



REMAPPING EXILED AND THE DIASPORIC LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH

Dr.Ch. Anuradha

(Senior Lecturer in English, K.B. N. College, Vijayawada.)

Email: anu.varsharam@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT



The expatriate Indian writers are not a monolithic category and cannot be viewed as a single homogeneous group. Even their affinity and identification with India is of varying degrees of intensity ranging from a minimalist remnant of cultural memory to a deeply missed immediate reality, thus differentiating writes of one nation from another whenever they have settled, and one generation from another within nation. The study of this paper "Remapping exiled and the diasporic literature in the context of indian writings in English" presents the burgeoning existence of the Diaspora Indian writing in English across the continents.

Keywords: *Expatriates, Diaspora, Identity, Quest for Heritage, Cultural Identity Etc.*



Theories drawn from Diasporic Studies are being increasingly pressed into service to interpret the writers of Indian origin who have settled in countries such as the US, Canada, England, Australia, Caribbean, Africa, Far East, and other parts of the globe. The demographic profile of the 25 million Indian diaspora spread across 110 countries in the 8 major regions of the world has yielded, over the years, a rich harvest of writers who attract popular and critical acclaim on the international scene. Their writing has been substantial, significant, and complex enough to call for a regular ongoing critical consideration.

The expatriate Indian writers are not a monolithic category and cannot be viewed as a single homogeneous group. It is essentially a composite cultural context, drawing from different nations, cultures and societies, with of course; the single thread of Indian background running through this variegated this grouping. Even their affinity and identification with India is of varying degrees of intensity ranging from a minimalist remnant of cultural memory to a deeply missed immediate reality, thus differentiating writes of one nation from another whenever they have settled, and one generation from another within nation.

In general, the study of the paper presents the situation of these writers who enables them to leverage their experience of living on the cusp of cultures, their happy or unhappy positioning bestowing upon them a privileged perspective of outsider/insider, mixing cultural memory with desire in a hundred different ways. Most of the time their marginality in their host nations enables them to strike a chord of homelessness of the modern individual.

The paper explores how their writings range from expression of postcolonial angst, immigrant experience, and caught-on-the cusp syndrome or outsider/insider perspectives. It is recognized that these writers call for a few new critical discourse that will, to begin with, renegotiate the ideas of citizenship and the politics of belonging and of culture, and evolve a new idiom to include their new, vastly diverse diasporic concerns. Questions of history and heritage somehow interwoven, by and large, with the identity of émigré writing in a way

that is more urgent than it is with the stay-at-home Indian writing. Expatriate Indian writers in English invariably been the standard bearers in the interrogation of the hegemonic structures during the postcolonial era.

The paper tries to explore the literary background of the Indian writings in English since its inception. It randomly makes the survey of its origin, growth its implications and ramifications were discussed at length giving importance to Indian – American Diasporic writers. Since time immemorial Indian Diaspora has been an interesting subject and topic of discussion. In each and every genre of literature, writers have experimented with this concept of Diaspora by giving it different terms such as migration, immigration, dispersion, overseas Indians, Nomads, Refugees, Exiles and so on. However, the term literally means to scatter, to spread or to disperse. Through their writings, these writers make a conscious effort to re-establish and cultural patterns whose roots have been traced back to India and this leads to the revival of renaissance of Indian culture. Diaspora writing is the one which covers every continent and part of the world. In this regard, the chapter focuses on diasporic writing has been spread from Caribbean islands to Australia and made a significant contribution in the field of different genres.

Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri reflections were made on how migrations have resulted in building up Diasporic communities which share the common sense of rootlessness and experience of agony due to homelessness in a new land. The central theme of Lahiri's fictional aura is Indian-American life and the dilemma in the lives of Indian immigrants who encounter problems such as identity crisis, alienation, nostalgic feeling etc. In the *Namesake* she plays a role as an impersonal detached storyteller. She pays a visit to the Bengali immigrants in America where the state of exile is cultural as well as emotional. The Diasporic themes such as the uncomfortable position of the immigrants, the large gulf between the developed world and India and between family tradition and individual freedom are reflected in the *Namesake*. *Difficult Daughters* by ManjuKapur, presented an argument by attempting to explore the theme of gender representation within the discursive



parameters of a nationalistic discourse. The novel may be considered as an autobiography which traces the destiny of its female protagonist through the trajectory of nation's history, presenting a postcolonial critique of imperialism through the collective experience of freedom struggle in the Indian nation, as and how it refracted through the saga of individual women's lives. The chapter explores the question of women's indemnity and subjectivity in context of the cultural and political formulation of a nation in process.

