the everyday communal violence and riots in Meerut. The charm of Bombay was just hitting, an agent showed me the green pastures of Canada. I gathered all my life savings and my wife's jewelry and came here. The hotel owners (in Canada) turned out to be Jaat; they took my passport and paid me \$500 monthly. I work 12 hours a day like a slave, waiting for the end of the month. I haven't shown my face to my family back home. I am not educated; I ponder and ponder and my heart aches. I have been experiencing something close to palpitations since last month; it feels like one day, the bird of life will fly away, and my family won't even know. (Pause) This wife and innocent child are my life...The hotel people say it's a 5-year contract; there's no question of leaving before that. Now, I can never go back home, never. (27)

The narrative illustrates how migrants' initial hopes for a better life can clash with the harsh realities and exploitative employment practices, leading to isolation, loneliness, and a lack of agency. We often hear about such exploitative immigrant practices in the Gulf countries but Jawaid Danish's play underscores the universality of exploitation through its practice in an immigrant-friendly country like Canada. This highlights the vulnerability and manipulation of migrants and the need for better protection and support in host countries.

Abubakar also misses his family and says, "*Lanat hai kan apun log aayela hai yar.* /What a curse that we have come here, friends" (27). His statement reflects the emotional turmoil experienced by migrants separated from a family facing significant challenges and hardships in their new environment. It also suggests a deep sense of regret and disillusionment with the migrant experience. This sentiment is common among migrants who may feel disconnected, lonely, and overwhelmed by the difficulties they encounter in the host country. It also highlights the complexities of migration, undertaken by individuals for better opportunities but end up grappling with unforeseen struggles and longing for the familiar comfort of home.

Raheel yearns to provide logical and reasonable solutions to the problem. A problem had driven them to seek refuge in Canada. Raheel wants them to resolve the problems they encounter here because back home they had problems too. Kamred Khazar a socialist feels anxious about the life of these immigrants.

This is pure oppression and injustice with these poor people. Life holds no significance in this capitalist system. I say there's a need for a revolution. Here's where the revolution is needed. You all go on strike, I'm with you. (28)

Khazar and Aijaz discuss Marx and his ideology, the fall of the wall of Berlin, and the collapse of Russia. Aijaz adds,

You're a member of this honorable society as well. You're deeply rooted and remain steadfast in your beliefs and ideology. (Pause) While each of us has become an island, is alone, and bears our own cross. But the burden of the past still weighs on our minds. (Explaining) Brother, now open your eyes wide. That morning will not come yet. The revolution won't come now either. Even if Russia is fragmented or Eastern Europe's system has changed, so what? It was the need of time. It doesn't mean the death of our perspective. In my opinion, life itself is a continuous revolution. (Pause) (28)



Shabari has a valid question.

Brother, I can't understand why these people, who appear so capable and talk about great things, are damned fools to have left their homeland. I flounder in the sea of bewilderment. (29).

While looking at the ongoing debates among the participants, Raheel interferes and addresses the migrants,

We haven't gathered here to dwell on the issues of capitalism or imperialism. At least we have a chance to avail the opportunities offered by democracy here. (Pause) Our problem is that our people are caught between two cultures, and it's a reality that migrants are extraordinarily emotional and sensitive. That's why there's a greater risk of these migrants losing their mental imbalance as compared to the natives. However, we have a solution to this issue. If we all engage with empathy and love, share each other's joys and sorrows, and accept the internal and external challenges that hinder our path, then we can progress towards a healthier and more prosperous journey in a much better way. (28)

What makes this play moving is its deep insight and study of the psychological challenges faced by immigrants. The trauma of displacement, the isolation of loneliness, the ache of nostalgia, and the haunting memories of the home they have left behind all contribute to the sketching of a complex psychological landscape. Raheel's insights shed light on the intricacies of immigrant psychology and stress upon the crucial role of unity and social support in navigating these turbulent waters for a healthier and more fulfilling immigrant experience.

Aijaz feels sorry about this discussion and adds:

We often stray from our objectives... but what can be done? The sense of alienation in this system is so intense that life has turned into a continuous metamorphosis, and all 'isms' have become meaningless. Now, the waiting is a continuum, an endless vacuum. The glitter of the high-value dollars may be alluring, but how do we eliminate the void within? (29)

Sarmadi listening to the dastan of these migrants recalls verses of the Surh Attakusur from the holy *Quran*. He looks at the roof and recites, "*Al-Haku Mutakasur Hatta Zartam Al-Maqabir*" [Competition for the increasing the material/worldly wealth has made you blind until you meet your graves] (30). He thinks that in the lust of the dollar, they have come to one of the beautiful but not-so-beautiful parts of their life, as Surah at-Takathur underscores the detrimental effects of contemporary societies' greed, leading people to be discontent with what they have. Their insatiable desire for more blinds them until they are faced with their own mortality, only then realizing the folly of their pursuits.

