

Sociation and Reghu Nath in Gill's

IMMIGRANT: A STUDY

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World into which one is born is wholly new at the time of birth. It is only through senses that one has the first experience of the world. These sensations facilitate building a view of the world. Communication takes place between the individual and others in the society. The individual's action causes others to act forcing interaction to creep in.

Interaction, the core of social behaviour determines, human behaviour which can be well comprehended if one realizes that the social actions of individuals are always oriented toward other human beings and that it is the interplay between the action of Self (Ego) and the expected or actual reaction of one or many others (Alters) which occupies the centre of the human stage. (Coser 65). Interaction, therefore, involves norms, status positions and reciprocal obligations.

Despite the complex network that underlies various human behaviour in reality, many literary works deal with them. It never escapes the keen observation of creative writers who evince interest in delineating characters and their involvement in the phenomenon of interaction in the world created by them. Stephen Gill, an Indo- Canadian, multi-faceted writer with deep insights and perception is no exception to it. Global Peace and Social Concerns, his areas of interest, are conspicuous in his poems, novels, critical essays and children's stories. Upholding his belief that authors are obliged to improve the world, Gill's oeuvre is focused on contributing something to the society. His works are a sounding board for his social views.

As a social researcher he applies his creative intuition to the condition of man to discover, what Niels Bohr calls, "the relations between the manifold aspects of our experience". (Singh 105)

With his first hand experiences of an immigrant, he brilliantly records a new Canadian's plight in his second novel *Immigrant*, without missing out any detail of reality. Brutal frankness in expression, various prejudices the Canadian society has in store for the new immigrants and a documentation of social value mark *Immigrant*. The novel effortlessly pictures the strife Reghu Nath, the persona and his ilk, face in the new country. Entrapped in a snare of racial discrimination, alienating culture, ethnic discrepancies, demanding professors, incomprehensible women and haunting memories of his motherland, Reghu Nath struggles desperately to interact with other human beings. The interplay between the action of Reghu Nath, the "Self" and the expected or the unexpected actions of many "Others" in Canada is the crux of *Immigrant*. This paper attempts at exploring the phenomenon of "Sociation" that Reghu Nath involves in, in a milieu full of contradictions, Canada.

"Sociation", the term is Kurt Wolff's rendering of Georg Simmel's German term, "Vergesellschaftung". As the literal translation of it, "Societalization" sounds awkward and Albion Small's translation of the word as "Socialization" has a specific meaning in sociology, sociologists most often use the word "sociation".

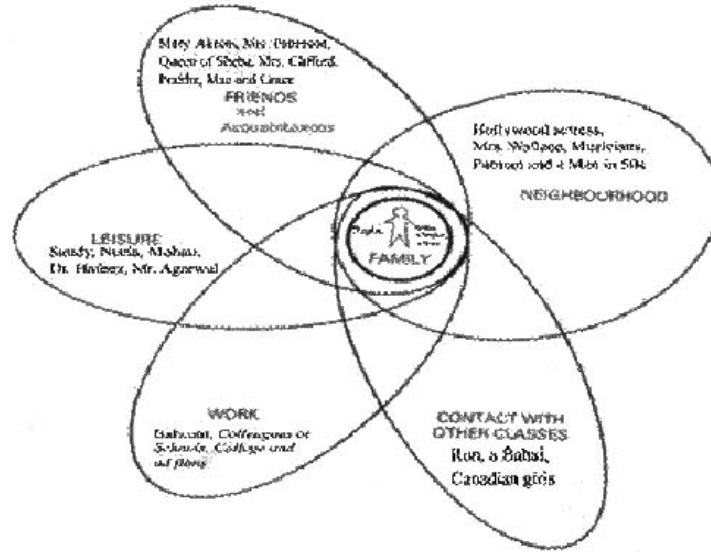
Georg Simmel, a philosopher, a sociologist and a co-founder of the sociological society is acclaimed as the founder of Formal Sociology. According to Simmel, an individual is a member of many specified groups of individuals and activities. A modern society, in his view, comprises of complex web of relations between individuals in constant interaction with one another, a thought that has introduced "Vergesellschaftung" or "Sociation". Sociation is "the particular patterns and forms in which men associate and interact with one another" (Abraham 141).

