



# Manifestation of Diasporic Sensibilities and Acculturation in the Film *Lion*

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**ABSTRACT**--Diaspora, a prominent topic in postcolonial studies, deals extensively with migration, displacement, and their effects. The concept of home is at the heart of every diasporic sentiment. Even though immigrants get assimilated into the life of the host country, they retain memories of their homeland that were left behind. This creates a sense of being caught in the in-between space and identity crisis. The contradiction between rootedness and uprootedness occurs. Thus, diaspora is related to the concepts of home, nostalgia, identity, space, migration, cross-culturalism, and transnationalism. This paper attempts to analyse the central character Saroo's diasporic experiences in the film *Lion*. Mostly concerned with his acculturation to a new nation and his identity crisis as a result of immigration. Saroo's assimilation to the new country was relatively easy, but his recollection of memories of home and family caused him to have an identity crisis. In the film, frequent flashbacks of home in India are contrasted to his current life in Australia, which depicts the emotional trauma Saroo was going through. But he eventually overcame his identity crisis through integration into both cultures.

**KEYWORDS**--Diaspora, migration, assimilation, memories, home, identity crisis, acculturation, integration

## INTRODUCTION

Migration is inherent in the very nature of human existence. Human beings have been travelling from one area to another from the beginning of time for a variety of reasons. Every country's human history contains countless accounts of individuals migrating from one part to another. In one way, migration refers to relocating from one location to another for residential purposes. Migration can occur both within and outside of the country. When a person migrates outside the political boundaries of a country for an extended length of time and chooses to reside in the host nation. Then it eventually becomes diaspora. The word "Diaspora" has been derived from Greek origin, which means dispersion or scattering. The displacement of an individual, community, or group of people from their original homeland to an alien territory is referred to as a diaspora.

It also denotes a cultural shift from pure roots to mixed customs in the adopted land. People migrate from their home country to the host country for one reason or another. As a result of this movement, immigrants are unable to maintain their cultural identity forcing them to endure the feeling of alienation, longing and nostalgia. When they cross the threshold into a hybrid situation, they either embrace cross-culturalism or are subjected to the continuous experience of trauma. People who are thrust into unfamiliar environments and cultural settings attempt to balance two cultures. That is one which they possess and the other the new one. The diasporic culture is essentially a mixture and a fusion of the two cultures. These immigrant experiences are mainly reflected in diasporic literature. In the contemporary period, the complexities of the immigrant experience are widely portrayed through films as well. Alienation, displacement, rootlessness, nostalgia and the quest for identities are important themes of diasporic studies. These aspects are reflected in both forced and voluntary migration.

The present paper is an attempt to examine the diasporic experiences that the main character Saroo goes through as part of his immigration to Australia in the film. Furthermore, the study examines Saroo's acculturation to Australia as well as the character's struggle to overcome his identity dilemma. *Lion* is a biographical film from Australia that was released in 2016. Garth Davis directed the film. The film is based on Saroo Brierley's nonfiction book *A Long Way Home*. The narrative follows a five-year-old Indian child who becomes disoriented on a train that takes him thousands of kilometres away from his home and family. Saroo reaches Calcutta where he undergoes harsh experiences. However, he was later adopted by an Australian couple and relocated to Australia. After twenty-five years, Saroo is flooded by the memories of his homeland while residing in Australia. He uses Google Earth to find his biological family in India. The main distinguishing features of the diaspora can be traced in this particular film through the protagonist Saroo. Saroo reflects on the dilemma of immigration, the recollection of home including the memories of childhood and past events, feeling of alienation, identity crisis, clash of two cultures, search for identity and rootlessness.

