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DIASPORIC LITERATURE---AN OVERVIEW

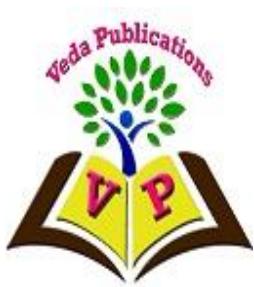
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ABSTRACT



Originally, diaspora refers to the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel. It is otherwise known as a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate locale. Historically too, diaspora goes back to the Bible era when the Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. The term Diaspora is derived from ancient Greek language which means "Scatter about". But, the term is now described to show any large migration of refugees, language or culture.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Migration, Hybridity, In-betweenness, Mutation, Expatriation.*

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The concept of Diaspora has been derived from the Greek word meaning "to scatter". Moreover, the word is associated with the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel. Hence, the diaspora belongs to a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographical area. It means migration of a specific population across cultural domain where the uprooted people feel nostalgic about their homeland. It does not mean that they have no home; but having home on an alien land becomes a means of suffering for them. Therefore, they see and feel the difference of living at home and abroad. The simple and single definition of the term is not possible because the concerned field of diaspora is changing its paradigms with respect to the changing modes of technologies in the digital age. Scholars must not think that diaspora has been lost due to the invented means of supertechnology. On the contrary, the basic assumptions have been changed slightly; yet there is a lot of scope to study it again. Now, the people's sufferings have some additional tools and means by which they provide much scope in the field of research. This scope strikes with traditional structure of diaspora changing it in new dimensions and forms.

The study of diaspora in contemporary times has become multi-directional. Scholars usually try to see the basic roots to distinguish the concept of diaspora with respect to various cultural and geographical aspects. Now-a-days, the uprooted communities do not feel nostalgic about their homeland, because they have technological means of communication. Hence the concept of 'Myth of Returns' has to be studied with new dimensions. Further, scholars can see the politics of globalization where the world is being shaped into a model of small village. So the idea of 'inbetweenness' has been affected due to these changes. Therefore, the study of diaspora has become complex having a lot of potential within it.

The Diaspora is a process of people migrating frequently from one place to another for various reasons. Migrations have resulted in building up a diasporic community which shares a common sense of rootlessness, pain and agony of

homelessness in a new land. Cultural interactions paved the way to establish multi-cultural societies. The policy of multi culturalist is often contrasted with the concept of assimilation and social integration. All diasporic discourses are shaded by the ideology of post-colonialism.

In the present global scenario, many people migrate in search of employment, business and trade. All diasporic communities established outside their birth territories concede that their own native land always has some claim on their loyalty and emotion. This occurs through language, religion and custom. The diasporic people often find themselves managing across cultural identities. They have to create various cultural, ethnic and political identities to meet the challenges from their native lands and their adopted homelands. The way in which the diasporic people manage their identities is determined by political, social, professional and class factors. The diasporic communities might choose adoption, accommodation, acculturation, and assimilation. Identity crisis arises if one migrates from one territory to another place.

Diasporic identities are manifold, heterogeneous and subject to persistent metamorphosis. While they attempt to adopt themselves to their various experiences, they simultaneously endeavour to find their identity. The compromise among these multiple, mobile and altering identities can be sorted out by the formation of a transcultural identity. Diasporic discourse compels us to contemplate about fundamentals of nation and nationalism, while determining the affinities of citizens and nation state. Diasporic discourse mirrors awareness that living is a part of transnational network that involves a homeland. Diaspora discourse speaks about people who reside in one place but passionate for another place. Another aspect of diasporic discourse is the search for selfhood in the world between two cultures that of homeland and embraced land. The notion of 'home' often plays a cardinal function in Diaspora communities. In migrating from one nation to another, the migrant quests for setting up home in a new land. But they are unable to identify the new



place as their home. Instead they find their home elsewhere, back across the boundary and they always wish to come back. The expatriate has to start his next beginning wherever he goes to settle. In M.G.Vassanji's *Amrika* at the end Ramji would neither adjust with life in America nor exposes the dynamics of east African-Indian life in a new country, he feels strangely depleted.

