

# Indian Diasporic Literature in English

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**Abstract-** The present study is an attempt to present the Indian Diasporic responsiveness that statistics in Indian literature in English. It is a well-accepted fact that the basic theme of all literature is human being, his or her actions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and faiths. Literature deals with the number of sociological concepts, arrangements aesthetically. Diaspora literature deals with emigrant sensibility. It focuses on the lives of immigrants and their inner and external conflicts in an alien land. By highlighting issues like cultural predicament, quest for identity, multiculturalism and universal aspects of human existence, Diasporic Literature occupies an important status in the literary field.

## INTRODUCTION

Indian Diaspora was mainly a special choice of individuals, particularly for academic pursuit or economic gains either towards the Middle East or to the Western countries, particularly to U.S.A. The deportee did face a clash of opposing cultures, a feeling of alienation which was then followed by the attempts to adjust, to adopt, to accept and finally form a disconnect identity as a racial group to be assimilated and hence uncultured. All this is placed under the umbrella term of deportee Writing or Diasporic Literature.

The word 'Diaspora' is derived from the Greek word 'Diasperio' which means to distribute, to fling. The term originally associated with the Jewish chronological experience but today the term has acquired a more expanded meaning and it refers to common inherited homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration and a sense of peculiarity in the country of residence. This term cuts across various disciplines such as Sociology, Cultural Studies, and Political Science etc. On the background of globalization, the term 'Diaspora' raises the questions of acculturation, assimilation, the loss of identity etc.

The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration be, financial, social, political, no matter whether they

migrate for trade and commerce, as holy preachers, as laborers, convicts, soldiers, as expatriate or refugees, exiles, or as guest workers in search of recovered life and opportunities have shared some common things as well as differences which are based on their conditions of migration and period of stay in the adopted land. Mostly the migrants suffer from the pain of being far off from their homes, the memoirs of their motherland, the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonize the minds of migrants.

The expatriate literature also deals mostly with the inner quarrel in the context of cultural dislodgment. The immigrants away from the families swing between crisis and renovation. They are thrice alienated from the native land they left behind, from their new horde country and their children. Diaspora literature is in constant conversation with the metahome. The longing to regain lost home often culminates in the creation of a different description of home.

Nostalgia, loss, betrayal and duty are the basics of new homes as diasporic protagonist adjust to new countries. In adjusting to new countries, issue of acculturation and assimilation become the central point as these immigrants consult the unbalance of their hyphenated identities. Usually, the generation diaspora cling to food and clothes as the most apparent markers of Indianness that sets them apart and highlights their difference. The assertion 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 prevailing culture.

The terms 'Nation' and 'Identity' become necessary to examine the way of living life and human existence, in the past and present. Problems of the nation, identity, national identity, individual identity, etc. are the recent needs, which have surface, which were

never qualified by mankind in the past. The life that people lived in the past was mainly introvert with themselves and their families. It is not essential for one to take it for arranged that the problem of nation and identity take place in the life of person only when he accept migration and mobility. Since, it is a psychological feeling; there is a possibility of its experience even within his native land.

Identity becomes the core issue in any exploration of diaspora. The diasporic identity is based on the history or circumstances leading to migration, as well as the individual responses to these circumstances. There are some factors like language, dress, and socio-cultural environment that deepen the problem of nation and identity after immigration takes place.

V. S. Naipaul's characters like Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsamir from *The Mystic Masseur*, are instances of persons who are generation away from their original homeland, India, but their legacy gives them a realization of their past. They become examples of the outsider, the unhoused, for the world to see. Naipaul's characters are not governed by actual displacement but by an innate memory of disruption. For them, their native land India is not a geographical space but a conception of the imagination.

Literature of old generation of diasporic Indian writers like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhari, Ved Mehta,, mainly look reverse at India and hardly ever record their experiences away from India as expatriate. It is as if these writers have discovered their Indianness when they are out of India. Evidently, they have the benefit of looking at their homeland from the outside. The distance offers impassiveness that is so required to have a clear insight of their native land. Gradually, the old diaspora of indentured laborers is replaced by the new diaspora of International Indian English Writers live in the market driven world. The writers while portraying migrant characters in their imaginary tale investigate the theme of displacement, alienation, assimilation, acculturation, etc. The diasporic Indian writers' portrayal of dislocate characters gains immense significance if seen against the geopolitical background of the vast Indian subcontinent. That is exactly why such works have an international circulation and a lasting demand.