Jawaid Danish during our interview mentions "These stories are of the first generation of immigrants who brought the baggage of non-mainstream cultural identities, diverse religious beliefs, languages, and traditions. Their first and foremost requirement was re-settlement, bread and butter, and a half-decent living quarter...Some, like me, were struggling here to survive and send money back home to support families left behind. The daily challenges were procurement of Halal meat,



ethnic mirch masala, and residing close to religious institutions. Some ongoing long-term issues were safeguarding one's mother tongue, maintaining self-identity and cultural heritage as they were quickly approaching middle age”

Jawaaid Danish play is ahead of its time. It covers mental health, issues of children, the elderly, the hitherto undocumented apart from those struggling for a better life in a new land. One such theme of how elderly people feel lonely and become victims of mental health is depicted through the characterization of Ashraf who migrates from a small town in Gujarat, India. He is retired and comes to Canada on the invitation of his son who works as an engineer and daughter in law who works in an office. He narrates his dastan of migration:

At first, I felt very good, then my heart started pounding. Son, leaving for work early in the morning, would return late. I am retired, and my wife passed away last year. That's why my son called me here. However, unemployment and loneliness have affected my spirits. I knew no one for miles around. I longed for someone to talk to. A few months passed somehow. Then suddenly, I started experiencing severe headaches. Initially, neither I nor my children paid much attention to it. But gradually, this illness worsened, and when the attack came, vomiting would follow. Eating and drinking would stop. We consulted many doctors; some said it was migraine, while others had different opinions. Finally, someone told my son about this Center. Mr. Raheel's treatment has restored my health. (31)

Ashraf expresses gratitude towards Raheel and his Center for the initiative which serves as a crucial platform for socializing, sharing experiences, and finding relief through the expression of feelings and emotions. Raheel's identification of Ashraf's problem as loneliness is crucial since ventilation and talking are considered to be a part of the healing mechanism in psychology.

His suggestion to join the community Center as a member and take up a small job at a Baby Centre is also profitable as it will be both engaging and lucrative for financial independence. Here Centre also symbolize the socialization and necessity for socialization in diaspora.

Jawaaid Danish's plays have proven to be ahead of their time, with one of the themes addressing the plight of undocumented and refugee migrants in Canada. Today, amidst the current socio-political landscape, the influx of “illegal migrants” into the United States, UK, Canada, Australia, and other European countries has become a central point of heated discussions, elections, and immigrant policies in the West. In the context of the US, the Biden administration faces considerable scrutiny on this front. According to the Migration Policy Institute's 2023 report, the number of unauthorized migrants in the US stands at approximately 11,047,000, with Mexicans comprising 5,313,000 (48%) and Indians 553,000 (7%) of this demographic. There are also numerous news reports about the US deporting illegal Indians to India. Moreover, the Indian-origin presidential candidate Vivel Ramaswamy, who supported Donald Trump, also advocated against both legal and illegal migration.

It is important to understand how these “illegal” migration and fear of “illegal” activities are shaping political debates and policies in the US today, and how stringent visa policies push migrants towards such means, as depicted in texts and movies. Numerous films, such as “La Illegal” by Arturo Ripestine, “The Illegal Immigrants” (1985)



by Mbel Cheung, and recent releases like "Aaja Mexico Challiye" by Rakesh Dhawan (2022), "Hun Ni Murhde Yaar" by Jass Grewal (2018), "The Illegal" by Danish Renzu (2022), and "Dunki" by Rajkumar Hirani (2023), delve into the experiences of illegal migrants from diverse backgrounds.

While some Indian movies capture the aspirations, challenges, and multifaceted narratives surrounding legal and illegal migrations, paying attention to the hardships faced by individuals caught between the allure of the American/Canadian/Australian/European dreams and the nightmarish realities of migration, there is relatively less focus on literature produced in Indian languages. In this Urdu play of Jawaid Danish, Mr. Shahreyar, is one such refugee who lives under the constant fear of deportation because he lacks proper documents. A poetic mind from Faizabad, India, he joins the community center after moving to Canada as a refugee following the Babri Masjid demolition case. However, his expectations of life in Canada as a refugee does not match his experience. Constantly under surveillance by immigration authorities due to a lack of documents and evidence of his refugee status, Shahreyar, like the characters in the movie *Dunki*, lives in constant fear of deportation.

