



INDIAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: The Greek noun *Diaspora* derives from the verb *diaspeire in*, a compound of “dia” (over or through) and “speirein” (to scatter or sow”). The word emerged from the proto- Indo- European root, *spr*, which can be found today in such English words as “spring”, “spray” and “disperse”. In all of its various uses, *Diaspora* has something to do with scattering and dispersal. Besides, diasporic Indian English fiction keeps the writers linked with India and the entire world. The supposed complexities and uncertainties as a result of the tensions between localities and spatio- temporal dualities is important theme of the diasporic discourse. For considerable groups of people around the globe, the concept of identity is embedded within an episteme of actual or imaginary displacements and self-imposed sense of exile. Their tendency to shed their ethnic identity and to assimilate local norms can produce strong nostalgic as well as separatist tendencies among diasporic discourse. Already in its inevitable concern with the idea of homeland, the concept of *Diaspora* has also been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities and of texts that express and explore this condition, sometimes by employing mixed written and visual discourse.

Key words: Diaspora, separatist, nostalgic, duality, discourse.

The Greek noun *Diaspora* derives from the verb *diaspeire in*, a compound of “dia” (over or through) and “speirein” (to scatter or sow”). The word emerged from the proto- Indo- European root, *spr*, which can be found today in such English words as “spring”, “spray” and “disperse”. In all of its various uses, *Diaspora* has something to do with scattering and dispersal. Bill Ashcroft et al define “*Diaspora*” as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (68). Initially referred to the dispersion of Jews outside Israel, the word *Diaspora* as per the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary now applies to the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country. The Jewish use of the term captures a poignant implication- filled with rudiments of enforced exile, collective suffering, a substantially strong and obligatory sense of identity and a great longing for the home country.

Over and above, *Diaspora* has appeared to denote, by and large, to historical mass dispersal of an involuntary nature, such as the expulsion of Jews from Judea and the fleeing of Greeks after the fall of Constantinople. The name *Diaspora* is also at times applied to signify the growth of human civilisation all over the world. The beginning of the prehistoric human and consequent dispersal to establish human civilizations in different parts of the world signifies *Diaspora* and the diasporic state. In the conventional sense, *Diaspora* signifies a homogeneous and identical body of geographically displaced people such as indentured labourers or slaves chiefly under the Empire and often referred to as exiled or expatriates. This standard term also incorporates the ancestry of these expatriates under its ambit. According to another source, the term *Diaspora* refers to a journey across civilisations. In the introduction of his article entitled “*Diasporas*”, Vijay Mishra labels post-war South Asian, Chinese, Arab and Korean communities settled in Britain, Europe, America, Canada and Australia as *Diaspora*. Cohen refers to five kinds of *Diaspora*: Victim (e.g. Jews, Armenians), Labour (Indian, Chinese), Trade (Chinese, Lebanese), Imperial (British) and Cultural (Caribbean) *Diasporas*.

Nevertheless there are broadly two approaches to describe *Diaspora*: a traditional approach which sees *Diaspora* as produced by some form of compulsion that brings about the uprooting and resettlement outside the confines of the homeland of large numbers of people; and a post-modern approach of understanding of *Diaspora* by anthropologists and cultural critics, which sees it as expressing forms of ‘hybrid’ consciousness and identity. The diasporic ‘scattering’ is transformed into ‘gathering’ by Homi Bhabha as he says:

Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres [...] Also the gathering of people in the *Diaspora* : indentured, migrant, [...] (139).

From the aforementioned, it must be understood that Diaspora must entail displacement- movement from one's own country to another. However such literal definitions identify Diaspora solely as physical migration, and lack to elucidate the implication of Diaspora. The term has not one but manifold inferences further than the literal. Therefore, the concept of Diaspora, though old, has of late taken on new facets. The traditional association of the term "Diaspora" to the migrant experience has, during the last two decades, become an area of more methodical and cross-disciplinary study. While the concept of Diaspora was at first concerned with comparatively small populace in the Mediterranean area, today it applies to the whole world with almost every ethnocultural group having its own Diaspora. The general approach to Diaspora refers to voluntary or involuntary removal from the ancestral land. In today's world, Diaspora as a descriptive term encompasses the entire of a migrant group bypassing the division made in the past literature between the first and succeeding generation of migrants, that is, between exile and expatriation.

