



Research Paper

Indian Diaspora: Homes Away From the Homeland

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Abstract:

As they torn between the two places and two cultures and often languages; the expatriate writer navigates a new literary space. The diasporic literature arises under these circumstances. The broken psyche of the immigrants sheds off its psychosis into writing. Therefore, the migrant writer feels a forceful need to write and with their multicultural ethos and a profound understanding of socio-cultural and economic realities around them, they have been successful in transforming their experiences into writings. Another important reason for writing by the creative talent in the diasporic community is to make their existence recognized. The very act of creation is a purposeful effort to form a cultural identity

I. Introduction

‘Diaspora’ is a journey that negotiates a physical detachment from, and a psychological attachment towards, the homeland. The term ‘diaspora’ was originally used to describe the dispersion of Jews from Babylon in the 6th Century BC, and later was used to refer to all migrants who left their homeland to go to another country for various reasons. Today’s use of the term associates it with this conscious choice. However, it also encompasses the psychological connection to the home, away from ‘home’.

The term ‘diaspora’ originally comes from the Greek word for ‘scattering’ and refers to the dispersion of a people from their homeland to some other destinations. Exactly speaking, the word has its roots in the Greek word, ‘diaspeirein’, meaning ‘scattering about’ or ‘dispersing’. In one of his well-known essays, *Dissemination*, Homi Bhabha reminds us how a time of scattering which causes the ‘diaspora’ is also a time of gathering. A simple definition of diaspora literature, then, would be works written by authors who live outside their native land. The term identifies a work’s distinctive geographic origins, but it may also be defined by its contents irrespective of the consideration where it has been written. The movement involved in Diaspora causes dislocation, and locations of cultures and individuals harp upon memories. Diasporic writers live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. Diasporic writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures. Theories are generated and positions defined in order to construct new identities which further negotiate boundaries and confines that relate to different temporal and spatial metaphors.

Indian immigrants are spread around the world and form an integral part of the global diaspora. The job market that has opened up as a result of globalization has made the potential of Indians more visible and functional. There have also been social and cultural exchanges. It is in this context that the literatures emerging from the diasporic people assume significance. The literature of the Indian diaspora is a body of writing produced by people who identify themselves as being of Indian origin, but also belonging to foreign lands.

II. Diaspora and Literature

Diaspora plays a significant role in literature, especially in Indian Writing in English. Literature from the Indian diaspora functions as a substitute for the homeland on a global platform, and it traverses across historical periods and geographies. It explores questions of representation, and delves into the experiences of dislocation, marginalization, and acculturation that are usually associated with migration to a foreign land. Simultaneously, it probes into the very idea of a ‘home’, and into the notion of belonging. It also draws upon a variety of perspectives from literary and digital cultures to evaluate issues such as gender, politics, generational conflict, race, class, and transnational encounters. An intersectional web of exploration is carried out through these texts, with authors questioning the very basis of their cultural identities.

Nostalgia, loss, betrayal and duty are the foundations of new homes as diasporic protagonist adjust to new countries. In adjusting to new countries, issues of acculturation and assimilation become the central point as these immigrants negotiate the unbalance of their hyphenated identities. Usually, the first generation diaspora clings to food and clothes as the most obvious markers of Indianness that sets them apart and highlights their

difference. The insistence on this difference is often a conscious declaration of belonging to another place. On the other hand, second generation diaspora declines and removes such identity markers to assimilate the dominant culture.

Identity becomes the core issue in any investigation of diaspora, a particularly diasporic identity that is made of various factors and sub-factors. This diasporic identity is multi-level. It is also based on the history or conditions leading to migration, as well as the individual responses to these circumstances. This experience of dislocation is dependent on factors such as the generation of diaspora that one belongs, impact of globalization, why the diasporic has shifted away from his homeland and also the approach of the host country towards the diasporic community.

There are some factors like language, dress, and socio-cultural environment that deepen the problem of nation and identity after migration takes place. Expatriation involves nervousness of belonging to two communities on the part of immigrant that culminates a kind of conflict in him or her that something other people do not have to struggle with. The development that takes afterward is painful. It recognizes 'fluid identity'. It is an acknowledgment of substitute realities; this is a positive way forward, where we talk about each other's culture and redefine our anticipations and aspirations.

Recent Indian Diasporic Literature in English

Literature by the Indian diaspora in English has gained a reputation both in academics and popular culture, and there is no dearth for this kind of writing being adapted into films. Thus, even the diasporic cultural texts (films/documentaries) offer possibilities of exploring the diasporic cultural identities. According to Stuart Hall, "there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity...one in the term of shared culture and second of what we are". This insight explains the diasporic narratives that represent the struggles of balancing the 'home' and the values of the new and adopted land. Novels like *The Namesake* projects the disparities between cultures and the attempt of the migrant families in equally managing the diverse and sometimes opposing traditions. Jhumpa Lahiri, a second-generation diasporic writer, portrays characters that are caught between these irreconcilable differences, and which seek to land on a sense of equilibrium or balance between their Indian-ness and American-ness.

The Indian diaspora is a generic term which is used to describe people who migrated from the territory of the Indian Republic and settled elsewhere in the world, and also the subsequent generations of such people. But we must be particular about the distinction between the old and the new Indian diasporas, between the sporadic migration in a steady pattern of the indentured labour force of the past and of the IT technocrats of the modern times. The first group comprises those who emigrated semi-voluntarily from India to countries like Mauritius, Trinidad, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, Fiji, Guyana and other destinations to work in rail or road construction or sugar plantations during the colonial era. The second group involving postmodern dispersal includes new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres in the west and middle-east, particularly Australia, the USA, Canada, and Britain, in search of prospects of a better standard of life.

