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EXPLORATION OF SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

We are confronting some of the global issues like Immigration, Cultural Conflict, Identity Crisis, Multiculturalism, loneliness, alienation and belongingness in the era of Globalization. This Research Paper manifests diasporic and multicultural experiences with the help of habits, foods, traditions and rituals that are different in two countries and cultures. Multiculturalism is not only concerned with the purely visible aspects of diversity but it probes into the inner psyche and philosophical implications of the character. The abstract of this paper explores the theme of cross cultural and sandwiched world where Indians are living in the host country and refused to give up their cultural roots. They still hope for assimilation and acculturation in new land. This paper mainly deals with the psyche of characters, their plights and sufferings, uprootedness and brings out stirring and teasing sense of identity.

Loss of Identity is one of the prominent global issues. Postcolonial immigration from Eastern part of the world to The Western, enhanced cultural diversity. Identity (cultural, political, social) becomes the issue of prime importance among these immigrants. It can be called the post-colonial movement for the existence of cultural and personal identity. Gradually evolved cultural conflict, a sense of belonging, loneliness, and alienation among these immigrants found its best expression in diaspora literature. Diasporic literature is the literature of minority communities living in exile. The literature often reflects the longing for a homeland.

In the 1990's the diaspora literature was noted for its immigrant subjectivities and the angst of the displaced. The questions of ethno-nationalism of the displaced become burning issues as the term 'diaspora' did not just signify the price of plight of the Jews, but the term was extended to ensconce multitude of ethnic, religious and national communities who found themselves living outside of the territory to which they were historically "rooted". Diaspora is also meant to overcome and redefine essential assumptions regarding concepts like hybridity nomadism and creolization. In the terms of Identity studies, these terms have risen beyond their essentialized terms and definitions; nevertheless, they also seek to celebrate the progressive potential of such positions.

The shorter Oxford dictionary defines "Diaspora" as "any body of people living outside their traditional homeland". Contemporary diaspora, according to critics, occupy the third space beyond the situated practice of place and the lived experience of history. If we look at the recent history of diaspora, we can understand that under colonialism, diaspora involved European movement leading towards colonial settlement indentured labour migrations (from the Indian subcontinent, China and other places to the West Indies, South Africa etc.), the relocation of African slaves to British colonies etc. The literature of the diaspora is of specific interest as the narratives speak about exile, displacements in space, time and history, the representation of the immigrant's psyche, feminizing the postcolonial landscape, nativist critique of Male Eurocentric history, theology of the oppressed and ethnographic feminism, etc, to drive home the point of displacement through the literature of resistance and subversion.

According to Amitav Ghosh the Indian Diaspora is "one of the most important demographic dislocations" of Modern Times and each day it is growing in its content, style and contexts. The literature of the Indian Diaspora constitutes a major study in the history of cross-cultural migrations which spanned over three centuries. The insights gleaned from these historical facts and subjective narrations are also important insights into diaspora theory in general. Examining both the "old" Indian diaspora of early capitalism, following the abolition of slavery, and

the "new" diaspora linked to movements of late capitalism, the renowned critic, Vijay Mishra argues that a full understanding of the Indian diaspora can only be gained in relation to the locations of both the "old" and the "new" in nation states. Applying a theoretical framework based on trauma, mourning/impossible mourning, specters, identity, travel translation, and recognition, Mishra uses the term "imaginary" to refer to any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously or unconsciously as a group in displacement. He examines the works of key writers, many now based across the globe in Canada, Australia, America and the UK – V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, Shani Mootoo, Bharati Mukherjee, David Dabydeen, Rohinton Mistry and Hanif Kureishi, among them – to show how they exemplify both the diasporic imaginary and the respective traumas of the "old" and "new" Indian diasporas.

The first Diaspora consisted of unprivileged and subaltern classes whose forced alienation was a one-way ticket to a distant diasporic settlement. Those days, the return to Homeland was next to impossible due to lack of proper means of transportation, economic deficiency, and vast physical distances. Such distances furthered psychological alienation and deepened the trauma of separation. Thus, the homeland became the sacred image in the diasporic imagination of most of authors belonging descended from this category of migrants.

However, the second Diaspora was the result of personal choices and the inclination towards material gains, professional and business interests. Access to privilege and technological advancement were the most compelling factors of the settlements of the second Diaspora. Compared to the first diaspora, the second diaspora considered immigration as part of their obvious choice and there were no compulsions to such a choice. Rather, immigrations were deemed to be a privilege rather than the forced exile. Vijay Mishra identifies V. S. Naipaul as the founding father of the old diaspora and Salman Rushdie as the representative of Modern (second) Diaspora. V. S. Naipaul remarkably portrays the search for the roots in his 'A House for Mr. Biswas'. In the same manner, Rushdie's 'Midnight Children' and 'Shame' are the novels of leave taking: from the country of his birth (India) and from that second country (Pakistan) where he tried, half-heartedly to settle and couldn't.