However, the term Diaspora is even now used in general for transnational relocation of every kind of dispersion or dislocation, regardless of place and territory, even the figurative ones. According to Balvant Jani, "the word 'Diaspora' is used to represent the feelings of all those who feel themselves to be disconnected politically or existentially." (48). Moreover the diasporic angst, the sense of homelessness, rootlessness is often seen as a mental crisis and at times exaggerated. The diasporic people are bound by a strong sense of nationalism which goes beyond the boundaries of state and territory. In the absence of a particular locale or a space to call their own, the diasporic people are even more firm in their nationalistic principles. This is in a way a longing and quest for an identity.

The sociological and anthropological approach to Diaspora explains it as a series of communities that hold discernible characteristics despite their relationship with their past homelands. Nevertheless, the existing definition of Diaspora refers to a group of individuals that conceives of its separateness based on a set of characteristics and a common ethnicity or nationality, who live in a host country while maintaining ties with the home country. Thus Diaspora is always referred to in the context of the existence of a home country, a term that is identical with "homeland", although the former is a broader connotation, denoting an entity that can span beyond state boundaries. The attachment to the homeland is usually cultural and this form of attachment entails a chain of transnational links by sending remittances home, voting in the home country elections, funding civic projects, etc. The issues that the discourse of the Diaspora encompasses include loss of native soil and longing for it, alienation in new land, surrender, adversity, conciliation and redefining identity; as a result it needs to be approached from different perspectives.

Today Diaspora has become a momentous force on the global panorama and the term is approached from new incline, more essentially a symbolic one. The main aspects are associated with the experience of unsettlement rather than of displacement and relocation. It is no longer considered a sheer demographic shifting, but a fairly larger importance is given for the suggestions of such a shift.

Indian Diaspora

The Indian Diaspora is one of the most outstanding and a complex socio-economic phenomenon of the contemporary world and its study undoubtedly contributes in generating the transitional networks in the contemporary world of fiction. Migration has been taking place for millions of years and it occurs when individuals can no longer acquire the necessary resources to sustain themselves at their native lands and hence, they migrate to a place where the resources are available. In the earlier period, people moved to other lands either because the social and economical condition of the home country was not conducive for their living or were or attracted by the images of a destination with greater socio-economic opportunities. The Indian Diaspora has been shaped by a series of dispersal of population. Sudesh Mishra in his essay *From Sugar to Masala* divides the Indian Diaspora into two categories - the old and the new. He writes that:

This distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada, and Britain. (276)

Post independence, the Indian diasporic community received a new identity due to the processes of self-fashioning and acceptance by the West. The historical account of the Indian Diaspora can be largely divided into three segments, based on the reasons of their movement. The first phase of immigration began by the end of the nineteenth century, during the British colonisation. Many uneducated people who were employed as indentured labourers in sugar plantations and in railroad construction in British colonies left their homeland. The second phase of migration took place in the mid twentieth century, when educated people set off to developed nations to experience independence and economic development. The third phase of migration took place by the end of the nineteenth century, and in the commencement of the twenty-first century. This time, people's movement to the developed nations was for better education and employment. S K Sareen divides the history of the Indian Diaspora into four major movements such as:

(i) the indentured labor that built for the empire in South Asia and the West Indies; (ii) the seekers who went mainly to the West in search of security, freedom or identity; (iii) the aspirants who went again to the West in search of opportunities (money); and (iv) the re-migrants who, for self-preservation, had to move from where they had arrived from India to other locale such as the Ugandans to UK and USA and the Fijians to Australia.(82).