The process of sociation that Reghu Nath, the protagonist of *Immigrant* engages in as a grown up man at an alien land is noteworthy. His relationships with other individuals, groups and masses is a painstaking effort towards sociation. His patterns of interaction is classified and analysed differentiating between "form" and "content" based on formal sociology. In the novel, "Form" – the basic structural configurations or that element in social life that is stable, is

Reghu Nath's mode of interaction with other individuals. It refers to the "how" of social action in the novel. For Reghu Nath, Canada, the setting of the novel, is a land of greener pastures that he has sought after. Canadian nation with its multiplicity of cultures and its norms shape the behaviour of Reghu Nath. The metropolis of Ottawa and Montreal become the location for Reghu Nath's – the stranger (a social type) – interaction with others.

"Individual drives, purposes and other motive powers constitute the 'content'" (Abraham 142) of Reghu Nath's interaction. He, with the status of an immigrant hunts for a job amid tight economic conditions. He chooses Canada as a home with aspirations for better opportunities and social well-being. Governed by loneliness, fear, apprehensions, nervousness, humiliation, antagonism and difficulty in adapting himself to a new life, he strives forward with the motive of gaining a dignified position in a hostile land.

Meanwhile, he shares his individual beliefs with those around him, who are part of the social world. Reghu Nath places himself in a social scale that depends on his frame of reference (North 51). His frame of reference is his family with mother, a brother and a sister. His friends and acquaintance circle comprises of Mary, Akram, Mrs. Patterson, Queen of Sheba, Mohan, Balwant, Sandy, Prabha, Mrs. Clifford, Dr. Hafeez, Mr. Aggarwal, Ron, a white friend, Mac and Grace. His neighbourhood encompasses Hollywood actress, Mrs. Wallace, Musician, Fatman and the Man in fifties. These people and those who work with him temporarily at schools, college, ad films and the media introduce him to other groups of people. Reghu Nath's frame of reference can be diagrammatically represented as follows.



The frame of reference (North 52)

Reghu Nath's innumerable relationship with different types of people vary from a fleeting encounter with least significance to a relationship with an indelible impact on him. Out of the numerous forms of sociation classified by Simmel only three most important forms – Dyad, triad and superordination - subordination are used as guidelines to study the forms of sociation that Reghu Nath engages in.

Whenever, Reghu Nath interacts with another individual, Dyad, the simplest sociological formation operating between two elements is formed. The dyads in the novel can be analysed as those that are fleeting encounters, those that influence Reghu, those which allow him to express his individual beliefs and those that transform into a triad.

Most of the dyads formed are Reghu's fleeting encounters with other individuals. His encounters with the charming woman in VCIO flight to Montreal, receptionists in the overseas students' reception, officers at the International League Office, Canadian girls, the musician in his neighbourhood at Lorne Avenue, the Fatman and the Man in fifties who prod him to return to his country may be transitory but still they are sociation in themselves. They are prototypes of everyday experiences. Even these ephemeral engagements determine Reghu Nath's behaviour.

Besides these fleeting encounters there is yet another type of dyad in the novel that are quite far-reaching. Reghu's interaction with Akram, Mrs. Patterson, Queen of Sheba, Mrs. Wallace, girls of Indian origin, Dr. Hafeez and Aggarwal, fall under this category. Reghu meets Akram at the University library where both are employed on a part-time basis. It is Akram who exposes Reghu to the various nuances of a students' life in Canada.

Akram's friendship proved to be useful to Reghu. He explained to Reghu about the health insurance plan of Ontario, the social security number, the credit system at the university, the methods of the university examinations, the purpose for term papers, and other things of which a newcomer from the sub continent of India is not aware (17)

However, Reghu finds it hard to cope with the totally new situation.