Australia is widely regarded as the "land of opportunity." Australia overtly welcomes immigrants from numerous countries with no discrimination or prejudice. The adoption of children to Australia provides a normal life and stability. Saroo as a kid was able to acculturate easily to Australian culture comfortably with the help of his adoptive parents. In a way, assimilation occurred as part of displacement and leaving behind the memories of his homeland. Saroo was showered with love and care by his Australian parents Sue and John. Once he turned into an adult, his home and family memories are evoked. 'Jalebis' acts as an important symbol that evokes his memories of home and family. A sense of loss comes into his mind. Saroo was caught up in an in-between space. These memories create trauma in his mind which he finds difficult to overcome. Memories created a constant urge for him to go back to his roots and meet his biological family. This aspect is made evident when he uses the new technology called Google Earth to find his true identity which was lost as a child.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Film *Lion* has been subjected to analysis by a few. *Analysis of Lion as an Adapted Biopic of "A Long Way Home"* by M Asif Ikram Anjum analyses the film *Lion* as an adaptation of the book *A Long Way Home*. Another research, *Love and Belonging Needs Analysis of Saroo as The Main Character in Lion Film* by Muhamad Wildan Musthofa depicts the main character Saroo's efforts to fulfil his love and belonging needs as interpreted via Abraham Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs. So, in the film *Lion*, no study is conducted to show the character Saroo's diasporic experience and acculturation as part of immigration.

## OBJECTIVES

This study endeavours to address the protagonist Saroo's Diasporic experiences and acculturation as part of immigration in the film. Mainly focusing on his assimilation to the new land, then subsequently on how traditional cuisine serves as a vital symbol in conjuring memories of homeland, which finally leads to Saroo's identity issue. Later, the struggle he undertakes to find his lost family. The paper also tries to understand the way Saroo overcomes his identity crisis through integration.

## HYPOTHESIS

The present research paper uses the qualitative approach to reveal the findings. Every diasporic feeling is rooted in the sense of home. The love, care, and acceptance that one receives in the hostland make it easy to adapt. At the same time, immigrants are motivated to return to their roots as a result of their recollections of a lost homeland. As a result, individuals experience emotions of indecision, identity crisis, and so on. Saroo experiences similar emotions in this film. The parallel images of both countries represent Saroo's emotional agony. Saroo's attempt to discover his actual identity is an important aspect of the film. Saroo overcomes his identity crisis by embracing both his Indian and Australian heritage by integration.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This film is analysed using the diasporic theory. Diaspora studies primarily depict immigrants' attachment to their homelands and their experiences in the host country. Along with that, Berry's acculturation model is used to analyse the film.

Himadri Lahiri in the book *Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism* says diaspora is a social formation that exists outside the country of origin. It is a phenomenon that involves the uprooting, whether forced or voluntarily, of a large number of individuals from their homeland and their re-rooting in the host country. Diasporic individuals typically portray intense nostalgia for their homeland and its cultures. But they also tend to acculturate or assimilate to the prevailing culture of the new location, whether consciously or subconsciously.

Acculturation is seen as an important aspect of immigration. Acculturation is the process of adapting to a different culture, usually, one that is hegemonic. The requirement for acculturation arises from the contact between the homeland's culture and the host land's culture. According to psychologist John W. Berry,

acculturation is the psychological and cultural change that occurs in migrants when they live and interact with the host society. Assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization are the four basic strategies of acculturation proposed by Berry. These basic strategies developed from the intersection of maintaining native culture and adopting host culture. Assimilation happens when individuals adopt the cultures of the hostland over their native culture. Separation happens when individuals maintain the culture of their native land and rejects the host culture. Integration happens when individuals are interested in adopting the cultural norms of the dominant culture while retaining their native culture. Integration is often a synonym for biculturalism. The last strategy is marginalization, which occurs when individuals reject their host culture as well as native culture. Assimilation and integration are reflected in two different stages of Saroo's life as part of immigration from India to Australia. Moreover, integration has a more positive effect on immigrant adaptation.

As a result of this displacement, Saroo lands in traumatic situations as he is haunted by the memories of his homeland while residing in Australia. The concepts are explained from the diasporic context. Mainly to understand the feelings the character Saroo has undergone after immigration. The movie uses various parallelisms and symbols to explain his inner feelings. The displacement of individuals from their homelands and immigration to different world regions has cultural as well as social implications, for the immigrants themselves and the host societies in which they arrive. When the memories of his homeland appeared after twenty years, he was caught between two worlds. The movie depicts his struggle to reconcile his past in India and his present in Australia. Finally, by optimistically accepting both identities, Saroo overcame the identity crisis.