Indians Diaspora is the third largest Diaspora, after the British and the Chinese, and in that order. Indians or the people of Indian origin are found in all continents. The Indian Diaspora today constitutes an important and, in some respects a unique force in world culture. In post-Second World War period, the dispersal of Indian labor and professionals has been a world-wide phenomenon. In spite of the diversity, the Indian community has certain common traits. However unlike the Indian communities across the world might be, it is observed that they all maintain some sort of tenuous link with the motherland. Certain customs and traditions bind Indians together to some extent. Religious festivals, rituals, arranged marriages, food, Hindi movies and music

are some of the major binding forces. The newspapers published by Indians carry a section of matrimonial advertisements. These advertisements help Indians to locate one another. The religious practices of the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the US and other countries show that they are often more desperately committed to their religious practices and faiths. Due to this the idea, of home becomes fundamental in diasporic writing which typically focuses on discrimination, nostalgia, identity and a sense of belonging. The Diaspora experience can be made clearer by taking into consideration an excerpt from Salman Rushdie:

It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge which gives use to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities, or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indian of the mind. (10)

Diaspora writers document their daily experiences and plights in their writings. In most cases, their writings reminiscence their loneliness in the new land, the problems they face in the new society and their in-betweenness. Notwithstanding the fundamental resemblance in their experiences and expressions, Diaspora writings cannot be homogenized. Thus Diaspora is an expression that evokes different opposing impressions and reflections. It can be a positive site for the assertion of an identity, or, on the contrary, a pessimistic site of fears of losing that identity. Diaspora is additionally a widely held name in contemporary research as it holds various experiences that are prevailing in the various discourses connected to the present transnational globalization: borders, migration, immigration, repatriation, exile, refugees, assimilation, multiculturalism and hybridity.

Diasporic Literature in English and its depiction

Indian literature has always been coloured with the shades of cultures governing the land. The word 'culture' is blend with various human emotions. Culture Shock is one such sprout that has shaped inter-cultural literature. And the literature that has originated at the border line of cultures is Diaspora Literature. Diaspora writings occupy an important place around cultures and countries. Cultures travel and become established or get displaced and the individuals experience nostalgia and loss of memory. Though the immigrant writers share common features, the differences based on the condition of their migration and settlement cannot be ignored. The Diaspora writings are the accounts of the experiences of the Diaspora communities living in different socio-cultural background. The Indian Diasporic writing covers every continent and part of the world. It is a remarkable contradiction in terms that a great deal of Indian writing covers every continent and part of the world.

Diasporic Literature refers to the literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. It is consequence of the immigrants who have access to education and knowledge. The diasporic literature typically centres on discrimination, nostalgia, identity and a sense of belonging. 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. These writings record the experiences of the diasporic communities living in varied socio-cultural settings. Their nostalgia and attachment to the homeland's traditions, religions and languages gave birth to Diaspora literature. These tensions and throes remain a recurring theme in the Diaspora literature. The migrant, who leaves his homeland crossing the boundaries of time and money to become one with his new surroundings longs to return home. Many of the works discuss the individual/communities attachment to the homeland and the urge to belong in the settled land and as a result of this they reveal a hybrid existence as stated by Lau:

They are people who are as multi-cultural as they are multi-lingual. They do not regard themselves as fully belonging in either culture, and have practically evolved a sub-culture peculiar to themselves. They try to take the best from both worlds, but suffer the sense of hybridity and cultural entanglement. (241)

Since Diaspora is so closely associated with cultural memory, diasporic writing expresses a real or fictional past of a community. The creative treatment and presentation of expatriate subject matter, to explain the Diasporic perception, strengthens the relevance and significance of the Diasporic literature generated by these writers. The authors present the inner turmoil of the characters that are migrants and their difficulty to accommodate themselves in new land. Diasporic writing inhabits a great position of significance between cultures and countries. These writers live in two worlds and two cultures and face dilemma where they can neither disregard the world and culture they have come out of nor can they completely assimilate into new culture that means they cannot destabilize their identities totally. Stuart Hall in his article on *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* says:

Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference [...] It is because this New world is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to the 'lost origins' [...] And yet, this 'return to the beginning' is like the imaginary in Lanca-it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery. (235-236)

Portrayal of the 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 narratives of Diaspora writers deal, predominantly, with the inner conflict in the milieu of cultural displacements. The immigrants move back and forth between crisis and re-establishment. Idiosyncrasies and peculiarities present a fine and insightful interpretation on their lives. In the throes of adaptation journey, the shift of the identity of immigrants is caused to undergo a complete makeover beyond identification. The desire of better material prospects transforms life into restlessness as sometimes they face racial discrimination as well from the people of the host country. Therefore the works shaped by the Diasporic writers present the immigration experiences and their aftermaths as they have lived out of the country for an extensive period of time and wrote out of consciousness of their own Diasporic existence.

These writers offer significant insight of what it means to be an expatriate and their perceptions are real though they have diverse experiences. However there are specific common elements in all forms of Diaspora viz. the sense of longing for their homeland, a curious attachment to the traditions and ethnicity of their country, its religion and language. These features produce the literature of the Diaspora which is chiefly related to individual's or community's attachment to homeland.

Though common in themes, the diasporic writers may differ based on generations/ages. The writings of the first generation diasporic writers may be different from the second and third generations. Through their writing, the first generation writers put in the picture about their earlier life and experiences. The second and later generations of the diasporic community in general show a twofold identity. Though the second and later generations of the diasporic community deem the country in which they are born as the home country, the society still sees them as outsiders and hence they are trapped in a hyphenated identity. They are not pleased about the way their parents live. It brings about quite a lot of misapprehensions between both generations. The concept of 'home' continues to intensify inter-generational frictions that exist everywhere within the Diaspora community. Uma Parameswaran aptly states:

Most young people whose parents keep to the old ways feel trapped by their differences, not only at school but at home. However, with the resilience of youth, most of them find balance, and some even start appreciating aspects of their heritage culture.(35)

Hence to brief up Indian Diasporic literature explore the cultural displacement and its impact. All the Diaspora literature can be treated as arising out of experience of immigration. This is especially significant in any analysis of Indian English literature because its Diaspora extends to almost all parts of the globe. The diasporic writers share some common traits: they and their protagonists are engaged in a continuous search for their origins. It is a quest for identity, marked by nostalgia for past, a longing for the lost values of their ancestors, an acute sense of their otherness. Thus the identities of Diaspora individuals can neither be traced to their homeland to which they all want to return nor to the country they inhabit. They, certainly, face the predicament of cross or twofold identity, which makes their survival difficult. This is a daring experience applicable to all Indian Diaspora, notwithstanding their social group, county and religious conviction. Whatsoever, the writers of Diaspora have the actual potency of the contemporary literary imagination in the evocation of the individual's dilemma in the milieu of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and the quest for identity.

Therefore Diasporic consciousness is a prevailing experience in world literature which encompasses the mental flight of Diasporans who frequently try to streamline their present on the basis of their past that preoccupies them. Their quest for the past, dislocation and marginalization in the host country and the assimilation into the culture of adopted country brings out the conflicting state of ambivalence. The writers of Indian Diaspora have significantly enriched creative writing in English through their literary contributions. They have been focussing in their writings on reinventing India by the exhibiting of complexities of another civilization, cultural assimilation and nostalgia, surviving identity crisis, impulse for existence. The process of survival of the diasporic individual/ community between "home of origin" and "world of adoption" is the voyage undertaken in the entire process from "alienation" to final "assimilation." They plunge profoundly into the realm of creative power to delineate something fairly different and distinct from that portrayed by fellow novelists. The well-known writers in this area include V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, Uma Parameswaran, Kiran Desai, Shauna Singh Baldwin and Anita Rau Badami. Their works are filled with the diasporic consciousness, as they experience diasporic problems that vary as per their generations, perceptions, attitudes and specific identities. Their works offer a keen sense of pathos by coping with not only geographical displacement but also socio-cultural sense of dislocation. Their concerns turn into universal concerns with the exiles' sense of displacement and rootlessness. Even supposing writings of the Diaspora writers vary in accordance with the reasons of their movement, the shared aims among their writing is their sense of guilt for not being loyal to both societies. The cultural barriers, identity crisis, racism, and violence faced by the immigrant is expressed in all the Diasporic literature. The tension of living in-between the two worlds is reflected suitably in their works.