In yet another dyad formed by Reghu Nath's interaction with a compatriot whom he meets within a few days of his arrival in Canada, he learns that clasping hands and walking hand in hand is a detestable behaviour in the West. "His newfound friend, already tuned into North American mores rejects Nath's gesture with a stern, 'This is not India'" (Westcott 104) After this incident, Reghu observes others and learns a lesson never to forget in his life. It even affects his own frequent habit of shaking hands warmly.

With new experiences Reghu moves further with the hope of establishing himself, when he meets Maple, a divorcee in her thirties, at the International League. She, an administrative secretary at a local college waxes eloquence on her favourite topics – women, marriage and friendship. Her views on these controversial issues have a compelling impact on Reghu. Sporting jeans and craving for smoking and drinking, she presents herself as a by-product of modern civilization that has robbed her of her emotions and natural impulses.

Maple, on the other hand, considered sexual acquiescences obliging and felt the man should be grateful to her. (26)

Maple's behaviour and her controversial views do not appeal Reghu Nath and so he severs his relationship with her. His secession destroys the dyad and a new

one is formed in its stead with Mrs. Patterson, a 55-year old divorcee from England coming closer to him.

Divorced twice, Mrs. Patterson feels very lonely and afraid of death but loves to hear eulogies of her physical and intellectual accomplishments. Having studied her well, Reghu never ceases to praise her. During the course of interaction with her, he discovers a friend, a mother, an aunt, and then a friend in her. By lending money and being helpful she exerts both positive and negative influences on him.

He owed her his knowledge of Canada and its people, its politics, North American expressions, and his improved pronunciation. He was grateful to her for the confidence she built up in him (27)

But, Mrs. Patterson's possessive and demanding nature has a negative impact on him, affecting his studies. The more Reghu tries to break away from her the more he feels very weak to ward off her influence.

The encompassing knowledge of Canada gained from Mrs. Patterson seem to be wanting when he meets Queen of Sheba. The formation of this new dyad helps him to trace the plight of the immigrants. She unlocks many truths about Canada that Reghu has never heard of.

"Canadians will not give me the type of job for which I am qualified"

"Why?"

"Because they are prejudiced and suffer from the worst kind of inferiority complex. Believe me, Canadians will never give responsible positions to blacks easily" . (44)

The interaction, proves quite useful in throwing light on the darker side of Canada that is unknown to him.

His inquisitiveness to meet and interact with Mrs. Wallace, a freelance writer at the age of sixty, leads Reghu into a dyad. Undeterred by the fact that sex interests her more than money, his fascination for writers drives him into a relationship with her. His queries to her on the literary scene in Canada, particularly Montreal and the status of successful writers there, expose him to the

possibility of making a living by writing. Besides that he is jolted when she divulges a hard truth that Canada, a democratic nation, is in fact a Police state. By laying bare the details of how criminals escape and innocent citizens are always caught, Mrs. Wallace exposes him to hard realities. Knowledge of crime, Police, status of writers and a tip about the possibility of working in TV commercials is the highlight of this dyad.

Dyads of different natures are formed when Reghu interacts with Balwant, Neela and Prabha all of Indian origin and with Sandy, a Kenyan girl of Indian descent. Reghu meets Balwant, a tall, slim beautiful Hindu girl from Punjab at Royal Park during the shooting of a TV commercial. "Reghu was certain he would have a good time with Balwant to help him overcome the sharp pangs of life" (69). But, he gets disappointed when she turns out to be one who does not want to prolong friendship rather find a suitable Indian boy who will marry her. Frustrated with this relationship he hunts for a friend who will not be obsessed with marriage and that is when he meets Sandy at a party.

