

The International Journal of Advanced Research In Multidisciplinary Sciences (IJARMS)

Volume 1 Issue 2, 2018

Issues in the Indian Diasporic Literature

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Abstract

The notion of diaspora generally indicates achievements: creating a home outside the homeland, entrepreneurship, the establishment of local and global networks, new organizations, media and spatial as well as social mobility. Indian Diaspora literature has become a mainstream literature in recent decades. The study of Diaspora is used to refer Indians who live abroad. The migration of people to other countries occurred at the different point of time of their lifetime. Diasporic literature is studied with the generalized notion giving equal importance to different generations of people. This paper brings forth that there is issues in Indian Diasporic Writer. In Indian diasporic writer have a various issues generated by the experience of migrancy and diaspora, such as displacement, alienation, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely portrayed in contemporary Indian Writing in English

Indian diaspora fiction in English must be regarded as a sub-genre of Indian English diaspora literature written by the Indian diaspora writers. The novel of immigrant fiction is its sub-form with its own distinct qualities. It is the literary product of the Indian encounter with the people of their host-land, their involvement in the country of their destination.

In the beginning the term “diaspora” was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to the conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the Empire.

Keywords:

Motherland, Issues, Migration, Nostalgia, Identity of Crisis, Diaspora, adaptation,

INTRODUCTION:

Indian Diaspora's mode of adaptation is marked by a clear preference for economic integration more than for cultural integration. Indian diasporic community has suffered from harassment. e. g. their expulsion from Uganda under Idi Amin. They are also victims of racial discrimination. Bharati Mukherjee had a similar experience in Canada.

The Indian diaspora is unique and diverse in terms of religion, region, caste, language etc. The Indian food is gaining popularity in the world. So the Indian restaurants are located in cosmopolitan cities of the world. It is due to diaspora and a process of Indianization of the world. Similarly the Indian cinema, yoga, Ayurveda, herbal medicines etc. have reached corners of the world. These are the stepping stones of Indianization of the globe.

It is interesting to note that the history of Indian diasporic writing is as old as the diaspora itself. The first Indian writing in English is attributed to Dean Mohamed, who was born in Patna, India. His book 'The Travels of Dean Mahomet' was published in 1794. It predates by about forty years the first English text written by an Indian residing in India.

Literature of old generation of diasporic Indian writers like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhari, Ved Mehta,, mainly look back at India and hardly ever record their experiences away from India as expatriates. Gradually, the old diaspora of indentured laborers is replaced by the new diaspora of International Indian English Writers live in the market driven world. These writers register their away from India experiences and even if they look back at their motherland it is often in a melancholic tone rather than nostalgia.

DIASPORA ISSUES IN INDIAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE:

Various issues generated by the experience of migrancy and diaspora, such as displacement, alienation, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely portrayed in contemporary Indian Writing in English.

The term 'diaspora' was primarily used in association with the scattering and banishment of the Jews from their motherland and their nostalgia for their lost country and the cultural alienation experienced by them in the cultures of new location.

Diasporic writer create 'imaginary homelands' from the fragmentary and partial memories of their homeland. They undergo cultural dilemmas, feel culturally displaced and endangered of their cultural identity at the ridicule of their cultural practices and symbols whose baggage they carry with them and try to maintain it.

They also show resistance to the discourse of power in the adopted culture in various forms. However, the children born to migrants dwell in different spaces in the adopted culture because of their better assimilation and better settlements. Their confusions, feelings of rootlessness, displacement are also less deep and are not of similar nature as in the case of their parents and grandparents.

The creative writers all over the world have depicted these various issues sensitive to diaspora lives and experiences from different angles and perspectives but the space engaged by the Diasporas is so diverse that all the Diasporas cannot be clubbed together. In addition, their concerns and sensibilities differ to a great extent as per their generation, individual perceptions, and their community.

Many Indian diaspora writers writing in English and other languages too have portrayed in their literary works certain community, region and culture-specific conflicts in the new lands of relocation illuminating the multiplicity of Indian culture. But their major concern about diaspora issues have been dislocation, fragmentation, nostalgia for home, marginalization, racial hatred, cultural and gender hatred, conflicts, identity crisis, generation differences, transformation of subjectivities, emergence of new patterns of life with cross-cultural interaction and disintegration of family units of Indian diaspora leading to anguish, traumas and dilemmas suffered by the members of such families in varying degrees and mostly by the children of these unhappy and broken homes. Many of whom are revealed going off track in the cultural lawlessness of the western countries and inclining towards drug addiction, homosexual, and lesbian relationships.