'Hybridity' is one of the concepts of diasporic discourse. Homi J Bhabha clarifies in his essay "*Science Taken for Wonders*" about hybridity. "The relation between mother culture and alien cultures produced through the strategy of disavowal, the reference of discrimination is always to the process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is discovered is not repeated but respected as something different – a mutation, a hybrid." Bhabha's contention is that there is an amalgamation of cultural forms as a consequence of two processes of colonialism and post-colonialism. His notion of hybridity is one of the universal experiences of the colonized. Diaspora and its impact give rise to corresponding attitudes to the literature. The immigrant or expatriate writers produce literature which reflects thrust areas such as family, sexuality, nationalism etc which can be judged in terms of Western concept of what is genuine and what is false.

There are many Indian women writers base in the USA, Canada, Britain and other parts of the globe. Some are afresh immigrants, while others such as Jhumpa Lahiri are second generation immigrants. These expatriate writers pen about their footing in cross cultural contrast.

An expatriate is someone temporarily or permanently residing in a country and culture other than that of their upbringing or legal residence. The word expatriate is coined from the Latin language. 'Ex' means 'out of' where as 'Patria' means 'country'. There is a contrariety between an expatriate and an immigrant. Generally immigrants assure themselves to be a part of their country of dwelling places where as expatriate are temporarily located in the host

country and most of the time plan to turn back to their native country, so they never adopt the culture in the host country. Expatriate representation has been queried on various enumerations. It is said that most of the expatriate writers have a weak comprehension of real happenings in contemporary India and aim to reconstruct it through the eyes of nostalgia, writing about imaginary homelands. Distancing oneself from one's nation leads to objectivity, but it also leads to the ossification of cultural constructs. It is said that the expatriate is not directly in contact with the actuality of India. The East-West clash between tradition and modernity is the drive behind the writings of acclaimed writers such as Meerasyal, Anitha Rau, Badami, Shauna Singh Balwin, Uma Parmeshwaren, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana and Kiran Desai.

The theme that guides to self discovery with a denial of the traditions of the country of origin is a recurrent one among migrant writers, Mention may be made of such authors and their works such as Kirchaer's *Shiva Dancing* (1998), Ameena Meer's *Bombay Talkie* (1994) and Bharathi Mukarjee's *Jasmine* (1989) are good examples.

The Indian diasporic writers have roots in India. But they present image of various geographical areas of the Indian Diaspora: from the South Pacific to South America, from the Indian Islands of Mauritius and Singapore to the cities and suburbs of London, New York, Johannesburg, and Toronto. The people of Indian Diaspora share a diasporic consciousness generated by a complex network of historical connections, spiritual affinities and unifying racial memories and that their shared sensibility is manifested in the cultural productions of the Indian diasporic communities around the globe. Indian diaspora can be applied to ample number of writers including major international writers such as V.S.Naipaul and Salman Rushdie and other accomplished emerging writers.

Most of the immigrant writers are nostalgic of their homeland and make creative writing an important medium. Mention may be made of expatriate writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Vissanji, Bharti Mukherjee,



Chitra Banerjee Divakarani, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Meerasyal, Amit Chaudhury, Meena Alexander, Sunetra Gupa, Gita Mehtha, Suniti Namjoshi, Shani Mootoo, Anurag Mathur, Amulya Malladi, Vineela Vijayaraghavan, Anita Rau Badami, Abraham Varghese and Peter Nazareth. Most of the women writers have contributed the perspective of gender along with the themes of ethnicity, migrancy and post-coloniality languages and religious traditions.

One needs to mention briefly about the stories and themes of certain expatriate writers. The Indian diaspora creates a new multiple reality a kaleidoscopic pattern which is typical and yet unique. A new woman emerged in almost all nations. The modern concept of immigration thus became the centre story in women's literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author born in Calcutta and spent the first nineteen years of her life in India. Having had her school education in a missionary school run by Irish nuns she moved to United States to continue her studies.

Divakaruni approaches the themes of disillusionment and exile in innovative ways. She projected varied themes in her works like inter racial marriages, mobile parents or preference for alternative sexualities, home and family, ethnicity and identity, body and sexuality through which she articulates a perspective of women's experience of exile in particular and women's alienation in general. The heroines in Divakaruni's novels lead an imperfect life which shows how women struggle hard for their personal identity. Divakaruni comments that her protagonists may be Bengalis, but her 'Desh' is now America. As a Diasporic writer, she thus exposes the dual dilemma faced by women 1) Moving to a different country which is free, women has to settle themselves to this changed culture 2) Their magical wedding dollar dreams are shattered and disillusioned. Almost all the women presented in her novels fail to establish a bond of communication with their husbands.