Therefore, the meaning of Diaspora originated from the Greek "to scatter" and "to sow", suggests both dispersal and settlement. Diaspora focuses on settlement after displacement which is responsible in creating transnational networks. In the post-colonial world, highly marked by globalization, transnational migration is a reality. Therefore there are numerous groups of people who navigate across the national borders to arrive at their assured land. These populaces, all of whom share the similar native soil, so as to safeguard their customs and culture and to rebuild the memorable sort of surroundings, much connected with their idea of the homeland, materialize communities through which they can cling to their roots. Such Diasporas broaden and develop together with not only the original immigrants known as the first generation but also their succeeding generations, the second generation, as long as they prefer to or are made remain as a separate community. This course of action is a very long-term. The first and even the second generation of immigrants, those who proliferate in Diaspora writings generally have to come to terms with problems and to be afflicted with affects and traumas on the way to their national, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities. What needs to be deemed here is that the conception of identity in general and diasporic identity specifically, is not set, fixed or a fundamental whole but is to a certain extent constructed and self-created.

Over the last few decades, Indian English writing has indisputably reached to its successful development. There has been an impressive advancement in the extent of creative works being published by Indian English writers together in India and out of the country. Furthermore, Indian English fiction received a lot of attention as fiction is the most distinctive form of literary expression today in the global perspective. A good number of women Indian English writers have won laurels in India and overseas. An added attribute that has further enhanced this discipline is the Diaspora writing by Indian English writers now settled in different parts of the world. On account of this, Indian English writing now has the benefit of an exceptional eminence in the world.

Indian Diaspora literature capturing worldwide attention today is typically by and about learned migrants or their descendants. It handles subjects like alienation, nostalgia, identity crisis, discrimination etc. It operates in a cultural space preoccupied by heterogeneity, and tries to reconcile with alien realities. A literary network connected with questions of equality and identity, it attempts assimilation with host country and society. All diasporic fiction, thus, is filled with issues associated with location, movement, crossing border, original home and adopted home and identity. The Diaspora writers act like transitional beings moving from one cultural setting to another, in a way, reacting equivocally to dual cultures, make an effort to integrate between the homeland and the identity. Even when these Diaspora writers attempt to integrate with their new milieu, they remain emotionally involved to their ancestral traditions, habits, languages and religions.

It is apt to state that diasporic Indian English fiction is a significant genre depicting the experiences and outlook of Indian Diaspora in a broad sense. It makes room for the discussions in relation to Indian immigrants and offers emotional security

to that specific Diaspora. Being the representatives of the Indian Diaspora, diasporic female Indian writers are on the rise in addressing the readers of Indian English literature in an insightful, self-effacing style while carrying a sense of the universal experience of immigration. Besides, diasporic Indian English fiction keeps the writers linked with India and the entire world. The supposed complexities and uncertainties as a result of the tensions between localities and spatio-temporal dualities is an important theme of the diasporic discourse. For considerable groups of people around the globe, the concept of identity is embedded within an episteme of actual or imaginary displacements and self-imposed sense of exile. Their tendency to shed their ethnic identity and to assimilate local norms can produce strong nostalgic as well as separatist tendencies among diasporic discourse. Already in its inevitable concern with the idea of homeland, the concept of Diaspora has also been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities and of texts that express and explore this condition, sometimes by employing mixed written and visual discourse.

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