

INDIAN DIASPORA: ETHNICITY AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY

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Abstract:

Indians have migrated to different parts of the world over a period of time. A lot of Indians migrated to European countries during the British rule for different reasons. People from different states of India also made their trips to England and other European countries for higher education and other industry related assignments. With the passage of time, many European countries evolved themselves into a multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. After the World War II, Indians travelled to many European countries for different reasons and became an integral part of the European canvas. Those Indians who migrated and settled in European countries came together and formed an Indian group because of which their original heterogeneous identity got affected. Their heterogeneous multi-regional, linguistic, religious and cultural identities underwent a change. In spite of that, a lot of efforts have been made to maintain their own identity intact through the diasporic literature. Efforts were also made to maintain their own identity by developing their global identity an Indian Diaspora. An attempt has been made here to analyse and study the theme of ethnicity and diasporic identity in the literature.

Keywords: Migration, Indian diaspora, diasporic identity, assimilation, ethnicity, the Globalized assimilation etc.

Introduction:

The Diasporic Literature has occupied a very important place in the literary circle. Attempts have been continuously made to express the vocal sufferings through the diasporic literature. In the light of this fact, it becomes essential to know how Indians have migrated to different parts of the world over a period of time. A lot of Indians migrated to European countries during the British rule for different reasons. People from different states of India also made their trips to England and other European countries for higher education and other industry related assignments. With the passage of time, many European countries evolved themselves into a multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. After the World War II, Indians travelled to many European countries for different reasons and became an integral part of the European canvas. Those Indians who migrated and settled in European countries came together and formed an Indian group because of which their original heterogeneous identity got affected. Their heterogeneous multi-regional, linguistic, religious and cultural identities underwent a change. In spite of that, a lot of efforts have been made to maintain their own identity intact through the diasporic literature. Efforts were also made to maintain their own identity by developing their global identity an Indian Diaspora. The group of migrants in the European countries are called 'cultural or ethnic minority' and are considered as a part of 'Cultural Pluralism' or 'multi-culturalism'.

The term 'Diaspora' has been derived from a Greek word which means 'dispersion'. The origin of the Indian Diaspora has been

the regional social structures of the emigrants and migrants. It is on the basis of regional cultures and languages in European countries, Indian migrants established Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, Telugu and other such Diasporas. But when we speak of Indian Diaspora, all these regional cultural groups feel themselves as a part of it. Indian Diaspora is therefore a shared cultural heritage of Indians. The circles or associations formed by Indian migrants in European countries created the feelings of belonging to the Indian cultural heritage which helped them to be in touch with India. The global use of telephone, transport and cyber technology has enabled them to develop the cross-border relations and trans-nationalism across borders. It is because of this, the term 'World Indian Community' is now recognized as Indian Diaspora.

Indian Diaspora in Europe:

Indian Diaspora is said to be the third largest diaspora after the British and the Chinese Diaspora. More than 25 million diasporic people have dispersed around the globe in more than 75 countries. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many Indians established their settlement in Central Asia and Russia. Most of them included the bankers and the traders. In spite of being migrated, India always remained their home and forefather's home for them.

The Indian diaspora gained its momentum during the 19th and 20th century when emigration began to take place. After the formation of the Republic of India on 26th January 1950, Indians began to migrate to the Western Hemisphere including Europe with a view to pursue higher education in different educational institutions.

After completion of their studies, many inidans secured jobs and settled themselves at the place where they took education in that respective country. The literary output produced by the diasporic writers shows that Most of the Diaspora writers have expressed their nostalgic memories about motherland in their piece of writing. The immigration to the foreign land is the root cause of Diaspora. Whether such mental state occurred while in home land is a moot question to be answered. If it is occasioned due to immigration and subsequent alienation in the distant land, it may have its roots in psychological outbursts. The Diaspora writers miss their mother land and its memories that lead them to feel nostalgic. Whether the psychological forces acted upon these outbursts is a question of further studies in this respect. The Diaspora literature needs to be seen through this perspective and therefore the dynamics of Diaspora studies have to be researched upon through different methodologies. Indian origin authors who have settled in foreign land mostly delineated their mental conflicts and disorientation in the alien atmosphere. Their characters denote a peculiar mental set up wherein dwells the dissected psychology. They crave for motherland is common and supreme in all these characters. The comparison of Diaspora between the person who has lost the homeland and who is native to his motherland is inevitable. The phenomenon of Diaspora which is peculiar to immigration and its aftermath needs to be seen in that perspective. It is the choice of the character to opt for a foreign land whether for comforts, luxuries or career advancement. No two different religions, societies, nations and culture can be assimilated

fully. There always occur a friction of ideas, value and material gain over a sort of ownership rights. The sort of friction is visible even in native land where different forces act together for a material gain. It is right to see different atmosphere in an alien land where people may not be supportive to that extent. The person who gets involved in that labyrinth of desires must accept certain aberration in the acceptance of the foreigners.

The conflicts of interest between the native and the displaced emerged as a focal point for more alienation and further promotion of a sort of enmity between them. The bone of contention between two different cultures may lie in economic prospects and enrichment. The novels of the Diaspora writers depict the characters who had suffered mental agony on account of social alienation in foreign land. They crave for proper and likeminded human company is a pre-dominant factor. Most of the characters are created to stir the emotions of total alienation. The major upheaval in their mind occurs due to non-acceptance; socially, culturally and mentally by the host country. The assimilation factor needs to be considered for more cohesion of two different components. Racial superiority has always been predominant factor since the times immemorial. England ruled over the country and they had a mighty force of racial superiority. The native people of pre-independent India suffered at the hands of the British for their racial superiority. How different is this suffering from the immigrants who have suffered the same mental pain and agony in an alien land? The scene of action may be spread over to different locations yet the mental conflicts remains the core issue. Immigrants

need to be mentally conditioned to accept certain abnormality in a foreign land because two different cultures and mental set up are at stake. This assists in softening the impact on the targeted culture and resilience on the part of the immigrants. A common strain discerns throughout all of the Diaspora literature. Bharti Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri may have common dilemma in their life but they both treat it differently. Both may have undergone similar situations where an individual relegated back in the face of nationalistic views. The first and second generation too plays an important part in depicting the characters. In effect, they employ a different methodology to treat their characters.