Nobel Laureate Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (b. 1932), born in a Hindu Brahmin family in Trinidad in 1932 and a third generation West Indian

of East Indian descent, has themes like homelessness, spiritual isolation and perpetual exile in his works. His creative talent has been shaped by continuous perception of rootlessness, deracination and displacement in his writing. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) focuses on the protagonists' desperate flight to have a house of his own: a symbolic act of a person's need to develop an authentic identity. Mohan Biswas, the protagonist, is a universal figure transcending boundaries of time and place. Bruce King compares the protagonist with Shakespeare's king Lear.

Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) created great controversy and violent protest. It has been banned in several countries and Ayatollah Khomeini dictated in a fatwa, a death sentence against its author. In this controversial work, he explores the theme of migration through the parallel lives of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. As a Diaspora writer, Rushdie transcends mere geographical and physical migration dealing with spiritual alienation and rootlessness (p. 61). The subject of Anita Desai (b. 1937), a remarkable novelist and proponent of a feminine sensibility, has been solitude and alienation. She usually dealt with private lives of people in general and women in particular. *Clear Light of the Day* shows the importance of home and family. Tara and Bim are two sisters who differ in their attitudes and temperaments. Tara marries Bakul who is employed in diplomatic service abroad. There, they feel alien and return to India for reassurance of cultural identity. Bim sacrifices love and marriage and motherhood for life-long care of her aged aunt and retarded brother. She achieves symbolic motherhood and sustains family and home. *In Custody* explores the problem of alienation of an educated college teacher from his roots and culture. Baumgartner's *Bombay* (1988) is about India from foreign perspective. *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) describes the pilgrimage of three Europeans to India. It employs journey motif for the spiritual quest when shows the uncertainty of the diasporic condition. Sophie undergoes the intense diasporic experience. She remains with Matteo but she is unable to justify his spiritual craze. She bears him two children but shields them from their father's spiritual madness. By



juxtaposing Matteo's spiritual obsession with Sophie's rationalistic position, Anita Desai shows the inadequacy of both. She deglamorizes the Western craze for instant '*nirvana*'. Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985) deals with the migration of the Indians to England and disillusionment they often experience there. Dev comes to England to pursue his studies but he finds it very difficult to adjust with the alien surroundings. He is unable to bear the silence and emptiness of London. He feels trapped and racially conscious England questioning his choice of becoming "Macaulay's Bastard". However, he asserts that he was there to interpret India to them. Adit is a romantic admirer of England in the beginning but later he is drawn back to India the country which he called dirty and lazy. Sarah is an English girl married to Adit also faces identity crisis. She is romantically in love with India but when her husband expressed the desire that their child should be born in India, she felt shocked and surprised. She felt the sense of being uprooted. She accompanies her husband to India bidding goodbye to England. Anita Desai is also concerned with larger diasporic issues like inner alienation and uprootedness - rather than mere geographical displacement (p. 63).

Kamala Markandaya (b. 1924-2004) born of an Indian family and became a British citizen but her writings are anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist. Her *Some Inner Fury* focuses on cultural difficulties involved in an interracial relationship that develops between Mira and Richard Marlowe, an English man. Her novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) deals with the sufferings of the first generation immigrants in England. The protagonist of the novel Srinivas leaves his native land to settle in England but eventually, he finds that he belongs nowhere. Through flashback technique, she recounts Srinivas's past life in India juxtaposing it against his present sufferings in England. The novel deals with the issues of diasporic angst, psychological and physical displacement and hyphenated identity often experienced by the immigrants in an alien country (p. 63).

Bharti Mukherjee (b. 1940) who resides in America is a diasporic fiction writer who holds that migratory experiences have enriched expatriate

literary writings. In fact, her experience as an expatriate forms the main source of her writings. Her works also deal with the issues of identity, the notion of belonging, the feeling of alienation and rootlessness, migrations, dislocations and relocations.

According to Bharathi Mukherjee, "we immigrants have a fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are placed by civil and religious conflicts. When we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country".