Knowing well that Reghu is an Indian, she tries to demonstrate her identity by speaking in an Indian tongue. To his dismay, within two or three days, she too insists on getting married, forcing Reghu to evade her. Moving away from her he hits at Neela, a nurse from India, at a party again, who is in no way different from Balwant and Sandy. She too nags him to get married. Escaping from all these quags Reghu becomes cognizant of the intentions of the Indian girls in Canada whose prime desire is to get married and be settled in life.

Least interested in entangling himself in a lasting relationship, he bumps against Prabha, a cataloguer at the University Library. Unlike other Indian girls, she is not after marriage. "Reghu and Prabha met occasionally around the University, always talking about the indifference of Ottawans and antagonistic attitudes of some professors" (100). During their interaction with each other, Prabha discloses the discriminatory policy of the staff at the library. The dyad that emerges out of their friendship diminishes into nothing with the mysterious death of Prabha. The death, and the unbelievable account of it in the newspaper, confounds Reghu, traumatising him tremendously. "Reghu could not

sleep the night he heard of Prabha's death. He felt lonely, a foreigner in a foreign land. The walls of his room closed on him" (105).

Despair constrains him to observe the same embitterment in Dr. Hafeez, a scientist from Bangladesh, whom he often meets on the streets of Ottawa. The pitiable and mysterious appearance of Dr. Hafeez lures Reghu into a conversation with him, ultimately a dyad evolves. Reghu gradually ascertains that Dr. Hafeez a combustion engineer from British University, a professor, manages to find himself a position with the department of chemical engineering at Canada. But, his brother's death in a car accident in Bangladesh forges Dr. Hafeez to give up his post. On his return to Canada, after six months, he does not get back the same position. Instead he has to live on unemployment benefit for eight months till he gets just a technical representative's position with an American lubricant company. Reghu is shaken up to know that even the present job of Dr. Hafeez necessitates "good public relations" (110), that he finds difficult in an unfavourable climate. The escalating dejection spurs Dr. Hafeez to return unwillingly to his native land, Bangladesh, though he hates her political climate. Reghu is altogether astounded nevertheless, the dyad shapes his behaviour.

With the knowledge of Canada deduced from the dyads, Reghu finds an opportune moment to share his views of Canada with Mohan, an Indian, a newcomer to Canada. Reghu invites Mohan for a drink and a chat, a fitting occasion for sociation. Reghu's open-minded and matured outlook of an immigrant surfaces out when he shares about Canada, its cultures and the girls. His tips on how to invite Canadian girls and a comparative study of them with their Indian counterparts exhibit his wide range of experiences.

It is hard to bring them to your room and be intimate the first day. It is easier to lead an Indian girl into a compromising situation, though they take sex almost religiously..... (65)

Reghu does not condemn Canadian culture. He tells Mohan that he sees no difference between men and women all over the world. Gill's concerns in universal brotherhood and World Federalism are manifested in this dyad.

Reghu's sociation with Prabha provides him with a chance to share his views on discrimination of some professors and the standard of education in Canada. He also discusses with her the prevailing combat between the members of the primary group comprising of the natives and the members of the secondary group, who are the outsiders.

Reghu's relationship with Aggarwal, yet another dyad, becomes a platform for Reghu to be on par with the other, the experienced immigrant in expressing his views on Canada. Aggarwal's condemnation of Christianity, unemployment, racial prejudices, and the system of education in Canada does not alter Reghu's attitude about the nation. His crude statement that Canadians consider Indians barbarians and non-cultured does not provoke Reghu. He responds in a well-thought-out fashion.

It is unfair to make such a sweeping statement. As far as Christianity is concerned, it preaches love and tolerance. Many people cannot grasp this main message of Christ. For them, pride in so-called nationalism is above everything. They go to Church as a routine. Such persons exist in every nation and religion. You cannot condemn a religion for these bigots. (131)

A very long discourse with Aggarwal on varied topics inclusive of the rootlessness of his son makes Reghu mull over the stifling existence of immigrants and he affirms that hatred, jealousy and discrimination are the upshot of ignorance.