In *Desirable Daughters*, by Bharati Mukherjee the Immigrants have envisioned tales that exhibit experiences of independent and emerging countries. Cultures have taken up new form in the contemporary times, where the issues of Diaspora, globalization, consumerism, transnationalism cultural hyberidity and identity crisis have become new motif in the postcolonial literatures. The new issues give rise to identity crisis that evokes feelings of an individual that portrays socio-cultural setup that shows the blend of tradition and modernity. The new identity creates problems for Tara in *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee, where she is alienated, languishing in the angst and ennui of the diasporic experience, yet to carve out a niche for herself. Bharati Mukherjee has struck a balance between tradition and modernity by representing past and present which is achieved through the female protagonist -Tara, who severed her links with tradition but remains tied to her native country. Tara is influenced by ancient customs and traditions, but is rooted to modern customs. She is conscious of her existential predicament which is mirrored in the epigraph.

Migrants not only take with them their skills and expertise to their new locales, but also their culture, living styles and collective memories. Over the ages, this has been a common thread, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity. Over the past two millennia, three broad patterns of migration have occurred: ancient and medieval migration to colonial powers; migration to the industrial nations immediately after World War II; and recent migration to developed countries for better career opportunities and living conditions, where the internet, affordable airfare, and cheap

communications help to maintain close ties with one's homeland. The phenomenon that is human migration is best captured by the term we have all come to know as "diaspora".

The term diaspora is derived from the Greek words, "dia", which means "through," and "speiro" which means, "to scatter." Literally, "diaspora" means scattering or dispersion. It was originally used to describe the dispersion of Jews after their exile from Babylon in the 6th century BC, and later to refer to all Jewish people scattered in exile outside Palestine. Today it has come to describe any group of people who are dispersed or scattered away from their home country with a distinct collective memory and a myth of return. There is no ambiguity about the term when it is used in relation to the Jewish people, but once it is applied to other religious or ethnic groups, it becomes difficult to make a clear distinction between what is a migration and what is a diaspora, or between what is a minority and what is a diaspora. We do not use the term "British Diaspora" when discussing the presence of even recent descendants of British people in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada or the United States. They are simply Aussies, Kiwis, South Africans, Canadians or Americans, even though they meet most of the requirements of a diaspora. Nor is the term applied to the many German colonies established in Central and Eastern Europe, or in several Latin American countries. These colonies, in both Chile and Argentina for instance, continue to retain their Germanic identity – normally a key-defining feature of a diaspora, - but there is no reference to a "German Diaspora" in our lexicon. They are typically referred to as a "minority of superiority."

A diaspora is also characterized by the role played by a collective memory, which retains the historical facts that precipitated the dispersion or scattering, as well as the cultural heritage of the homeland, and is often religious in nature. The Indian Diaspora fulfills all these conditions. We maintain our family traditions of origin, but also are gradually subject to social, cultural and political integration into the host nation. We are acutely aware of our Indian (and regional) origins, but don't go much further than a sympathetic curiosity about them;



however, our personal identity is significantly affected by that awareness. We take an active interest in the general fate of India, and in important events in India. We perpetuate significant aspects of our Indian culture like language - most of us speak Hindi, as well as our mother tongues - and we maintain our religions and our tradition for weddings, upanayans, and cremations.

We maintain regular communications with our family and friends in India and send remittances back home on a regular basis. India is number one in the world, with over \$55 billion in annual remittances (China is second with \$50 billion). Lastly, we attempt to influence our host country governments to pursue policies favorable to India, such as the intense lobbying by the Indian Diaspora in the US to get a recalcitrant US Senate to approve the Nuclear Treaty. The Historical Evolution of the Indian Diaspora, which numbers around 30 million, goes back at least two thousand years.

