

Diaspora Literature and Modernity

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ABSTRACT:

The term diaspora comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “to scatter about.” And that’s exactly what the people of a diaspora do they scatter from their homeland to places across the globe, spreading their culture as they go. The Bible refers to the Diaspora of Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians or spread of any people from their original homeland in search of work, they were inclined to shift to some other place for the survival and livelihood. Diasporic Literature is written by the authors who lived outside their native land. Diasporic Literature is all about the Quest for Identity, Hybridization, Rootlessness and Nostalgia. Diaspora writers turn to their native land for many reasons. Diasporic Literature plays a vital role as it deals with the complexities of culture, roots and making adjustments with the other civilization.

According to Homi Bhabha Diaspora is, “Gathering of exile, immigrants and refugees in foreign culture and foreign land. Gathering of the past in ritual and revivals and that gathering in the present.”

KEYWORDS:

Diaspora, Identity, Immigration, Nostalgia, Rootlessness.



The Literature of any language usually works as a channel between the cultures to understand each other. Diasporic literature has its own language to express themselves, the language of feelings, emotions, necessity and is not about any fancy imagination but the experiences of the people at the ground level, it is about their

suffering, the way society treated them, the lack of confidence to express themselves and moreover will the readers understand their plight of suffering.

Diasporic literature deals with the real experiences and the way of expression will also be real from within the individual personality of each diasporic writer. Now in 21st century we witnessed a worldwide dispersion of vast population fleeing from their native land to foreign land for more beneficial economic opportunities, as a matter of prestige, cultural conflicts and to have a unique status in the society. Now the term diaspora has taken an expanded meaning to include any group of people leaving outside their native or homeland. It refers to the people who were voluntarily or forcibly exiled to some foreign country in search of better life, suffered from the nostalgic longing for their past life and struggle to pressure their culture religious beliefs and above all the identity of their former land along with the adjustments to be made in the country where they are living now and follow the local culture in terms of food, clothing etc.

In modern context diaspora can be treated as multiculturalized. The people who migrated not only settled in new territories but took with them the form of their native land, its culture, values, religious beliefs, social norms, attitudes from the country in which they have been born. So a multicultural community was formed and they started to live a life with the past then with the present and future having an emotional attachment with their original culture.

Diasporic literature raises questions regarding the definitions of home and nation. The writers often tried to locate themselves in new cultures but most of times they are not accepted. It becomes an important question to them about the nature of the relationship with the work, it also explores questions of identity, nation, absorption,

assimilation and adaptability in their art of writing.

The issue of diaspora, identity crisis, alienation, cultural liberty, globalization, transnationalism have become the primary motif for the diasporic writers. The self dislocation from its roots to discover identity in the transnational and transcultural space.

The diasporic writers whose writing are about the quest of identity and related aspects can be seen in the works of Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander and many other writers.

Salman Rushdie born in Bombay having lived in many countries embodies the diasporic experience in his works his, "Imaginary Homelands," is a collection of essays and lectures offers an insightful reflection on migrant conditions, search for identity in a multicultural world. It deals with the connection's disruptions and migrations between eastern and western civilizations. "Imaginary Homelands," is a collection of 70 essays over an astonishing range of subjects. It begins with an image of photograph in the room where he writes, it is a picture of the house in which he lived as a child taken before he was born, and he keeps it there to remind him, "that the past is home, albeit is lost home in the last city in the mists of lost time". Rushdie visited his father's house after a long time and saw that it was not in black and white but in glorious technicolour and wishes to restore the past. Rushdie argues that the migrant whether from one country to another from one language or culture to another or even from a traditional rural society to a modern metropolis. The essays talk about how writers use memory to reconstruct their past from the homeland.

V.S. Naipaul occupies a prominent place among the most celebrated diasporic writers and a leading novelist of English-speaking Caribbean identity in which 'roots' has been erased and new

ideas and ideologies. V.S. Naipaul can be regarded as the hybrid colonised native, half native, and half westernised unsatisfactory identity of diasporic. Naipaul's grandfather immigrated to West Indies as an indentured labourer and his father Seeprasad Naipaul was an unsuccessful journalist in West Indies. Naipaul was born in West Indies but had the Indian culture, beliefs, and traditions at home. Though he was a third-generation expatriate but still struggle to cut off himself from the roots of his ancestral home land India, he considers himself as a nomadic, who belongs to no country. He visited India and wrote a first travelogue on India, "As an Area of Darkness" in 1964 subtitled as 'Experience of India' here he experiences a sense of disillusionment a quest for family roots and describes the land of his ancestors as an area of darkness where nothing appears to be astir with life.