Reghu, then seizes the opportunity to talk with Ron, a white Canadian friend about Canadian Government and its political ties with India. Ron, a Bahai who believes in One World and One Government relates with Reghu, forming a dyad. The dyad paves way for Reghu to boldly give his opinions on the immature decisions taken by the Canadian leaders in terminating the contract with the Government of India in nuclear supplies. During his conversation with Ron, Reghu appears to be the ambassador of India and its nuclear policies. His struggle to paint a true picture of India before Ron showcases his undying spirit of nationalism.

Some dyads refrain from being what they are and get transformed into triads, when a new member is added bringing in a profound structural change. The Dyad of Reghu and Akram changes into a triad when Akram's children are introduced to and interact with Reghu. The day Mrs. Wallace introduces Reghu to a woman, it turns out to be a triad. Began as a dyad, Reghu's interaction with Prabha also grows into a triad when she introduces him to Mrs. Clifford who further brings in Judy and Ken into the triad.

A third element is introduced into the dyad and a triad is formed. The potentiality to exist on its own independent of each of its members makes a triad different from a dyad. The third party can take three basic roles as "(1) non-partisan mediator who seeks to be objective and not favor either side but help them reconcile their differences; (2) 'tertius gaudens' or being the third party who actually enjoys the conflict of the other two parties and seeks to use it for his or her own advantage; (3) divide and rule type of role in which the third party deliberately instigates conflict between the other two parties in order to promote his or her advantage" (Abraham 145).

Reghu and his interaction with Mary, her brother Dick and their parents who see him off at London Airport is the first instance of a triad in the novel. Mary's brother Dick and his parents do not seem to be closely related with Reghu still, they form a momentary group. This triad is just a passing mention in the novel, still the farewell at the airport is suggestive of a bond that binds them into a triad. The roles of the "third elements" in this momentary group cannot easily be identified and so classified into the three basic roles of the third party mentioned. It is obvious that Reghu's separation from the members of the triad does not dissolve the group. It continues in its own way perhaps with newer members in it.

A further reading of the novel confronts the reader with another triad comprising of Reghu, his brother, sister and mother. This group is a permanent group. The sociological function of the third party is not clearly studied because of the lack of relevant details about them as in the previous triad.

Reghu and Akram's sociation is a shift from a dyad to a triad. The "third party" in this triad is Akram's three "pretty little daughters, who call him uncle" (16). However, Akram felt lonely and sympathized with his children who were used to such an isolated life. It is indeed interesting to note how a dyad gradually shapes into a triad. Besides this, Akram's continual reference to Dr. Menard, perchance warrants Reghu's high regard for the professor.

Reghu's association with Prabha leads to the formation of a significant triad in the novel, with the addition of Mrs. Clifford as the third element. This sociological structure helps Reghu know more about motherhood and an old mother's anxiety of being lonely and deserted. The outpours of Mrs. Clifford on modernization and its deadly impact bring to the fore the truth that machines have robbed them off their peace of mind.

We've lost out feelings and sentiments, and have become as cold as our snow. Socially, we're dead.....we no longer have blood in our veins (101)

Towards the end of the novel, Reghu's association with Mac, a businessman from India and his white girl friend Grace, evolves into a triad. Mac is introduced to Reghu by an Indian whose wife worked as a sales girl with Mac's garment shop. Reghu is not comfortable with Mac. Mac's deceitful practices lead Sanjay, Grace, Vachan and Dev Singh into bankruptcy, repelling Reghu from him. Yet, Reghu is forced into a relationship with him in the already formed dyad between Mac and Grace. Reghu, the third element enters functioning as a "non-partisan" in the triad. Mac and Grace the conflicting parties after accusing "one another of infidelity and stealing money" reconcile with each other. The dissent between them is quite transitory. The "non-partisan" Reghu does not favour either of them yet the conflict comes to an end.