## ANALYSIS

*Lion* is a film that tells the narrative of Saroo, a young Indian boy, who becomes disoriented on a train that takes him thousands of kilometres away from his home and family. Saroo arrives in Calcutta after two days on the train. He is eventually placed in an orphanage and later adopted by an Australian couple named John Brierley and Sue Brierley. Twenty-five years later, armed with a few recollections, Saroo's unrelenting desire, and a technology known as Google Earth, he sets out to find his family and, eventually, returns to his first home. Acculturation into the host country, the sense of being in-between places, and the desire for one's homeland are all important aspects of diasporic studies. These features are depicted at various periods of Saroo's life as a result of his immigration to Australia.

Saroo as a child gets easily adapted to the lifestyle of Australia. Saroo acculturation into the host land happens. Acculturation is necessitated as a result of contact between two cultures. Immigrants eventually get to understand the dynamics of the alien land's social and cultural milieu as the result of this process of encounter. Mrs Sood, a social worker shows Saroo images of the Australian couple who will adopt him. She also shows him pictures of their house in Australia before he moves there. Furthermore, there is a scene in the film where Saroo and other adoptive children are taught English, with a concentration on the objects they may face at the dinner table. They enthusiastically learn vocabulary like fork, spoon, and knife. Even terms like salt, pepper, and so on. All of these contributed to Saroo's sense of normalcy while being adopted. The

adoption of children to Australia provides them with a normal life and stability. It also allows them to get misplaced love and care. Furthermore, assist them in becoming successful persons. Assimilation occurs when individuals adopt the cultural norms of the host or dominant culture over their own. Once Saroo reaches Australia, he quickly assimilates into the dominant culture with the help of his adoptive parents. Saroo's native tongue, Hindi, is finally supplanted by English. It becomes clearer when Saroo, as an adult, speaks English proficiently and has an Australian accent. Each person has a distinct experience while immigrating to the host country. Some may readily assimilate into the culture of their new home, while for others, migration can be traumatic. Sue and John adopted another Indian boy, named Mantosh, who struggled to fit in in a new country. Furthermore, he was prone to rages and self-harm. So, the film depicts a dichotomy between the characters Saroo and Mantosh. Whereas Saroo easily assimilated into the new land, Mantosh struggled to do so.

A house is not simply a physical structure or a collection of concrete goods in which people dwell, but it is also more than that. It's something to do with memories, privacy, and security that no man can find anywhere on the earth. Home gives a man a sense of attachment and belonging. One's home is lost when one migrates to another country. The concept of home is intrinsic to the understanding of diaspora. Furthermore, in diaspora studies, the concept of home is a question of identity and belonging. Even if there is love and prosperity received in the hostland one may always dream of returning to the place of origin. Saroo's nostalgia for his lost homeland is reflected in the film repeatedly through parallel scenes. This creates the diasporic identity of in-betweenness in Saroo's character. The second half of the movie centralizes the idea of self-discovery and identity. It was the time when Saroo had turned into an adult. Twenty years later, Saroo moves to Melbourne to pursue a degree in hotel management as a young man. When Saroo gets to college, he began to realise the complexities of his ethnic and national identities. Saroo even though got assimilated easily to Australian culture, something so precious as his heritage cannot be neglected for his whole life. This is the main reason why Saroo was questioned at university about his background, he claims he is not Indian since he was adopted. During his meal with his Indian friends in Australia, Saroo comes across jalebis. A delicacy that he remembers from his childhood. Jalebi acts as an important symbol in the film. It's a deep-fried dessert popular in India. It is first depicted at the beginning of the film when young Saroo visits a busy market with his brother Guddu in his village. Saroo was enthralled by them and asked Guddu to get him some, one day. But after a long year when he sees this delicacy at the party hosted by one of his Indian friends in Australia, it evoked a different feeling and emotion. Its smell and taste take Saroo back to his roots. Saroo had a difficult experience. His mind was flooded with recollections from his childhood in India. Because he was too busy assimilating into the society in which he was adopted, these memories got suppressed somewhere. A sense of loss is created in his mind. Saroo reveals to his Indian friends and his girlfriend Lucy that he is not from Calcutta but rather he was lost, a pivotal realisation for him. Jalebis act as an important symbol to bring back Saroo's memories of childhood with his biological family in India. So, this film in one way is about searching for himself in the host land. The memories of the homeland are evoked through food. He remembers his biological mother, brother Guddu and his sister Shekila. Saroo is triggered by the underlying question of where did he come from. He even sees a cultural contrast between his childhood in India and his present life in Australia. Even though Saroo was enriched with his homeland's memory, he had no idea about the place.