Diaspora Literature in Indian Languages

The term 'Indian diaspora' has often been used in academic discourse representing writers from the Indian subcontinent. While diasporic writing in English has drawn sufficient attention from critics, literature in Indian languages has not received its due recognition. There are a fair number of writers who write in their Indian languages. Language stands as an important vehicle for maintaining ethnic identity, distinguishing one group from another. Such a study is also important for Western people, as it would shed some light on the nature and dynamics of Indian society and culture (*Diasporic Indian Women Writers*, Sireesha Telugu, 2009). For a very long time, regional diaspora literature tried to be a part of mainstream literature but remained *apart* due to the dominance of literature in English.

Early migrants relied on their native tongues, and migrant oral narratives were narrated in their vernacular languages, but not in written narratives. Diaspora literature in Indian Languages has been present for some time now but has not acquired public visibility, and there has been a constant struggle of Indians to promote their works written in Indian languages. The diasporic writers writing in vernacular languages say that they have their own style with which they express their emotions and ideas freely. They seek to preserve their mother-languages in this hybridised cultural community. The diasporic writers writing in Indian languages hope that their language and literature reaches the future generations. This group writes for immigrant people of their cultures only, and speaks only to the native readership in the diaspora. They confess that they are the writers, poets, audience, readers and critics. They write to cherish their community's past and a fear of loss of this past makes them want to preserve their language.

More recently, there has been some critical reading for the diaspora literature produced in some of the Indian languages. Literary associations were formed in the diaspora, providing a platform for these writers to share their works. Publishing houses like the Vanguri Foundation in Houston started hosting the diaspora works

written in Indian languages. Diaspora literature in Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Sindhi, Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi, and many more are traversing the global today. Vanguri Foundation in America has been publishing Telugu diasporic literature for the past 40 years that relates to the migrant experiences that the writers in English do. In order to promote Indian languages, many chose to express their concerns in their narratives.

“Building temples, celebrating festivals and rituals are thus seen as affirmations of cultural identity.” Literature in vernacular languages is an attempt to enhance the understanding of their private space, which further enriches their culture and heritage in novel ways.

Main Contributors of Indian Diasporic literature in English

It is interesting to note that the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers in the so called ‘girit colonies’ have predominantly favoured writing in English, the lingua franca of the world. Writers of the ‘girit diaspora’ like Seepersad Naipaul (India-Trinidad) and his sons Shivadhar Naipaul (Trinidad-England) and Vidiadhar Naipaul, Cyril Dabyeen (Guyana-Canada), David Dabydeen (Guyana-England), Harold Ladoo (Trinidad-Canada), Neil Bissoondath (Trinidad-Canada), Subramani (Fiji), K. S. Maniam (Malaysia), have made significant contribution in the literary field. As opposed to the old diaspora of indentured labourers, “the new diaspora of international Indian English writers live close to their market, in the comforts of the suburbia of advanced capital but draw their raw material from the inexhaustible imaginative resources of that messy and disorderly subcontinent that is India.”⁷ These writers record their experiences away from India, and even if they look back at their homeland it is often in an elegiac rather than nostalgic tone. Ultimately, Indian writers in the West are increasingly identifying themselves with the literary tradition of the migrant writers of the world seeking inspiration as much from Swift, Conrad, Marx and others as from Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy.

The great writers of Indian English fiction like Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, had a strong dedication to expose cruel realities of life to effect the desired change in society. Nationalism, Partition Poverty, Peasantry, Subjugated Women, Rural-Urban Divide, East-West encounter, Feudal Practices, Casteism, and Communalism were some of the themes quite closer to their hearts. All of them are well known for realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian life. Taking departure from the first generation of Indian English novelists, the postmodern Indian English novelists have concentrated on a completely new set of themes which are wide ranging and inclusive as the life in the age of globalization is immersed in the emerging issues of globalization and subsequent multiculturalism, feminism, queer theories, diasporic sensibility, glamour, consumerism, commoditization, upward mobility, erosion of ethical values are some of main issues raised by contemporary novelists and short stories writers.

Portrayal of Diaspora issues in Indian Diasporic Literature

A new aspect of this life in exile got added in post-independence period in India when many people in the sixties and seventies began moving towards developed countries on their own agreement either to avoid political or economic difficulties of their native land or to study or as professionals which Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak calls as part of ‘brain-drain’. Since then, this move to other countries has been ongoing. It is important to note that whatever the reasons for migration be, the immigrants do experience the sense of unbelonging and displacement in the new lands. They may try hard to assimilate or acculturate in the new cultures; they remained on the edge of the adopted culture and treated as other. While remaining on the margins of the most cultures, they undergo complex experiences of anxiety, confusions, yearnings and aspirations. These Diasporas live in what Homi K Bhabha calls in between condition that is very agonizing to them, and there is a yearning for ‘home’ which remains a “mythic place of desire in diasporic imagination.”

III. Conclusion

Diaspora literature of nearly two hundred years has made a difference in the very way a ‘nation’, in this case, India, is viewed. The modern day Indian cinema similarly represents more of the Western world, making the diaspora a substitute for the homeland. Movies like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), *Namstey London* (2007) and *My Name is Khan* (2010) offer representations of the changed family and social systems due to immigration into a land with different values and cultures. The characters adapt to Western modernity, but are also balanced due to their “Indian” ways. Indian diaspora writers have made their mark by winning literary prizes too. Spread across six continents and 125 countries, the Indian diaspora has created homes away from the homeland.

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