Indian diasporic literature has raised different issues and aspects of immigrants' lives. The fictional narratives like Bharati Mukherjee's 'Jasmine (1990)', Meera Syal's 'Anita and Me (1996)', Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake (2003)', Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 'The Mistress of Spices (1996)' have shown the Indians living in England, America and where they have immigrated either to advance their financial condition or to seek jobs due to unemployment at homelands or for better education of their children or better professional opportunities. Their life of is full of hard work, tensions and anxieties because of various existential problems have also been portrayed in these texts and many immigrants are shown not feeling a sense of belonging and are longing silently for home.

Some of these texts have also brought out the predicament of the illegal immigrants who have to do tedious jobs at lower wages quietly, constantly living under the fear of police and the immigration authorities. Another aspect that surfaces from the novels like Bharati Mukherjee's 'Jasmine' and Chitra Divakaruni's 'The Mistress of Spices' is the violence and sexual exploitation suffered by Indian women both at home and at workplaces for various reasons such as mismatched marriages with NRI men the feudal approach of the Indian husbands towards their wives and the sexual abuse of Indian women by comparatively better placed men of their own communities and even by the priests of temples and gurudwaras. But some of the female characters in these novels are also shown adopting different resistance approaches to emphasize their identities and live life of self-respect and dignity by revolting against the repressive relations and looking for the help of the police and NGO's.

Through this literature, we also witness people of the old generation who feel lonely as everyone in the home is busy from morning till eve. They are also presented feeling confused because of their inability to accept the new cultural ways adopted by their children and grandchildren. Torn between the non-fulfillment of their expectations from their children as per the Indian cultural codes and the loss of their hold on the family units, they pass their time either

in front of the idiot box or in the company of the people of their own generation and from their own communities if available in the neighbourhood.

The presentation of these grave issues related the children of Indian immigrants who are joining the mafia gang, either out of dissatisfaction, to earn money or to oppose and overpower their racial hatred and discrimination faced by them constantly in the discourse of power at every step in the country of whites reveals the deep concern of the Indian diaspora writers for them.

The nation which their parents and grandparents had once left to settle in the other one or the one that they had adopted and which never accepted them from the heart. Furthermore, such reactions of the American youth towards Sikh diaspora and the South Asians also raises few other issues, whether it was done because of their nationalistic feelings and the Sikhs suffered because of the mistaken identities or is it an manifestation of the feeling of resentment and revenge against the diaspora communities who are entering their country in large numbers because of their country's liberal immigration policy and are grabbing their job opportunities in their own country.

Literary works like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*, Chitra Banerjee- Divakaruni's *The Queen of Dreams* have also depicted the issue of intergenerational gap of the Indian Diaspora where the first generation parents expect from their children to live by the value system of Indian culture which they force on them at home through food, dress, customs, rituals, language, beliefs, etc. but the children encountering different cultural surroundings outside, find the latter have fascination, sandwiched between the two cultures and confused like Gogol in *The Namesake* and Meena in *Anita and Me*, who daily hear and bear the racial comments because of their brown skin as they are not able to decide which is their real 'home' India or the country where they have been born and brought up.

Jaywanti Dimiri has analyzed these dilemmas of the second generation diaspora very appropriately as she comments; Expatriate experience is problematic for the second generation immigrants of the third world for specific reasons. Born and brought up on foreign soil expatriation for this neo- class of immigrants hangs the background as an imaginary reality, free from the stigma of nostalgia and the popular symptoms of angst, loneliness existential rootlessness or homelessness, their predicament is in many ways worse than that of their predecessors.

We also find description of the crumbling family units of Indian diaspora because of commercially negotiated marriage, fast growing divorce culture among the Indians, expectations of Indian values by the male Indian immigrants from their green card holder America / Canada born wives, changing power relations in the house and also because of cultural and racial clashes.

However, writers like Chitra Banerjee- Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri have also shown, certain characters making conscious attempts to keep their family units together and adapting themselves to the requirements of the culture and lifestyle of their children.

A few Indian diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* and in her short story *The Last and Final Continent* and Kavita Daswani in her *For Matrimonial Purposes* (2003) have portrayed positive aspects of diaspora experiences which broaden the scope of the perception and bring change in the subjectivities of their characters.

Through their protagonists they have described that cultural interaction not only opens new routes for them connecting to culture of new location and of their homeland but also makes them mobile carriers of cultures and ways of thinking to both the lands and more lands and make a good amalgamation of these, thus creating new third cultures and shaping third history.