Naipaul deals with the crisis of identity in many of his works. A House for Mr Biswas, In A Free State, The Mystic Masseur, in all these novels' identity plays a vital role as he belongs to the Caribbean society where identity was completely destroyed by the colonization. He presents the colonial existence of diaspora and the theme of dislocation and loss of identity. In the Mystic Masseur Ganesh, the protagonist changes his name to Gareth to be considered and identified as a local person in the foreign land.

Anita Desai is one of the most significant writers in Indian English literature known for the portrayal of alienation and identity. She did not experience the physical dislocation but her multicultural heritage with a German mother and Bengali father gave her an outsider's perspective which influenced her writing.

As a diasporic writer, she states, "I feel about India as an Indian, but I suppose I think about it as an outsider"

Desai's is writing is the exploration of sensibility; grapple

with the thoughts, feeling and emotions. 'Cry, the Peacock' is her known novel the story of Maya and her married life with Gautama. The whole story is a remembrance of past things by Maya herself to discover some meaning in her life. 'Invoices in the City' is a story of three siblings Manisha, Nirode and Amla are seen in their quest for identity and meaning to their life. In Bye Bye Blackbird the writer vividly projects the prison- physical and psychological in which the coloured immigrant in Britain is caught, both the difficulties of adjustment there and those of return to India.

Jhumpa Lahiri is known as one of the celebrated diasporas known for her insightful portrayal of the immigrant experiences. She was born in London to Bengali parents and was brought up in Rhode Island. Her writings deal with the complexities of identity, belonging and displacement that come with being part of a diasporic community. Her characters often blend elements of Indian and American cultures, nostalgia for their homeland and the sense of rootlessness.

The protagonist Gogol Ganguly in, 'The Namesake', suffers from identity crisis. His name his father's immigrant past, makes him feel like an outsider in America. So, he decides to change his name as Nikhil but still unable to escape from his past.

'The Interpreter of Maladies' is a collection of short stories reveals her admirable grasp of presenting two different cultures in one country, it is really marvellous way to express in depth feelings and emotions. Through these short stories she puts an effort to describe about Indian immigrants and their diasporic feelings as she herself has experienced the life of foreign land. So, she has a deep understanding and awareness of diasporic and its related issues. So, Lahiri's characters suffer from nostalgia for their own country, as a sign of seclusion and displacement in a strange country

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian born American novelist and short story writer. She wrote about the cultural changes and alienation in the immigrant experience. In 1966 she moved to Canada and in 1989 became a professor of teaching post colonial and world literature at the University of California.

Her first novel 'The Tigers Daughters' deals with Tara the protagonist as an immigrant who was sent to New York for her higher studies. Tara fell in love with an aspiring American writer David Cartridge marries him and settles in New York. After seven years she returned to India to reconnect with her parents, her roots and her Bengali culture. In the novel 'Wife' Bharati depicts to glorify the alienated individual, the protagonist Dimple Basu kills her husband at the end of the novel to be fully recognised as an American as she felt it has her status. She experiences dramatic emotions and sinks into the world of isolation. It is the story of many people who migrate to America from India to have fantasy life in America with full of comfort and failed to recognise the inner self and blindly imitate the culture and attempts to become a total American and forgets that they cannot completely cut off from their roots of native land.

Bharati Mukherjee has achieved great recognition as a diasporic writer through her own cross-cultural experiences as an expatriate in the United States.

Meena Alexander was an Indian American poet known for her works with an exploring theme of identity and migration. She was born in India, persuaded her education in England and settled in New York. Her writing explores the themes of memory. Identity plays a significant role in her writing as she spent her life in India Africa Europe and the United States. She has published many volumes of poetry, two novels and a memoir. In her poem, 'Migrant

Memories' she expresses about the act of remembering one's half forgotten past that is not entirely lost but which still lingers half impressionability in our minds. Here her thoughts are unconnected and are stitched together by the very act of remembering them. In 'I Root My Name', she delves into the diasporic experiences with the focus on displacement the search of belonging and the struggle to establish a connection to one's ancestral roots despite the life of mobility and change as she herself had the personal experiences of life lived in a foreign country.

To conclude with the immigrants merged to other country in search of identity or home they left the home and ended up in finding no home. The comfort, the belongingness, love, nurture and many other related aspects can be enjoyed only in homeland because we have the rights as it is mine. But when one shifts to the other foreign country whatever may be his position, his achievement, his dedication, his wealth, but in or the other aspect he will stand as an outsider to the native people irrespective of his contributions made to that country. This is what the feeling and experience of many diasporic writers and immigrants. Many of them return to India to their homeland after spending some years to reconnect themselves with their roots and culture.

Diasporic literature deals with the modernity and modern writers but the emotions are as old as culture. One cannot scatter from his or her roots completely as they are inbuilt in our blood. One can look modern from the outlook but internally cannot deny the fact or belongingness and cannot dare to completely forget about roots, culture and identity.

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