

Theme of alienation and displacement in Diasporic writing in relation to Indian writers in English

Suman Rani (M.A., M. Phil, NET)
Research Scholar

Abstract: The paper focuses on Indian Diaspora as a case study of globalization and multiculturalism in relation to the themes of alienation, identity, multiculturalism. The Term of “Diaspora” is generally used to refer the any people or population to leave their own traditional homeland and they settled down to another place which is far from their own homeland. Diasporic literature has been playing a significant role in depicting culture and history of nations and revealing reality about people on diaspora. Diasporic writing deals with swinging between the memory of homeland and the new land, the migrants are in a permanent mental and emotional battle between the myth and customs of the old world and; freedom and attractions of the new one. Migrants stay in a dilemma as to pursue their old traditions or break the obstacles and accept the new values and culture. Each of the categories of Diasporas underline a particular cause of migration usually associated with particular groups of people. The diasporic authors engage in cultural transmission that is equitably exchanged in the manner of translating a map of reality for multiple readerships. Besides, they are equipped with bundles of memories and articulate an amalgam of global and national strands that embody real and imagined experience.

Index Terms: Diaspora, identity, multiculturalism, alienation, immigrant

Introduction:

Diaspora Theory with its various features has influenced the literature of every language of the world. This literature is widely known as Expatriate or Diasporic Literature. Diasporic Literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this wide context, all those writers can be regarded as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

A diasporic text can be investigated in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. The changing designation of home and accompanying nervousness about homelessness and unfeasibility of going back are recurrent themes in diasporic literature. The expatriate literature also deals mostly with the inner conflict in the context of cultural displacement. The immigrants away from the families fluctuate between crisis and reconstruction. They are thrice alienated from the native land they left behind, from their new host country and their children. Diaspora literature is in constant conversation with the metahome. The longing to regain lost home often culminates in the creation of a different version of home.

William Safran applies the terms ‘Diaspora’ to ...expatriate minority communities which have dispersed from an original center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions, to people 46 who retain their myths about their motherland and feel alienated in the new land. As the expatriate writer experiences cultural, geographical and emotional displacement, there emerges a diasporic sensibility that mirrors the plural identity of the writer. Their writing is characterized by a pluralistic vision. There is a constant shifting between two worlds, voyaging back and forth between two locales. The writer few times visualizes his or her home country as a place of violence, poverty, corruption and sometimes it is romanticized. Writers like See Prasad Naipaul and later Shiva Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul, Cyril Dabydeen, David Dabydeen, Sam Selvon, M.G. Vassanji, Subramanian, K.S. Maniam, Shani Muthoo and Marina Budos are important contributors in this field.

Diasporic Writing in Indian Writing

V.S. Naipaul stands in first of the all Diasporic writer. He was born in the small town of Chaguanas on the island of Trinidad and now he lives in England. The sense of ‘Homelessness’ comes naturally to him and it’s found in his writing. In 1961 he wrote one of his most famous novels “*A House for Mr. Biswas's*”. The whole of his novel representing the memories of Naipaul’s childhood. The main character of the novel of Mr.Biswas’s life is very similar to the life of Naipaul. Mr. Biswas’s search for a new ‘house’ is a search for belonging that he is not the ‘other’, to possess a place in an alien land. His whole novel layered with the sense of alienation and exile which is found in her writing. He cannot have that sense of belongingness anywhere because of his sense of alienation.

V. S. Naipaul’s characters like Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsumair from the *Mystic Masseur*, are instances of persons who are generations away from their original homeland, India, but their inheritance gives them a realization of their past. They become examples of the outsider.

Salman Rushdie was born on 19th June 1947 in Bombay but in 1967 his parents moved to Pakistan. He belonged to three countries and yet to none. Rushdie's was of multiple roots. This is evident in his two writings of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. In *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist Saleem Sinai journeys through India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and yet there is no certain place for him to settle down. Thus relocation is the root of problem here. The character of the novel has the quest for some 'imaginary homeland'. Thus we can echo the fact that every Diasporic literature is in reality a longing for that long lost homeland with which they want to establish a connection.

