

Diaspora: A Global Perspective

Abstract

The postcolonial diaspora of the mid to the late twentieth century forms an important dimension of the post-colonial engagement with the globalisation of cultures. Post-colonialism in literature includes the study of theory and literature related to the coloniser – colonised experience. The people of India as well as the characters in Indian novels must deal with the economic, political, and emotional effects which the British brought with them and left behind. This paper focuses on the multiplicity of different dimensions of diasporic consciousness, along with the immigrant experiences of dislocation, relocation and the struggles and strife. There is a constant endeavour on the parts of critics and scholars to analyse the vision of migrants, which they study and understand in terms of their post-colonial vision and diasporic strife.

Keywords: Diaspora, Cultural Displacement, Identity Crisis.

Introduction

Diaspora is an emerging term in the world of literature, which nowadays is profusely used by the writers and litterateurs who have migrated from their homeland in pursuit of greener pastures and better prospects to the countries of different ethnic and racial groups in an alien land. Even from India, hundreds and millions of people have migrated to various parts of the world including England, Europe and America. There is a double sense of loss reflected in the writings of diasporic writers: one is their severed bond with the motherland and the other is their invariable struggle in their attempt to belong to the alien culture and society. Despite their sincere efforts, these writers suffer feelings of alienation, racial and social discrimination followed by a sense of rootlessness. Consequently, these diasporic writers, irrespective of the country they have settled in, suffer from psychic disturbances and mental trauma because of their anguish to re-find a home in an impersonal and alien country. Therefore, these diasporic writers explore and express psycho-spiritual vacuum with cultural displacement in their writings which are called expatriate writings or immigrant writings. Although, immigration is never a completely unpleasant experience as a few immigrants quickly succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, social and cultural environment but for many this assimilation is neither a smooth sailing nor a cake walk, as they are trapped in the quagmire of cultural conflict that inevitably leads to a sense of loss, feeling of nostalgia and their illusion of having assimilated the alien culture completely. There are many diasporic writers like V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee, who have undergone such experiences during their migration at one point of the time or the other. Approximately, there are twenty million people of Indian origin settled in 136 countries all over the globe, but by and large they do not want their children to adopt and absorb alien culture as they exhibit through their writings an unflinching faith in hereditary cultural and spiritual values which ought to be persevered for identity.

Diaspora of different historical periods and varied ethnic and cultural groups constitute an important voice throughout the history of migration but the diaspora of the mid-twentieth century profusely relevant and integral to the expiation and understanding of the post-colonial interaction, conflicts and assimilations with global cultures. Therefore, twentieth century diasporic writings cannot be completely comprehended and appreciated without its post-colonial dimensions. The post-colonial diaspora explores and deals with the issues of hybridity, cultural insularity, social disparity, racism, ethnicity and marginalization etc. Such post-colonial diasporic writings very prominently address conflicts and problems arising out of the transnational hiatus generated by the immigrant community oscillating between the attractions of 'home' and aspirations of 'house'. As Edward Said in his discussion in '*Orientalism*' focuses on the theory of migrant sensibility in which cultural politics becomes the central

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conflict when the orient moves towards the occident as there is a constant struggle for either a merger or to create a ghetto. In the course of this journey, either to belong or to make one acceptable, there is an obligation to develop a sensibility which can be turned as a compromise, negotiation and assimilation. Thus, diasporic writing explicitly reflects the hybridity of culture, as immigrant from the post-colonial society is trapped between the conflicts of two alien cultures that create cultural ambivalence. Homi Bhabha has aptly summed up this aspect of cultural clash in the *Location of Culture* where he says, such post-colonial diasporic writings refuse to:

Oppose the pedagogy of the imperialist noun to the inflectional appropriation of the native voice, preferring instead, to go beyond such binaries of power in order to recognize our sense of the process of identification in the negotiation of cultural politics (233).