Two of the earliest novels that have efficiently depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's. *The Nowhere Man*. These novels reveal how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of 1960's isolates the character and deepen their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife and Jasmine* depict Indians in the US the land of immigrants both legal and illegal before globalization got its thrust. Salman Rushdie in his novel *The Satanic Verses* approach the metaphor of immigration by adopting the technique of magic realism. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* depicts Tilo, the protagonist, as an exotic character to reveal the migrant's distress. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* shows the extent of rootlessness encounter by character born and brought up on a foreign land. Amit Chaudhari, in his novel *Afternoon Raag*, portrays the lives of Indian students in Oxford. These writers also depict the positive aspect of displacement. There are benefits of living as a migrant, the opportunity of having a double perspective of being able to experience assorted cultural modes. It is often this advantage that enables diasporic Indians, particularly of the second generation; face the dilemma of dual identities. Such ambivalence produces existential anguish in their psychology.

Markandaya, had a strong dedication to expose cruel reality of life to effect the beloved change in society. Nationalism, detachment Poverty, Peasantry, Subjugated Women, Rural-Urban Divide, East-West encounter, Feudal Practices, Casteism, and Communalism were some of the theme quite closer to their hearts. All of them are well known for pragmatic portrayal of existing Indian life. Taking departure from the first generation of Indian English novelists, the postmodern Indian English novelists have concentrated on an completely new set of themes which are wide ranging and inclusive as the life in the age of globalization is immersed in the talented issues of globalization and subsequent multiculturalism, feminism, queer theories, diasporic emotional response, glamour, consumerism, commoditization, upward mobility, erosion of ethical values are some of main issues raised by fashionable novelists and short stories writers.

The problem of racial antagonism took a terrible form in America for the South Asians and especially

for the Sikh diaspora after 9/11 which has been obtainable by Chitra Banerjee- Divakaruni in her novel *The Queen Of Dreams* (2004) where a second generation Sikh young man Jaspal is given malicious punches by a few American youths, though he keeps on crying that he is an American like them. This is an unconfident situation of the diaspora identities, creates a question before the diaspora theorists of diaspora identities as to which nation do the diaspora actually belong. The nation which their parents and grandparents had once left to settle in the other one or the one that they had adopted and which never acknowledged them from the heart.

A few Indian diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* and in her short story *The Last and Final Continent* and Kavita Daswani in her *For Matrimonial Purpose* (2003) have portrayed positive aspects of diaspora experience which make wider the scope of the perception and bring change in the subjectivities of their characters. Through their protagonist they have described that cultural dealings not only opens new routes for them connecting to culture of new location and of their homeland but also makes them mobile carrier of cultures and ways of thinking to both the lands and more lands and make a good mixture of these, thus creating new third cultures and shaping third history.

Indo-American diaspora is one of the important diaspora which has exert the massive impact on the literary world and fashioned literary genius of our time. A basic reality for most of the first generation, Indian Americans is that they have grown up bilingual. Those who have had the benefit of being educated in English medium school have grown up with English as another 'native' language. Unlike Chinese, language was no hurdle for Indian immigrant. Their cultural traits, admirable knowledge, good work habits have earned them the label of 'model minority.' For a large section of an Indian immigrant community, the bonds to India endure. Their consciousness and sensibility include strong and highly differentiate regional consciousness, having to do with language, food, religious attachment, dress, etc.

Indian American literature is among the very 'young' literature in the United States, hardly forty years old. Writing by immigrants from the Indian sub-continent is associated with personal and communal individuality, memories of the homeland, and the

active retort to this 'new' world. Writers express their personal, ancestral identities and socio-political context, explaining how and why they come to be where they are and to write what they do. Ved Mehta's autobiographical inquiry in *The Ledge between the Streams* deals with his personal and familial detailed in an old fashioned way.

Bharati Mukherjee widens the autobiographical convention of Ved Mehta in quite different ways. Society is the subject matter of her memoir, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, co-authored with her husband. It is a work in which Mukherjee reveals her wistfulness for her home city.

Abraham Verghese's *My Own Country* is a moving memoir of how human contribution and engagement with a community make any place a home. This autobiography of a doctor specializing in infectious diseases, battling with AIDS patients in a small town in Tennessee, unfolds the satisfaction that many professional Indian Americans feel about their specialized work.