J.V.Desani's novel *All about H. Hatter* (1948) and Ved Mehta's novel *Delinquent Chacha* (1969) have the first references of immigrant experience in Indian English literature yet they lacked the depiction of life struggles or despair of Indian immigrants. Thus *The Nowhere Man* (1972) of Kamala Markandaya and *Wife* (1975) of Bharati Mukherjee are considered to be among the first few novels which depict the discrimination, disappointment, despair and isolation faced by Indian immigrants who are living in foreign contexts. Hence the establishment of diasporic Indian English literature as an independent genre of Indian English literature is regarded at the end of 1980s. Naipaul's characters are not governed by actual displacement but by an inherited memory of dislocation. For them, their native land India is not a geographical space but a creation of the imagination. Their predicament can be explained in Rushdie's words as he remarks; "-- the past is a country, from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity."

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. It is as if these writers have discovered their Indianness when they are out of India. Evidently, they have the benefit of looking at their homeland from the outside.

Modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two different classes. One class includes those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been raised since childhood outside India. They have had a vision of their country only from the outside as an alien place of their origin. The writers of the previous group have a factual displacement whereas those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have created an enviable corpus of English literature. These writers while portraying migrant characters in their fiction investigate the theme of displacement, alienation, assimilation, acculturation, etc. The diasporic Indian writers' portrayal of dislocated characters gains immense significance if seen against the geopolitical background of the vast Indian subcontinent. That is exactly why such works have an international readership and a lasting appeal.

Two of the earliest novels that have effectively depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. These novels reveal how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of 1960's isolates the character and deepens their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife* and *Jasmine* depict Indians in the US – the land of immigrants both legal and illegal – before globalization got its momentum. Salman Rushdie in his novel *The Satanic Verses* approaches the metaphor of migration by adopting the technique of magic realism. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* depicts Tilo, the protagonist, as an exotic character to reveal the migrant's anguish. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* shows the extent of rootlessness encountered by character born and brought up on a foreign land. Amit Chaudhari, in his novel *Afternoon Raag*, portrays the lives of Indian students in Oxford. These writers also depicted the positive aspect of displacement. There are benefits of living as a migrant, the opportunity of having a double perspective of being able to experience diverse cultural modes. It is often this advantage that enables diasporic Indians, particularly of the second generation; face the dilemma of dual identities

The ranks of second generation diasporic Indian writers like MeeraSyal, Hari Kunzru, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. have faithfully demonstrated the lives of both first and second generation immigrants in the US. This is possible because big issues like religious discrimination and racial intolerance are no longer the main concern of these writers.

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.

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. 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.

Rohinton Mistry writes in a different way from Jhumpa Lahiri or other Indian writers living and writing abroad. The comprehensive handling of the fish or the description of the vermilion in Jhumpa Lahiri creates 'Bengaliness' or Rohinton Mistry can describe Parsi habits and traditions. These regional sub-groups make Indian diasporic literature in English somewhat unique and different. In the great success of diasporic fiction of Indian writers, particularly in the last two decades of the 20th century – there has appear a substantial sub-group within diasporic Indian fiction that is writing in English from the Indian state of Bengal, the country of Bangladesh and by Probashi Bengalis (diasporic Bengalis) outside the two Bengals. This sub – group contains writers like – Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Sunetra Gupta, Nalinaksha Bhattacharya, and Joydeep Roy – Bhattacharya, Bidisha Bandopadhyay, Adib Khan, Amit Choudhary, and Chitra Bananarjee

Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation Indian American who was born in London, 1967. Her parents were immigrants from the state of West Bengal, India. Her award-winning novel *The Namesake* (2004) is considered to be one of the best fictions written about immigrant life. In this novel, Lahiri has successfully engaged aspects like the generational gap between first and second generation immigrants, conflict of east-west beliefs, cultural displacement, nostalgia, loss of identity, alienation and despair. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novels we see the crisis of identity and belongingness. Lahiri was a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and born on July 11, 1967 in London and later her family moved to the United States *The Namesake* represent the life of Gogol Ganguli is the American-born son of Asoka and Ashima Ganguli. The American society takes Gogol as its victim and He swing between the Indian culture and American culture. He is an ABCD- "an American Born Confused Desi", who doesn't have the answer to the question: "Where are you from?" He knows that desh genrelly used for the "countryman" means "Indian", and he knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as desh. But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. In America he feels himself alien. But the end of the novel he realized his heritage and the value of his Indian identify.