1. DISLOCATION:

The theme of dislocation is one of the important thematic concerns of the Diasporic Literature. One can observe this theme in the every phase of the Diasporic Literature. In the early phase as literature depicts the characters, which are dislocated due to the political and social necessities, face the feeling of displacement which leads them towards the cultural alienation and frustration. In the later phase as it is known as colonial period, the feeling of dislocation is aroused due to the empiricism of powerful countries. In this literary enterprise too, the characters face the problem of dislocation which leads them towards the quest of identity and longing for the nation. In the contemporary period, though the reasons are different, the feeling of dislocation still haunts the creative minds. The process of globalization and creolization of ethnic identity leads these characters towards the homelessness and more prominently towards the feeling of alienation. The phenomenon of dislocation can be treated as a break with the old identity which leads the segregation of these people from the host community. It also leads to the racial discrimination and marginalization of the Diasporic beings.

2. ALIENATION

Franz Fanon in his book *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) defines alienation as, “In one sense if I were asked for definition of alienation of myself. I would say that, I am one who waits; I investigate my surroundings, I interpret everything in terms of what I discover, I become sensitive”. Here the sense of investigation and interpretation is important because the migrated people try to interpret the new land and new people in terms of their own experiences. They feel rejected if the host country is not permitting them to amalgamate with their natives. Sometimes the environment does not permit to adjust with the situation. It is not only a kind of estrangement from society but also from one's own self, the homeland, and relatives. This suffering of alienation is explored in the novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) by Bharati Mukherjee. Here the main characters like Tara and Dimple are expatriates, geographically as well as psychologically. They are not comfortable at home as well as in the foreign land. These characters not only show their

migrated feelings but the feeling of alienation and isolation is very significant in the novel.

3. ROOTLESSNESS

Rootlessness is related terms as displacement gives birth to rootlessness. Mohan Biswas in 'A House for Mr. Biswas' is displaced again and again exclusively as well as inclusively. He has inherited displacement by taking birth to the parents who are indentured laborers. There are a large number of characters in the novel who have been separated from their roots and pass through the experience of displacement. The people who migrate to other countries for any reason feel the nostalgia for their homeland left behind and a feeling of fear on the strange land that gives birth to the feeling of homelessness. V. S. Naipaul understands how insignificant an individual is when he is without roots. In his A House for Mr. Biswas, one man attempts to overcome the wasteland of Trinidad's East Indian community.

4. CRISIS IN IDENTITY

The crisis of identity has always enjoyed a defining significance in the thematic framework of the Indian- Anglican novels. The novels of R. K. Narayan, Mulkraj Anand and Raja Rao redesigned the techno-thematic fabric of Indian English fiction and laid the foundation of the new Indian English fiction. The post-colonial age represented by these three novelists was chiefly a quest for identity along different dimensions of socio-political and economic order of India. The novels of Mulkraj Anand explored the thick congested fabric of Indian life and structured his fiction with unquestionable authority. The crisis of identity plays vital role in the cast of the narrative of Anand. His novels like 'The Untouchables' and 'The Coolie' explore the hidden dimensions of human psyche along socio-economic and cultural dimensions.

5. NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is a consequential effect of the homelessness in the new land, as well s loss of home in the motherland. A number of Diasporic writers have incorporated and accentuated the theme of Nostalgia in their writing which occurred because of their exile which is always prevailing and recapitulation in their mindset. The Nostalgia takes different forms which are, 'Home', 'Poetics of Return', 'Dislocation', 'Re-location', 'Memo-realization'. Nostalgia reveals the process of analysis and looking backward at the past. The exile idealizes the past and the old homeland. Hanif Kureishi in his essay 'The Rainbow Sing' memorizes his native Pakistan as: While elaborating the concept of Nostalgia he comments that it is a speculation and play of imagination. The memory and past experiences play vital role in this process.

CONCLUSION:

In my paper, I have tried to discuss about various issues generated by the experience of migrancy and diaspora, such as displacement, alienation, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely portrayed in contemporary Indian Writing in English.

Indian Diaspora literature has become a mainstream literature in recent decades. The study of Diaspora is used to refer Indians who live abroad. The migration of people to other countries occurred at the different point of time of their lifetime.

All contemporaries, they belong to different age group and diverse background. Irrespective of their backgrounds, the themes of home, nation, diasporic home, and the associated issues become central to their works. The diasporic issues of alienation, racist bias women's double marginalisation in the diasporic space, identity crisis of women have prominently figured in her fiction.

Besides it throws light on most of the aspects of diasporic life and issues. The clashes between east west, parents and children, identity issues like double identity, alienation of elder generation men and women are the major themes of their fiction which throw light on major living experiences of diaspora. Thus each of these writers offers their own stand on the issues and problems faced by diasporic living.

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