Most of the literature on the Indian diaspora deals with the Indians who immigrated during this colonial period especially from 1830 to 1930. The foreign subjugation with its impact on Indian peasants, the natural calamities like famines, mixed with social and economic backwardness, resulted in large scale unemployment at home and acute labour shortage in sugar plantation of British and European colonies. The situation, especially after the abolition of slavery, in 1830 led to the indenture form of labour from India and other parts of Asia. V.S. Naipaul has beautifully dealt with the plight and life of such indenture labour because his grandfather migrated to West Indies as an indenture labour. So, throughout his writings, Naipaul has written strongly against this forcible, contractual form of labour which gets reflected in micro form in the house of Tulsi in his book *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Thereafter, this system of indenture labour was followed by Kangini form of labour in which some middle men with capital engaged the labourers and workers from their own group or caste. Such diasporic migration continued even in post-colonial period with the difference that these post-colonial diasporic immigrants were skilled middle class technicians and intellectuals like doctors and engineers. Their migration was especially towards the U.S., U.K. and to some other parts of Europe and Australia. These immigrants with professional expertise and technical qualifications migrated to the west for better prospects and better life style. There were double migrants and even triple migrants in which the East African Sikh community migrated to Britain which is called Ramgadhia Community and the Jat Sikh community directly from India. This is the period when major chunk of writing is focused on post-colonial Indian diaspora in which the rapid changes in socio-cultural patterns, ways of living, rapid changes in transportation and scientific development were the major forces of pull.

A quick survey of the literature on Indian diaspora like the writings of Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee reveal that

the cultural conflict, social alienation and double perspective are deeply rooted in cultural hybridity, ethnicity, migration and the resultant marginalization. As the writings of Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie show that the immigrating character is caught between the two cultures and consequently suffers from double consciousness that eventually takes him away from his parent home, culture, language and roots. This is how, Robin Cohen analysis the central emotion of home for the immigrants in general and the diasporic writers in particular. There is a repeated emphasis when Robin Cohen places diaspora's in the context of globalization, where the diasporic community is increasingly becoming overcrowded and anachronistic, thereby, making the national boundaries and parent home less important. Cohen describes the meaning of global diasporas when he quoted Avtar Brah:

Home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smell, its heat and dust, balmy summer evening, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations (Cohen 10).

Since, Cohen interprets 'home is where the heart is' in terms of mutual social and economic relationship and a matrix of daily experiences. So, it means a place of origin or a virtual community where intimate social relations are maintained or forged. So, the effect of this critical appraisal has been clearly mentioned by Cohen in terms of the definition of diaspora by Anthias and Soysal. In case of Anthias the global diasporas could not provide a place for gender-sensitive and anti-racist movement while, in Soysal case, it could not provide an access to the understanding of citizenship in Europe and elsewhere. However, according to Toloyan, a scholar and editor of journal *Diaspora*, an attachment to a locality or a place is central to the understanding of the concept of diaspora, as he says (as quoted by Cohen):

Diasporists like myself, who want to argue that attachment to place was indispensable to diasporic life and thought until very recently, and that despite its erosion it remains important today, must tread carefully in order to avoid the charge that we are either imitating discredited nationalist rhetoric about the link between land, people and culture, or that we remain naïve about the global spaces that have opened up in the past several decade (Cohen 11).

So, it is through this diasporic approach as beautifully expressed by Cohen that we can understand the vision and values of the socio-cultural history that signifies a collective trauma precipitating a cultural conflict, thereby, showing a struggle for gradual assimilation and search for identity. This is effectively analysed regarding the migrants who come in contact with other men and moments in the process of their search of dissolved identities and almost forgotten roots. This is reflected in the book of Stanley M. Stephen, "diaspora concepts shift from essentialist notions of homeland, national or ethnic identity, probe multiple belongings and address the conditions that allow people to inhabit more than one national space" (Stephen 12).

The diasporic writings written by migrant writers are expression of ambiguous existence, as the writer can neither forget his society, nor he can go back to his roots, except in an imaginary manner. Since, he is engaged in the process of reshaping his destiny in an alien tradition and culture, so his works reflects the inseparable tensions and cultural conflicts of different cultures forcing him to live in 'cultural symbioses'. As, Salman Rushdie beautifully explains, "by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, so that he has imbibed what may be termed as a fragmentary vision of life" (Rushdie 12).

By and large the Indian writers, other than Indian diaspora, have powerfully captured the pulse of the society during the colonial and post-colonial period. Bharati Mukherjee has expressed diasporic issues like construction of female identity, quest for fulfilment, alongwith the diasporic text that have been translated in terms of a cultural and racial melting

cauldron of values and human beings. As has rightly been contended by Antony Appiah:

Records the brutalities and the squalor of these dealings between people. As well as passions that yokes us together. What she offers as a model of cultural cross – pollination – alas, one cannot forever resist the temptation of allegory – is not a gentle melding but a more vigorous and a more bitter fusion (Appiah 7).

So, there is a constant and continuous debate regarding the meaning of the term diaspora and how the term is associated with colonial and post-colonial perspectives. It should be understood that diaspora is not merely a shift in geographical location; it is a cultural fusion, social and individual migration that in turn gives rise to adaptation, accommodation and eventual assimilation.

Reference

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