Their characters are different entities and cannot be boxed in a single element of alienation and isolation. The depiction of treatment meted out to the immigrants may take a one sided look because the other side is still undisclosed. That paves the way for more assimilation and breaking the barriers of racism. The pioneer of Diaspora discontent V.S. Naipaul promoted his literature based on his earlier experiences. Over a period of time, such experiences might have undergone sea change thereby arising need to treat it differently. Therefore, we can always ascertain different strategies of each Diaspora writers to deal with individual issues though common in strain. Almost all the immigrants had a particular dream to fulfill. Bharti Mukherjee's Jasmine had a particular dream and she fulfills it courageously and steadfastly. To fulfill such desires, they opted for other ways which may not be detrimental to their safety or others but assisted the process of achieving the goal. Such characters are

always noteworthy because they have suffered humiliation and are more eager to avenge the realization. The methodology adopted in depicting such characters is different from the methodology of V.S. Naipual or Kiran Desai.

Every immigrant may have faced dissimilar experiences hence this retribution of circumstances. Craving for motherland and recognition in an alien land is considered normal expectation and the host country may not be at peril to adopt it. Beyond all such considerations there occurs a most pious common thread of humanity which binds all of them together and it is this factor that has left the society dissected. The Diaspora fiction does not stress on humanistic outburst which may be treated as the other side of the story. The poetic justice may occur when the characters are brought at par with humanistic values and satanic forces to endure with. With greater magnitude of depiction of suffering in the Diaspora fiction, it is imperative to look for the roots of the restlessness and discontentment in the minds of the people displaced and felt alienated. Most of the host countries may not be altogether hostile to its guests; yet the peculiar situation undergone by some of the members may be looked into. Some of the experiences encountered by the Diaspora may exist at the parent country and no more weightage can be given to dissimilation in the foreign land. There occur different cultures, traditions, milieu and mindset of the host country which may jeopardize the progress of displaced people.

However, beyond regional boundaries, humanity must prevail which will eradicate all ills stagnated in the minds of the

people. There are countries where all races with different ethnicities are assimilated with great fervor and respect to mankind. Diaspora remains still a magnificent phenomenon where in people suffers, alienated, segregated and displaced causing great havoc to their mental set up. Diaspora sufferings have no significant mention and backing in the law of the land and it is up to the people to manifest its goodwill and understand the pain and agony of the displaced people with greater sympathy. Wide assimilation and resilience on the part of both the parties will pave the way for mitigation of most of the sufferings of the immigrants. The inculcation of moral and pious values since the childhood ingrains the mind of the individual and tends to be compassionate. The feeling of empathy creates wonder and encompasses the people at disadvantage and marginalize. There is an urgent need at global level to be compassionate and empathic towards the problem of displaced people and become tolerant socially.

The mental trauma undergone by the immigrants reflects in their writing and must be considered as catastrophe. Due to wide use of social media, the youngsters tend to be violent and at times cruel towards one another. Schools and Colleges must embark upon certain projects and research activities which focus on moral fabric and fortitude of the young minds. Stricter rules of law against the heinous activities perpetrated by the native people must be framed so that the people cohabit in a congenial atmosphere. The emergent research must point out ways and means to amalgamate people of different counties, religion, cultures and regions smoothly without any hatred

against any particular class or society. Most of the Diaspora writings involve depiction of sufferings of the displaced people. The Use of brutal forces and dominancy of native people is known to the mankind since times immemorial. The social institutions and reformers guided the society and its people for their virtuous behaviour. However, the pain and agony never subsidized. The tradition of violence and atrocities continued till date and there is no end to it.

Living in such fearful and tortuous atmosphere demands greater degree of social acceptance and the feeling of brotherhood. Only nurturing of moral values amongst the people can contain the hatred and pervert activities. Indian literature has vast repository of wisdom and moral precepts to address the issue of Diaspora. The Indian moral fabric treats guests as god and this feeling may be propagated across the continent so that universal brotherhood prevails and no immigrant is marginalized and alienated. The hostility between the native and the immigrant may cease by a consolatory approach and fellow feeling which may result into depiction of the other side of the immigrants' problem.

Conclusion:

In Diaspora writings pain and anger is anticipated due to displacement and loss of homeland. The creative writers in these realistic situations have justified their outburst and demanded treatment at par with the natives. This is going to be a farfetched solution as no native can fully accept the outsider with different minds set and culture. The host country needs to be more

accommodative in accepting the values of universal brotherhood. Indian ancient literature has already carved a niche in promoting those values which treats every creature with the milk of human kindness. When these values are nurtured, the trauma of the displaced will turn into blissfulness with communal harmony. Further studies on Diaspora must focus on such occurrences and experiences which may give a positive outlook to the complete scenario. The harsh realities may soon turn into a sense of universal camaraderie without jeopardizing the material and mental health of the host country. The studies and research on Diaspora must shift to penetrate these virtuous values and make the world aware of the greatest gift of human kindness and to desist from any further barbaric acts. Such positive writings will pave the way for finding solution to the problems of the immigrants.

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