Shahryar also highlights the community divide among the Muslims and Urdu-speaking communities in Canada on the lines of nationality, sects, and standard of Urdu language, etc. He narrates,

When you go to a Pakistani gathering, the Indian community gets upset. Then there are conflicts amongst them as well. Whoever you see, create an assembly and consider themselves saviours of Urdu (pause) my heart neither feels at ease in these gatherings nor in their antics. I neither want to stay here nor can I prepare myself to return. (32)

The play explores traditional gender roles in the diaspora through the narrative of Shazia and Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan, a Pakistani doctor, faces the challenge of his qualifications not being recognized in Canada, which restricts his employment opportunities despite his qualifications. Consequently, while his wife Shazia works as a computer analyst, Rahim Khan remains idle, grappling with societal expectations regarding women's work and his own frustrations. This dynamic adds a nuanced dimension to his struggles within the diaspora.

Rahim Khan narrates his dastan of dilemma,

I came here from Karachi two years ago. I used to be a practicing physician there, but my degree proved to be useless here. I have to retake exams to get permission to practice. Coming here, I realized I'm useless when it comes to work. I don't feel inclined to take up the jobs that are available. My wife is a computer analyst and manages the household. This bothers me even more. It hurts my ego. I don't feel passionate about anything. How can I face going back? I don't know when things will change here. Life seems to be floating in the air. I'm often irritated, and I end up feeling guilty after arguing with my wife for no reason. (34)

Begam Khan (Shazia) displays more maturity as she understands the challenges her family is facing. Furthermore, she bravely questions traditional gender roles in her narrative:



I just want to say that if my husband had focused on his exams instead of dwelling on the past two years of change, he would have obtained his license by now. Anyway, it's not too late.

And secondly, why is the issue of the ego of men so very serious among us? If I'm managing the household, it's not the end of the world. It's just the need of the hour. I'm glad I can handle the responsibility with equanimity; I don't have any complexity. He too should get over his frustrations and focus on our future. (35).

After hearing Shazia, Raheel praises her and tells Rahim Khan, "You are blessed with such a decent and understanding wife. Women here don't have as much patience to endure hardships in Canada. He also tells him that he has seen young doctors come here and not hesitate to work in the restaurants. He advises him to focus on the exam and stop being depressed.

Shabrati listening to the sad dastans of migrants, interrupts and adds,

It's a strange season for Moharram, brother. Karbala, it's Karbala, wherever you look, everyone seems troubled, as if they are mourning someone's death. By Allah's oath, people must be dying here before their time."

Raheel intervenes with a smile, "No, Shabrati, it is not like that. No one dies before their time here, but everyone has to go through trials." No angel from heaven will descend to end our troubles in the blink of an eye. The problem won't be solved with prayers and talismans alone. It's with your courage and our hard work. We can overcome all kinds of trials. (36)

As William Safron rightly points out that one of the characteristics of diaspora is that the diasporic people want to go back to their homeland but they cannot go back. The same is reflected in the argument of Sarmadi who says,

The paths of return are open, but we have burnt our boats. Where will we go back to? At every step, we will encounter deep pitfalls. Friends! learn to face reality; the truth confronts us everywhere, and reality demands our attention in every situation. (370)

They come to Canada to escape problems back home. They now understand that returning will result in encountering a different set of challenges. Raheel advises them to learn to cope with these issues. Following this meeting, everyone appeared optimistic and filled with new hope and enthusiasm to confront and overcome circumstances. The play concludes with the following verse:

*Ham Ajnabi hain yahan par magar watan se kam  
Dhuwan dhuwan sa hai manzar magar watan se kam  
Shanakhata apni ham ye ek roz bhul jayenge  
Hame hai iska yahan dar magar watan se kam (40)*

## Conclusion

Jawaid Danish's insightful work covers the complex aspects of human migration and the grey embedded aspects of the emotional cost of migration in transnational contexts. Through his plays and book '*Hijrat Ke Tamashey*,' he encapsulates the struggle,



nostalgia, and resilience of ordinary individuals caught in the complexities of diasporic life. Unfortunately, these plays are not yet popular among the circles of migration and diaspora studies. One of the reasons could be that they are written in Urdu. Suppose anyone takes up these plays and translates them into English and other languages. We are sure they will open up a new literary world for the readers, especially because of their Urdu and South Asian background. Since this was a literary analysis, we could interview only the author. Our limitation was that we could not reach out to the Urdu-speaking diaspora individuals from Canada. But if anyone is interested, this paper can provide background for his/her further study of the Urdu language, culture, experience of this community, and identity in Diaspora, not just in Canada but also in other global contexts.

Danish's commitment to portraying natural characters and experiences enriches Urdu literature and serves as a guide for newcomers navigating life in a new land. His contributions to the Urdu language and the Dastangoi tradition in Canada and globally reflect a deep connection to cultural roots and a passion for sharing stories that resonate across borders. Danish's work is a testament to the richness and diversity of the South Asian diaspora, particularly the Indian and Pakistani Urdu speakers in Canada, by highlighting the multifaceted narratives that shape diasporic identities.

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