"Superordination - Subordination", the third major form of sociation in other words Simmel's sociology of power materializes whenever Reghu, the subordinate associates with his superiors in the society created by Stephen Gill. The Welfare Councillor offers Reghu with a clerk's position at an office. The superordinate, the boss, does not exercise absolute authority or dominate over Reghu nor does he expect implicit obedience from his subordinate. "Domination

of some form is a logical and structural necessity....” (Abraham 145) but when that is not found in its due proportion, the subordinates tend to fool around, make fun of and dodge the work.

Everyone was provided with pencil and papers, which they kept in readiness. Whenever the boss passed, they would scribble something on the paper. Reghu drew, or made circles, and doodled meaningless figures. The third week the employees were filled with doubts and suppositions. One said, “the boss has a lot of work for us, but he doesn’t know how to begin it” (35)

The employees come together as a group and they entertain themselves through games and puzzles. A high range of sociation takes place.

An altogether different kind of superordination is evident in the Principal of a School with whom Reghu associates. It is only after enquiries made at a board in Sherbrooke and two or three calls to the Principal that he reaches the School at Richmond to discover that the Principal looks for a teacher who can speak French. Frustrated Reghu tries hard to explain to him how unjust they are in dismissing him on grounds that he does not know French, eligibility not specified in the advertisement. Besides exhibiting authoritative behaviour, he also labels him with the deficit which the ‘inside group’ actually has.

Later, Reghu encounters yet another Principal of a College who has a striking resemblance to the one he has already met. This Principal hunts only for a Canadian teacher which he openly declares to Reghu on the third day of their meeting. After wasting three days Reghu, the stranger understands his role and position in this new society.

Reghu can be befittingly identified as a stranger, a social type. A gallery of social types - “the stranger”, “the mediator”, “the poor”, the “the adventurer”, “the miser” the man in the middle”, “the modern cynic” and “the renegade” - complements Simmel’s inventory of a social forms. “The social type is a conception abstracted from the structural components of a particular social relationship and involves the essential qualities of the person as well as the awareness and expectation of the status role involved” (Abraham 146).

Reghu, the stranger is the one who comes today and stays tomorrow. He “wanders” from one place to another in search of a suitable job. He tries his skills as a clerk, a teacher and an actor. Towards the end of the novel when Mac offers the position of a Cinema Manager, the readers feel that he will accept it and therefore there are more chances of his continuing his stay in Canada.

Reghu is a stranger as the place of his origin is India, a land of close family ties different from that of his host society, Canada. Reghu strives hard to establish strong bonds of relationships here but all in vain. There is also a marked difference in his independence in moving, the way of behaviour and the individuals of the society that he has entered.

It is to be comprehended that Reghu’s position in this group is determined from the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning. Reghu becomes an element of the host society while not being fully part of it. He is labelled as a member of the outside group.

Having studied intensely the dyadic and triadic forms of Reghu Nath’s sociation, the effects of sheer numerical size on them also needs to be attended to. Throughout the novel, Reghu relates with people either in dyad or a triad, mostly dyad. The relationships comprising of just two, three or a maximum of five members result in influencing each other. Being a small group, Reghu, gets a chance to interact directly with one another. Face to face interaction takes place in most of the relationships, except his few telephonic conversations with Mrs. Wallace, the Principal, and the Secretary of the College. Face to face interaction is replaced by formal arrangements in a school/college where Reghu teaches and an office where he works. Since Reghu’s sociation takes place in smaller groups, it is quite effective and influential.

Simmel’s study of interaction specifically sociation has thus been helpful in analysing the phenomenon of sociation in Reghu Nath. The association of Reghu, “the stranger”, through dyads, triads, superordination – subordination and the effect of the numerical size on the forms of sociation is worth a study as they “result in emergent social phenomena” (Turner 321). The study unearths the fact that sociation occurs not only in the lives of the members of the tangible society

but also in lives of those like Reghu from the intangible society created by the novelist, that holds “the mirror up to nature”.

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This paper is to be included in Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal’s forthcoming book ***Discovering Stephen Gill: A Collection of Papers and Articles***.