He only knows that the place was known as Ganestalay. But he wasn't sure whether such a place existed or not. His friends suggest to him the programme called Google Earth through which he can find his home. While he was with Lucy, Saroo again goes back to his memories. He has a flashback of sharing a mango with his biological mother in India. He was disturbed by this memory. Saroo begins to recall more and more memories of his early life after opening a portal to his past. In Tasmania, when Saroo was with his girlfriend Lucy sitting in a rocky area of nature as he looked out to the rocky hills sees an imaginary boy standing on the rock in the distance. The imaginary boy resembles his biological brother Guddu. Saroo in flashes sees Guddu calling for him in the train station. These memories come to him in flashes almost as though they are haunting him. As an immigrant Saroo undergoes a traumatic experience. Moreover, he is depicted as an isolated and alienated character in the host land. As a result, he isolates himself from his adopted parents, Mantosh and Lucy. Saroo was caught in an emotional strain as part of displacement from his homeland for the first time. This has left a hole in his sense of self. Saroo's devotion to his adopted parents is also depicted in the film, particularly the close motherly attachment he has built with Sue. But he couldn't tell them about his search since he was afraid of hurting them.

Saroo's desire to return home gets intensified as he uses Google Earth to find his family. He became more active in his search for his family. He hung maps on the wall of his apartment to trace his migration through India. He is continuously entangled in the memories of his homeland. In hallucination, he even hears his birth mother calling his name. When he stands on the seashore in Australia, immediately a flashback of his mother searching for him on the riverbank in his hometown is shown parallelly. Saroo's emotional recollections include working with his biological mother in the hills behind their village. He had visions of his mother on the seashore. Saroo's affection for his mother becomes stronger as he searches on Google Earth for information about his home. These continuous shots of flashbacks are used in the film to depict what the protagonist feels inside. The film depicts his journey into the past by splicing together footage of him in the present with images of India's past. On one hand, Saroo is shown walking on the bridge in Melbourne, on the other hand, he is shown as a child in his hometown. So, the streets from both countries meld into each other which reflects his search for identity, his mental state and his in-between culture. Here Saroo is caught in a liminal space. As he digs deeper and deeper into the search for his hometown, he begins to isolate himself from the present life. In a way, he is caught up between two different worlds unsure of which to embrace fully. Saroo's identity crisis began when he started his search for his home using Google Earth. The identity crisis is highlighted through the use of many flashbacks. Events of his childhood in India are shown parallel to his present life in Australia. In a way, the film uses Saroo's memory to depict the Indian landscape, and the Australian landscape is shown through his present life. The parallel dimensions emphasise one's identity suspended between his past and present. All these aspects are presented to bring out Saroo's psychological experiences as part of displacement throughout the film.