Poetry is not as popular as the novel or short-story but still, there is some major involvement by the Indian diaspora in Indo-American Literature. A. K. Ramanujan occupies an important place among Indo-American poets with a wish for connectedness and the absence of connection are the two facts of Ramanujan's poetic world. Meena Alexander's *Migrant Music* deals with belong and home which are created by the excavation and re-composition of the past. Agha Shahid Ali is a Kashmiri deport. The family of *Mirrors* is an extension of earlier immigrant themes. His *Immigrants of Loss* deals with universality of dislocation and sharply troublesome nature of American social hierarchies. Vikram Seth, a well-known Indian expatriate novelist has also contributed to his collections of poems like *The Golden Gate* and *All You Who Sleep Tonight*. Poets like Vijay Seshadri, Ravi Shankar, Maua Khosala, Prageeta Sharma have also contributed their literary talent.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the prominent refugee writers who reject the tradition-bound society of the East as she reaches out for the more empower and characteristic society of the West. Her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* depicts a young women's unsettling return home to Calcutta after years abroad. The wife is about the despair of an immigrant woman of middle-class Bengali origin devoid of her support

configuration in a foreign society. Darkness portrays the despair produced by the encounter with Canadian racism. Her *Middleman* and *Another Stories* reveal immigrant experience in US and Canada in ironic vein Mukherjee's later novel *Jasmine* shows the potential of remaking oneself in the New World.

American Born confused Desi (ABCD) is a term that refers to people of Desi origin, living United States. 'Confused' refers to their confusion, regarding their identity having been born in America or lived there since babyhood and been more closed to American culture than to their native culture. Their bonds in India are arbitrate by their parents. This second generation is more aware of struggles of people of color in the United States and attempt to review the inequalities of race and class. Another point that should be noted is that second generation women often find that they are subject to more affectionate demands and limitations than their male counterparts. Dating often becomes an scratchy issue in the lives of teenage daughters. Conflicts faced within the home by the Indian American women are the subject of Sushama Bedi's novel *The Fire Sacrifice* and is a inveterate theme of fiction and poetry in the recent anthologies.

The exclusive thing about Indian diasporic writings lies in the fact that the Indian diaspora differ from another diaspora. Unlike other Asian diaspora, the Indians, despite being 'Indian' do not reluctantly share a common faith, language, fare, dress, etc. The result is that the variety we have in India gets echoed in the literature of the writers of different background typically based on regions and sometimes on castes and religions.

Rohinton Mistry writes in a different way from Jhumpa Lahiri or other Indian writers living and writing abroad. Writers write about the customs, traditions, dress and cuisine, unusual to the region from where they come. In a way, they bring same rich miscellany that we have in India in their writings by portraying the microscopic details of their rites, dress, cuisine, etc. into the literature that they create. The comprehensive handling of the fish or the depiction of the vermilion in JhumpaLahiri creates 'Bengaliness' or Rohinton Mistry can portray Parsi habits and traditions. These regional sub-groups make Indian diasporic literature in English somewhat unique and different.

Unlike Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee - Divakaruni, and Sunetra Gupta, JhumpaLahiri is a class apart in the sense that her second generation diasporic location does not bond her to Calcutta (Kolkata) by birth. Born in London, raised in Rhode Island, Connecticut and presently living in New York, she deals faithfully with dislocation and disappointment of immigrant's lives also showing Bengali strain in them. All the nine stories of her debut literary work *Prophet of Maladies* set in America and India are unified by the pattern of exclusion, loneliness and search for fulfillment. They do not confine themselves only to the experiences of migrants and displace individuals. Though she speaks about universal appeal, most of Lahiri's Indian characters are Bengalis and her prose spotted with details of conservative Bengali names, food, cooking, and wardrobe, giving character and flavors to her stories. Also, as a Bengali, the idea of marriage loom large in her life. Lahiri initially drew heavily on her experiences of Calcutta as it gave her a discernment of her inheritance. Through this perspective, she credibly portrays the universal nature of human existence that goes beyond the boundaries of region, religion, nation, etc. Before analyzing her literary works, it is essential to take note of Jhumpa Lahiri's special and literary profile.

The study has attempted to examine the indication of Diaspora Theory and its aspects in literature by discussing Expatriate or Diasporic literature. It has analyzed the Indian contribution to diasporic literature in English to trace out the diasporic as well as recently emerged Bengali sub-group in Indo American Writing.

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