Her first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) narrates the story of Tara who gets married to an American and returns to India briefly but finds that she is unable to connect herself to her motherland. She fails to adjust with the things once she loved and admired in the past; she feels like an alien in her own city Calcutta. At last she returns to the USA the land of her adoption. The stories of *Darkness* (1985) present the experiences of Indian immigrants in the USA. *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) focuses on immigrants from various countries that form the American Salad Bowl. The novelist creates a vivid and complex tale of dislocation and transformation that take place in amalgam of two cultures. *Leave It To Me* (1997) is the story of a female child abandoned by a hippie mother from California. The girl child who becomes a young woman goes in search of her roots and true parentage. The revenge story is interwoven with the question of identity presented through twin motifs of Kali and Electra. Here the novelist explores the hyphenated individual's dilemma in the multi-ethnic USA. *Jasmine* (1990) is the story of a rebellious girl Jyoti who rebels against the conventional set up of the traditional society. She goes to the USA where she becomes Jasmine, a personification of Americanness. *Heat and Dust*, a Booker Prize winning novel, is by Ruth Jhabwala (b. 1927-2013). It



discusses India and its effects on the Westerners. Jhabwala's disillusionment is also evident in her short stories. She is critical of those who romanticize India and turn to the East for the spiritual search. She abhors exoticism that often attracts the Westerners to India. She is equally critical of the Indians who run after western materialism. Ruth Jhabwala is a non Indian writer writing from an objective, intelligent observer, satirical commentator and close investigator of the Indian ways of life. She has described the theme of East-West encounter and explored the theme of expatriation in India. She portrays psychological turmoil of the expatriates in her works with rare insight (p. 66). Anita Desai's daughter Kiran Desai (b. 1971) immigrated to the USA at the age of 14. Her work *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1999) was her debut which earned her quite a remarkable acclaim. Kiran, in spite of her split residential situations, feels at home in India. India is her hermitage and it throbs in her blood (p. 66). Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967) was born in London to Indian parents who moved to the United States after her birth. Her *Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* is a story of a Pakistani scholar who visits an Indian family in the New England. Lahiri shows in this story that the Indian family and the Pakistani scholar experienced "single silence and a single fear". They forgot all differences that the two countries always experience. In *The Third and the Final Continent*, Lahiri sums up the diasporic experience by suggesting that assimilation is the only solution for survival in an alien land (pp. 66-67). Like Jhumpa Lahiri, Anjan Appachana (b. 1972) is an Indian migrated to US. In her novel *Listening Now*, each chapter is narrated through the perspective of different characters involved in the life of Padma, the main character who has experienced tragic love, involving an illegitimate child and rejection by her lover. The author here maps the lines of urban middle class women who are caught between traditions and modernity. Her works do not directly deal with diasporic situations but she objectively views the entangled lives of urban, educated middle class women reflecting on gender relations (p. 67). Anita Rau Badami (b. 1961) moved to Canada in 1991. Her first novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996) is based on her own life. The novel presents

different perspectives of the mother Saroja in India and that of the daughter Kamini in Canada. It portrays the cultural affiliation versus individual desire. Her second novel *The Hero's Walk* illustrates the emotional tensions that underlie current notions of the South Asian diaspora. For Badami, Canada has become her home and Canada stands a muted presence in all her works that represent both freedom and possibility

The word Expatriate has assumed importance as a legitimate literary term in commonwealth literature. The term deals with many connotations like Diaspora, emigration, nationality, ethnicity, marginality, hybridity, etc. It means the strong feelings about the country of origin for the migrants of first generation. While for the second generation the ties and bonding with the homeland gradually gets replaced by the adopted alien country. As the second generation is born and brought up in that adopted foreign atmosphere they feel that as if their own. There exists a distinction between immigrant culture and ethnic culture and identity, because certain elements constitutes markers of identity likewise, food, clothes, language retention, religion, music, dance, customs of individual community, rites, traditions etc. These characteristics can be retained, discarded or adopted differently at different point of time and places but the feeling of oneness and a tug of roots always persist even after several years and sometimes centuries

An expatriate writer settles to the ethnic identity when he undergoes with the trauma of rejection in an alien culture. As Vinay Kirpal observes "Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these migrants in the new world" (Kirpal 165). An expatriate author who lives away from his homeland aims mainly at his homeland and past, in his works. Therefore an expatriate Indian writer living abroad aims at Indianess. His sensibility as a diasporic writer forces him to select Indian sensibility as his theme in his works. A number of Indian writers in English have received international recognition. Their works are well received in the world. They have created a unique form of literature with new themes and



diverse techniques in their works which have identification with the new culture, place and people.