The movie which was adopted by this novel too gained much attention worldwide. Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai is also a famous writer in diasporic Indian English literature. She was born in Chandigarh on 3rd September, 1971. She immigrated to England and then to America with her mother, who inspired her towards literature. Kiran Desai in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), subtly portrays the life struggles of Indian diaspora as well as the aspects of globalization, racial intolerance, terrorism and multi-cultural societies. This novel brought her much credit through awards like 'National Book Critics Circle Award' and 'Booker Prize', making her the youngest female recipient of 'Booker Prize' so far. In conclusion, it is appropriate to say that diasporic Indian English fiction is an important genre depicting the experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora in a broad sense. It makes space for the discussions about Indian immigrants and offers emotional security to that particular diaspora. Being the representatives of the Indian diaspora, diasporic female Indian writers are successful in addressing the readers of Indian English literature in a sensitive, unpretentious style while carrying a sense of the universal experience of immigration. Furthermore, diasporic Indian English fiction keeps their writers linked with India and the entire world.

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Jasmine* depicts the American society where people and their relationships are always in motion. Jasmine may be epitomized as a rebel, an adopter and also a survivor. Her confidence is revealed in this statement. —There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remark one self. We murder who we were so we can rebirth our selves-in the image of dreams. Jasmine has the courage to transform her dreams into reality. Which not only boosts the immense confidence of woman but it also serves as an energy for woman who wish to be liberated from the shackles of age, old dogmas. We assume the shifting images of Jasmine as the life of a woman engaged in quest of values she confides in. Bharathi Mukherjee celebrates these values as she drifts from one identity to another. In other words she celebrates the images of her multiple identities in this novel Jasmine. Jothy becomes Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane. In this way, Bharathi Mukherjee recounts the lives of the illegal aliens, who's brave face the worst humiliations and sufferings in a new world. Through her character, the novelist underlines the propensity to spiritual metamorphosis as a precondition to cultural assimilation with each new address. Whenever she acquires a new man she earns a new name. Jasmine symbolizes love and epitomizes courage and Jane stands for cunning. Bharathi Mukherjee created an innocent child like character Jyoti who transformed later into Jasmine with an element of love for her husband, Prakash. Jasmine becomes an illegal immigrant and journey to America. It reveals the courage of Jasmine. She marries Du and becomes an American which exhibits her cunning and selfish nature of the character besides craziness for American culture. Her marriage with Du evidences that she imbibes the spirit of American Culture. Thus she transforms from Indian image of women to American new image of woman. The juxtaposition of the twin themes of assimilation and resistance explain the peculiar rhythmic fluctuation between acceptance and rejection, inclusion and exclusion, happiness and suffering that is characteristic of Diaspora thematic structures. Jasmine is transformed by fulfilling her dream with her immigrant experience, while Maya, protagonist in *The Tenant* fails to sustain a meaningful relationship with her male counterpart she comes across. Unable to reconcile herself to the new culture, Maya is taken back to her roots.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni immigrated to America and came into spotlight as a female writer in diasporic Indian English literature. Her award-winning novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) portrays an Indian girl who works in a spice shop in Oakland, America and helps other immigrants to resolve their problems with the magic of her spices. Thus Divakaruni has Diasporic Female Indian Writers in Diasporic Indian English Fiction 139 flourished her novel with the elements of magic realism. It was also adopted into a movie of the same name.

Meena Alexander was born in 1951 in Allahabad and later she immigrated to Sudan and then to America. Her novel *Manhattan Music* (1997) is set on Manhattan as well as on India. There she has portrayed the immigrant life, identity crisis, racial intolerance, international affairs and marriages in a sensitive style of writing.

The female protagonist of Sunetra Gupta's novel *Memories of Rain* (1992) immigrates to England after falling in love with a British man but she soon realizes the true nature of her husband. Disappointed by his rude, mean behavior, she returns India with her children. Gupta's novel *A Sin of Colour* (1998) too portrays the dilemma and isolation faced by Indian immigrants amidst the complexities of a new context.

Conclusion:

The Home and Dislocation appeared again and again as the central themes in the writings of Indian Diasporic writers. Diasporic experience often comes from memory a memory of loss, of leaving the home, of not having any soul-connection with the host country and thus Diasporic literature always acts as a kind of bridge between two different cultures.

References:

- [1] Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London
- [2] Bharati Mukherjee, 1990. *Darkness*, Penguin India, New Delhi
- [3] Bharati Mukherjee, 1999. *Jasmine Grove* Weidenfeld, New York
- [4] Desai, Anita. 1985. *Bye Bye Blackbird*. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks.
- [5] Desai, Kiran. 2006. *The Inheritance of Loss*, Grove Press, New York.
- [6] Lahiri, Jhumpa. 2004. *Namesake*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- [7] Routledge Pandey, Abhay. 2008 *Indian Diasporic Literature: Creative*, New Delhi

