



Indian Diasporic Literature : A Study of Select Literary Texts

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Abstract: *It is a globally accepted fact that Diaspora writers set a trend since Independence. Diaspora literature, irrespective of language, style, literary form or technique, attracts readers across the borders. It may be stream of consciousness or magic realism, alienation or adaptability of a new land and culture. But, nostalgia is alike for all Diaspora writers. Notably, the works of Indian Diaspora cover all parts of the world. This paper focuses on a handful of Diaspora writers and their writings which are admired by readers.*

Keywords: *Diasporic sensibility, rootlessness, alienation, nation and identity, cultural assimilation, and disintegration.*

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Introduction:

The word 'diaspora' derives from the Greek term 'diaspeirin', Dias means 'across' and speirin means 'scatter'. Diaspora could be the voluntary or forced movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions. Having arrived in a new geographical and cultural context, they negotiate two cultures. This diasporic culture is necessarily mixed and is an amalgamation of two cultures. In words of Usha Bande "Transplantation connotes relocation and in its turn relocation presupposes the existence of location and dislocation therefrom". (Dwivedi 2011)

Thus, a Diaspora population looks back at location (homeland), passes through replication (the alien land) and results in dislocation (geographical as well as psychological). It has now become an umbrella term which incorporates expatriates, political refugees and ethnic and racial minorities. The Indian Diaspora emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries, as this period involved emigration of indentured labourers, traders, professionals, and students to French, British, Dutch, Dane and Portuguese Colonies in Asia, Africa, Caribbean, and Far Eastern countries. Dislocation and discrimination based on culture, religion and language often result in the creation of fractured identity. The broken psyche of immigrants sheds off its psychosis into writing. The migrant writers with their multicultural ethos and profound understanding of socio cultural realities transform their experiences into writing. The very fact of creation is a deliberate effort to form a recognised cultural identity and diasporic literature arises under these circumstances.

As the writer experiences cultural, geographical, and emotional displacement there emerges a diasporic sensibility that mirrors the plural identity of the writers. Stuart Hall believes that diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference. The Indian diasporic writers often aim at reinventing India through the rhythms of ancient legends, the cadences of mythology, the complexities of another civilization, cultural assimilation, and nostalgia.

They dive deep into the realm of imagination and the ocean of memory to paint something distinct. The diasporic space provides the writer with a unique advantage of being an outsider and insider simultaneously to both the host culture and the homeland and therefore the author becomes privy to a certain critical perspective on the socio- cultural, economic, and political realities of his homeland.

Identity and Nation: An immigrant's identity is an issue which has been much theorized. The arrival of an immigrant in the host land comprises the loss of concrete notions of identity, and the subsequent forming of a new identity, as the result of assimilation into the host land. There is a consequent push and pull between the immigrant's nostalgic desire to retain his original culture, and the one to assimilate into the new one. Therefore, the identity thus formed is a 'fluid' one. The immigrant does not wholly belong anywhere.

Role of Memory: Memories always play a very important role in the expatriate writing. The memories evoked are of past time, people and place as the writer had experienced them. But, at the time of writing they are immensely altered. In the Expatriate writing, different worlds negotiate with each other, the real world, and the imaginary one. The line of separation is very thin and faint so that these two worlds can easily merge but not so simply noticeable, as the perspectives keep shifting. These worlds blend memory and desire - memory of a bygone time and perhaps, the desire to get it back.

Select Literary Texts

The Circle of Reason (1986): It deals with the epic themes of travel, diaspora, history, memory, political struggle, communal violence, love and loss, while all the time crossing the generic boundary between anthropology and work of art. The writer's fictional and non-fictional writing tend to be transnational in sweep, moving restlessly across different countries, continents and oceans: 'Canada's colonial government decided not to admit eight thousand Indians. after deciding that the

ancient purity of Canada could not be endangered by Asiatic migration.' (Ghosh 80)

A House For Mr. Biswas (1961): '*How terrible it would have been...to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.*' (Naipaul 8) The novel exhibits the fear of Cannibalistic swallowing of identity. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is haunted by a sense of homelessness and has a desire to have validated for himself a human identity. He succeeds in creating a new world out of nothingness by owning a house and thereby leaving behind footprints on history and escaping annihilation and attaining fulfilment. It is difficult in his case to define a "home". The word 'home' is linked with identity and throughout the novel, there is an endeavour to overcome identity crisis, alienation, and rootlessness.

The Namesake (2003): The terrain Lahiri trespasses here is one she knows like the back of her hand -the limited spaces of Bengali immigrants on the Boston area, their peculiarly lonely lives with extended families made up of fellow expatriates. The story of Gogol develops gracefully throughout the novel into the allegorical saga of diaspora: 'Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.' (Lahiri 50) With penetrating insight, Lahiri reveals, not the defining name of power and expectations bestowed upon us by our parents, but also how gradually we redefine and find ourselves.

The Mistress of Spices (1998): It is a diasporic tale built between the voices of both male and female, sharing their joys and sorrows as immigrants to the United States: '*They dream of their motherland where each day still is melted sugar and cinnamon and birds with diamond throats sing, and silence when it falls is light as mountain mist.*' (Divakaruni 46) Divakaruni interweaves her text with strands of magic realism and feminine discourse to produce a work with a strong impact on the minds of readers.

The Inheritance of Loss (2006): In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai scrutinizes two phases of Indian migration. In the earlier phase, The Judge, Jemubhai Patel, moves to England to pursue a law degree. Although Jemubhai himself possesses a colonized mindset, which deems the English superior to the rest, his arrival in England is marked by racial and ethnic discrimination, and he struggles with alienation and rootlessness: '*...he grew stranger to himself than*

he was to those around him, found his own skin odd coloured, his own accent peculiar.' (Desai 40) Biju, who moves to New York as an illegal immigrant, to make a better life for himself, faces similar discrimination and humiliation. He faces many challenges and ends up feeling alienated. The hostile reception in the host land renders him nostalgic for his homeland, to which he eventually returns. Through the Judge, Sai, and Biju, Desai, portrays a fair picture of immigration, and the problems resulting from it, namely, those of identity crisis, alienation, rootlessness, and ethnic discrimination.

Midnight's Children (1981): Through **Midnight's Children**, Salman Rushdie, seeks to portray the inherent fragmentation in the identities of his characters. Saleem Sinai, relocated at birth to parents he was not born to, is the protagonist with an inherently fractured sense of identity. His geographical relocation from Bombay in India, to Pakistan and, subsequently, to Bangladesh is not merely a traversing of boundaries, but of their implicit cultural, historical, national, and social identities. In this way, he is deeply unrooted.

Rushdie, as an immigrant himself, creates an India of his imagination to grapple with his own sense of loss: **'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also'.** (Rushdie 242)

Conclusion:

The writers of Indian Diaspora are at the centre stage since the last decade because of their dazzling narrative and capturing works. Diasporic writing occupies a great place of significance between culture and countries. The powerful web of diaspora has connected the entire globe, spreading throughout the world, portraying the culture of their homeland and their nostalgia through their works.

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