Saroo pays a visit to his adoptive mother Sue, whose health is deteriorating amid his identity crisis. Saroo apologizes to his adoptive mother because he and Mantosh were so tough to their adoptive parents. He even tells her that he feels sad because she and John are not able to have their own children. Furthermore, he

even tells her that they were not just adopting them but also their pasts as well. Sue, on the other hand, informs Saroo that she was able to bear children but choose not to have children. According to Sue and John, there are enough children in the world. They choose adoption because they want to give a good life to the children who are suffering. Saroo's perception of his adoptive mother changes as he learns that he was not an alternative, but a choice, which strengthens their bond. Saroo after knowing more about his adoptive mother's point of view on life. He learns he must communicate openly with individuals surrounding him even if it is hard. Saroo's emotional catharsis is symbolised by a moment in the film in which he is sitting in the car after conversing with Sue while the rain pounds on the windshield. Saroo also pays a visit to Mantosh's residence and says sorry for what he had said to him. Saroo was still puzzled and despairing, and he tore away the maps that were on the wall of his room. Saroo had spent a long time searching for his home town in vain, and he was prepared to give up when it appeared that he had checked all probable regions he may have come from. Saroo restarts his search using Google Earth. At this time, he was randomly moving the cursor over the map of India displayed on the screen. The manner he searches parallelly reflects how he was attempting to put together his prior recollections in order to form a whole visual image of his childhood in India. During his search, Saroo comes across a small village which seems familiar to him and it triggers his memory. Saroo recalls a scene from the beginning of the film in which he was encircled by a swarm of butterflies. Saroo was able to track his memories back to his homeland as a result of this. He discovers the village's name, Ganesh Talai. Saroo used to mispronounce it as Ganestalay. Saroo sobs and he was overwhelmed with happiness on discovering his place of origin. In Saroo's discovery of his origins, the film demonstrates that memory is so geographically linked to space and relationships. When he uses Google Earth to find out his biological family in India. The film parallelly depicts the flashback scenes to represent Saroo's childhood memories. These recollections appear to align on the map's surface. Especially images of Saroo as a young child walking through the streets of his village and returning home. His recollections take on topographical qualities, connected to the location where he had particular experiences. It appears to be some kind of miracle as he was joining up bits of scattered childhood memories. Butterflies act as a significant motif in the film. At the beginning of the film, Saroo as a child was depicted standing in the centre of a swarm of yellow butterflies. Saroo was able to recall this particular scene as an adult which aided him to locate his homeland. So, the butterflies have some significance in portraying Saroo's identity and memory in the film. Furthermore, butterflies are symbolic of transition, and so signify Saroo's transformation as well as the struggles he underwent in discovering his original identity. Saroo tells his adoptive mother Sue about his journey and informs her that he has located his home in India. Sue expresses her hope to Saroo by stating that his biological mother will be in India and he will be able to find her. Saroo's adoptive parents, Sue and John, wholeheartedly support his endeavours. So, Saroo's profound relationship with his adoptive parents is demonstrated here, and his reconnection to his Australian identity. Saroo heads towards Ganesh Talai his, hometown in the hope of finding his biological mother Kamala, brother Guddu and his sister Shekila. He reunites with his mother and sister after twenty-five years. This reunion appears as one of the most powerful scenes in the film. Saroo was finally back in his homeland, which depicts his reconnection to his Indian identity. Saroo's trip to India was bittersweet because he learned that Guddu was no longer alive from his mother.

The central character blends into both cultures towards the end of the film. Saroo was able to find harmony in both his Indian and Australian identities through his strong bond with his two mothers. Saroo was able to overcome his identity dilemma which was formed as part of his displacement.

## CONCLUSION

Diaspora studies typically reflect immigrants' attachment to their homelands and their experiences in the host country. It is human instinct to link, to retain one's past life and home interconnected with one's new home. Diasporic subjects are defined by their feelings of estrangement, dislocation, displacement, and so on. Individuals are not only subjected to diasporic factors but they are also caught between devotion to home and hostility to hostland. Saroo was able to readily integrate into Australian society after being adopted. Food and culture are vital components of diaspora. Food serves as a crucial medium in the film for triggering memories of his home after a long time. Saroo suffers from an identity dilemma and is isolated as a result of this. He in a way upholds a diasporic identity and is caught in an in-between space. With the help of Google Earth and his fragmented memories, he was able to reconcile with his biological family in India. The film demonstrates how essential it is for him to reunite with his biological family, much as he is with his adoptive parents. Saroo overcame his identity dilemma by establishing a sense of belonging to both cultures.

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