It is pertinent here to look at the debates revolving around various competing forms of writing the works of authors like Suketu Mehta, Amitav Ghosh, Tabish Khair, Agha Shahid Ali, Sonali Bose and Salman Rushdie confirm a hybridity, between

diasporic and domiciled consciousness. They are National, not Nationalistic inclusive, not patriarchal, respecting the local while being ecumenical, celebrating human values and Indian pluralism as a vital "worldliness."

These writers have not only narrated the concerns of spatial and cultural displacement but also tried to retain the collective memories, visions and myths about their original homelands. They also feel themselves at the periphery of an alien culture where they are located and feel the pangs of not being fully accepted and drawn into the foreign land where they live their lives. The nostalgia that the harbor is an also an interesting factor in their writing as they feel that their ancestral land is their true land where they should eventually return. This preservationism is very well brought out in M.G. Vassanji's 'The Gunnsack', where the memories of the lost motherland are shored against the narrative ruins. The writers also continuously and persistently relate to their homeland in one way or the other and their ethno-communal consciousness is sustained and nurtured by such interactions.

However, the dominant elements in South East Asian Diaspora writing deal with the British empire and its legacy, struggles for independence, the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan and the unprecedented violence accompanying the migration of Hindus and Muslims across the new borders, the Bangladeshi war for independence from Pakistan, the continuing conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil minority, racism and the caste system, ongoing communal violence, the experience of plantation laborers, and life as immigrants in new countries. More generally, the literature interrogates notions of nationalism and trans-nationalism, identity and language, the individual and the collective, authenticity and hybridism, home and homeland, and the collision of the ancient and the modern.

Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines' has exemplified the transmogrified realities the Diaspora has to live with. In the novel, as he discusses the partition of Bangladesh and the communal tension that followed, he also narrates the trauma of the individual's attempt to locate the boundaries of one's homeland. While he questions the notion of boundaries and nations, he reaches a philosophical view that boundaries are basically shadow lines in our lives. Rushdie carries another interesting message of a migrant arriving "unstuck from more than land" as he runs from pillar to post crossing the boundaries of time memory and History carrying "bundles and boxes" always with them with the vision and dreams of returning homeland. But eventually, Rushdie also

narrates that homeland as just a piece of lingering memory, and not a reality and that the possibility of returning to the homeland, both physically and emotionally, becomes almost a metaphorical wish (Imaginary Homelands).

Interestingly, the diaspora authors disseminate many maps of reality for multiple readerships. Besides, the writers are equipped with memories when they narrate the combination of real and imagined memories that they glean from their transnational experiences as well as their dreams of an imaginary homeland. Suketu Mehta's novel 'Maximum City' articulates the fact that the idea of home is not a consumable entity. He says:

"You cannot go home by eating certain foods, by replaying its films on your TV screens. At some point you have to live there again." (Mehta, 13)

Diasporic writings are hybrid; they also provide new angles to reality; they provide new nuances to the geographical and cultural structures of feeling; this hybridity is subversive as it resists cultural authoritarianism and challenges official truths. The most relevant feature of diasporic writing is that it forces, interrogates and challenges the authoritative voices of time with an unassailable irreverence towards mainstream history.

Similarly, there are a number of novels by South Asian and British Writers which deal with the blatant reality of partition as the most traumatic experience in the history of two nations: India and Pakistan. Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice Candy Man' provides a seep into the cataclysmic events of the turmoil on the sub-continent during Partition, the spread of communal riots between the Hindus and Sikhs on the one side, and the Muslims on the other. Lenny, the eight-year-old child narrates the chain of events on the basis of her memory. How she learns from her elders and how she beholds the picture of divided India with her own eyes form the warp and woof of the novel. A fine blend of longing and belonging of a multiplicity of perspectives and a pointed nostalgia of mirth and sadness and of Sufism and Bhakti is epitomized in the work of Aga Shahid Ali. Similarly the novels of Rahi Masoom Raja (in Hindi) narrate the woeful tale of Partition -the foul play of politicians, the devastated form of the nation and its people after Partition and longing for the home that has been.

From subversions of colonial history to memories of an imaginary home, from the travails of the physical journey to the mental mappings of borderlines, which melt into shadows, diaspora writings cover the huge panorama of experience

which stretches from the colonial times to the post-colonial now: It has to be said that Diaspora writings have very harsh critics at home, who point out the fact that it is material comforts and benefits that lured the second Diaspora generation abroad, and their "trauma" in exile is little more than a great tool to promote one's own marketability.

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