To understand the expatriate sensibility, it is necessary to understand the psychology of artists in the recently liberated Third World Countries who are striving to find out a new identity. The expatriate sensibility of the writer can select any theme related to his country, historical background, political and social life or his own personal experiences. Search for identity and clash of cultures are the popular themes in the contemporary fictional works. As Rushdie sees it, "The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles...we are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslim who eat pork" (Rushdie 15). A statement like this can be made, only by one who has actually crossed borders and is confronted by the representations of his or her choice, assailed by guilt, for whatever reason, and wonders whether the choice made was really worth it. Such is the pain that the immigrant must bear, the 'sense of losses, the need to reclaim.

Jasbir Jain, on the other hand, opines that diaspora is not merely a scattering or a dispersion but an experience determined by who travels, where, how, and under what circumstances. Past (homeland) and Present (the land of adaptation), crop up between the imaginary and real. Loneliness, isolation and 'ghettoisation' go hand in hand with success, affluence and recognition. Self is constituted through the multiple pasts co-existing in the present. She observes that the condition of isolation and separation, the state of schizophrenia and frustration provides a background for the sense of identity. Jain further talks about the two aspects of the diasporic experiences –positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that it reflects Indianess, history and identity and negative because it acts like a buffer. In her opinion self is both affected by and affects identity. Self is a deeper core and is constituted of many factors. The 'self' develops after the act of dislocation and it relates to the new environment as it negotiate the past, the cultural inheritance, geographical and historical memories and challenges of present. Paranjape, while theorizing Diaspora in a time of globalization, identifies two categories of

diaspora- the doubly privileged and doubly underprivileged. He has a word of caution about Diaspora creativity threatening to submerge native Indian English creativity; diaspora substituting the homeland, and emphasizes the necessity to resist and counter the hegemony of diaspora text. Dwelling upon the structure of dislocation he observes that a Diasporic journey is impossibility with diaspora's two-fold motif of holding on to the old and inviting the new. Theorizing two-dimensional hybridity, away from and towards India, he advocates a synergy of diaspora and homeland and interrogating of diasporic discourse with sharing and difference. Makarand Paranjape concludes with the argument that India is an 'Idea'; the idea of mind and spirit, not a territory only, and an Indian diaspora has a mystic relation with the homeland. Indians abroad, like Jews, will never be able to forget their homeland or motherland.

Geeta Mehta has struck her roots in Indian political sphere. Because of the journalistic background she has, her works feature her keen political insight. She attained perfect knowledge about the cultures of three countries. She has also acknowledged various social issues in her works.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy has made greatest impression on the readers and critics in the west as well as who have made the maximum influence and impression in Delhi. Roy's international, critical and commercial success in 1997 radically changed perceptions of Indian writing in English, and not just in Delhi. Roy's book was immediately recognized as a major literary achievement. It won the Booker and stood at the top of New York Times bestseller list for several months.

It is an inseparable part of Indian writing in English. Expatriate writing is an off-shoot of globalization, of mass migration, of diaspora, the gap between different worlds, bridged vast oceanic distance between East and West, and also provided the necessary angst that inspires much literature of today.

The diasporic tension is not only spatial (torn between nation/cultures) but also temporal (split between the past and the present). Homi Bhabha has



also underlined the pain involved in the act of remembering: remembering is never a quite act of introspection or retrospection. It is painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. In Indian panorama, this specified area enwraps the uprootedness of people from their native lands to serve the British Empire, and in post colonial situations, people from the third world countries left for the developed countries leaving their home lands. This immigration caused these immigrants an experience of sense of uprootedness and unbelonging in the new lands. This plight of Diaspora reflected in writings. Diaspora writings have portrayed specific conflicts revealing the heterogeneity of Indian culture.

Diasporic Studies as an academic discipline lies at the intersection of several increasingly powerful developments in new literatures. Interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship has become prevalent to represent a dominant intellectual norm. The use of this new scholarly methodology to meet new academic needs and illuminate new subject matter has given rise to several discourses such as women's studies, Native American studies, African American studies, gay, lesbian, transgender and global studies.

There has been a growing recognition, both inside and outside academia, that global reality is incorrigibly and irremediably plural and that responsible research and pedagogy must account for and accommodate this fact. The study of the dynamics of racial and ethnic groups who have been denied, at one time or another, full participation, and the full benefits of citizenship, in different societies are worth debating. They are fascinating in themselves, and illuminate the entire spectrum of humanistic inquiry.

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