Focusing specifically on Expatriate or Diasporic Writing from India, what is so special about it? How 'Indian' is it? And how authentic? How is the compromise between the old world and the new reflected in the work? Are these writers' true spokespersons for India? These are some of the questions that need to be answered. The expatriate writer, it is argued, remains in what may be called a state of animated suspension, insecure in his new environment, uncertain of his affiliations and his roots. In the expatriate condition, there is a loss of geographical landmarks, a de-territorialization which seems irreversible. With this "de-territorialization" comes a change in individual sensibilities. So we have "geographies of identity" (Lane) which are connotative of the alteration of the individual sensibility in a changed geographical space.

The terms 'expatriate' and 'diaspora' have today become synonymous and yet the two words have different roots- 'expatriate' originating in Latin and 'diaspora' in Greek. Expatriate, moreover, refers to one who is away from a native land. In a negative sense it also means exile. The earlier versions of expatriate such as exile, refugee, and emigrant are today subsumed under the umbrella term 'diaspora'. Likewise, the word 'diaspora' too has taken refuge under a number of new modern trends. The major

cause has been globalization and as mentioned by Appadurai it is the disjuncture between economy, culture and politics that has given rise to the growth of Diaspora(1991 206). Even if one does not accept this very economic angle, still one finds that there have been a number of discussions with regard to expatriate writing per se.

William Safran discusses the fact that the word 'diaspora' is used as a metaphoric designation for several categories of people- expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities(1991 83-99). The expatriate minority community, according to Safran, shares certain characteristics such as heritage, memory idealization of homeland, personal relationship with roots, etc. Even though many critics have variously criticized many of these traits they are significant developments in developing a body of thought with regard to expatriate writing diaspora.

Much of the work related to diaspora and the contentions with regard to the nature of writing have generally been confined to creative writing. However this paper is concerned with the constitution of a female body of writing that has been variously constructed under the aegis of two fields of literary criticism, namely 'Third World feminism' and 'postcolonialism'. Generally diasporic criticism discusses that aspect that a person's total identification with a nation may not lead to any problems.

According to critics in diaspora studies, it is however noticed that people who have problems of identity/nationality create what they call a new space. This can be substantiated by the words of Mishra: Within a nation-state citizens are always unhyphenated, that is, if we are to believe what our passports say about us. In actual practice the pure unhyphenated generic category is only applicable to those citizens whose bodies signify an unproblematic identity of selves with nations. For those of us who are outside of this identity politics, whose corporealities fissure the logic of unproblematic identification, plural/multicultural societies have constructed the impure genre of the hyphenated subject(1996 433).

In the contemporary field there have been a number of young scholars who are increasingly trying



to rebuild the Indian nation and its ideology and yet these seem to have occupied the niche of either being parts of the construction of a civil society or a secular nationhood and do not really address traditional or conventional notions of Indian culture and tradition. HomiBhabha and GayatriC.Spivak formulated ideas that formed the base of post-colonial criticism as they were provoked, to some extent, by Western perceptions, and academic circles. Yet a closer analysis of women critics reveals that they use the postcolonial trope to depict women's identities. They have re-imagined the notion of femininity and womanliness by analyzing what GayatriC.Spivak has called discourses of cultural specificity and difference. In this role they may also be addressing the issue of a globalized ideology.

Definitely the number of discussions that have emerged on the idea of nation has made it possible for us to know that the nation is a complex representation wherein there is enough space for change and dynamism. It is nonetheless recognizable that every nation has one fixed constituent, namely people. In the last two to three decades women critics writing from developed countries have tried to give a reading of the Indian woman. A person teaching English literature dealing with women would have encountered a plethora of Western feminist theories as well as the issues of patriarchy. It is remarkably refreshing to see how Indian women critics are opposing the western academia by their own reshaping and identification of 'the brown woman', by their re-vision of terms such as 'Third World' and 'Postcolonialism'. In their identification of the Third World women/South Asian women and the trope of Postcolonialism they may, to a great extent, be homogenizing their portrayal.

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