

PARADIGM OF DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY AND CULTURAL AGONY IN MAJOR INDIAN WOMEN NOVELIST

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ABSTRACT

Migration has always been a major force in human history. The study of the phenomena of diaspora is a fertile ground to study Indian women fiction from a different perspective. We see that women fiction of India focuses on the loss of cultural roots. We see women character's emotional pain and suffering amidst a plethora of intercultural miscommunication. The representation of culture in often hostile environment as well as the relation with the homeland is key features of the diaspora concept in Indian Milieu.

This research paper is a humble attempt to emphasise on how those women define their identities in diasporic background and how they negotiate traditional contracts of identity given their experience of alienation and assimilation within their host culture and communities the home limited ability to play a role in defining themselves against categories that are critical to them.

Creation of literature gives a historical connection in the context of contemporary social structure. Indian women fiction in English also embellishes facts and unfolds interesting layers to hold the question of nostalgia, identity and quest for homeland. Diasporic sensibility in Indian women fiction can be seen and exemplified in interaction between gender class ethnicity and most importantly a recreation of identity and a new role of gender. Pendulating between the infatuation of home and land of opportunities –these form a new migrant come across a constant psychic battle: the old world is replete with myth and tradition; the new world is proliferate with an appetite for freedom. Their situation is like Hamlet, to be or not to be, as to whether they should remain in a situation amid old values and tradition with least interaction with the majority or break the shackles and get assimilated with the paraphernalia of new culture. For materialistic goals they are losing their identity and finding only uncertainty.

Literature is an honest representation of contemporary society so as the Indian Women novelist also have tried to depict the picture of their experience mixing fact and fiction in the writings. No doubt degree of honesty varies from person to person. Particular forms of loss and yearning articulated in much of diasporic literature relate to the experience of men as men, as

son, husband and fathers. For Naipaul, writing about the Caribbean, the yearning may be for the ability build a house for one's family (*A House for Mr Biswas*) or for Hanif Kureshie the frustrated search for upward mobility with British class structure (*My Beautiful Laundrette*). Lately, however, South Asian diasporic women writers are writing fiction which reflects the lives of South Sian diasporic women. The writing creates an arena within which the conventional discovery of the rootless male diasporic, can be relooked as a journey across borders(physical but also social and cultural) for the female diasporic creating a realm of dynamic dialogue within which it is possible to interrogate gender roles and reinterpret then to promote a gender vision of diasporic society. They share some diasporic sensibility with different thematic concern.

Diaspora emphasise catastrophic origin of people and uncomfortable outcomes. The characteristic of diaspora in the contemporary sense is thus one of endurance and achievement but also of anxiety and distrust. A feeling of the weight of their history, a sense of unease or difference that members of the diasporas feel in their country of settlement often results in a felt need for protective cover in the bosom of the community. There is victim tradition in which one experiences traumatic interludes in their histories which led to their dispersion or further dispersion. Diaspora is now deployed as a metaphoric designation to describe different categories of people- expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities.

Culture is generally, the outcome of a country's physical, mental, emotional and philosophical resources. It governs system and trends in particular territory of a society. Culture describes reality and it is also a set of mechanism of values, practices, systems and institutions. India has a heritage of rich culture. A woman is always taken to be bearer of culture and they are representative of culture. But in postcolonial time and space they also face cultural duality, cultural shock, cultural gap, and cultural dilemma. Manu Smriti says, "where women are honoured, the God are pleased; where they are not honoured all work becomes fruitless" in the present India women are facing multicultural effect and cultural conflict. Loss of identity has become a key feature of women fiction in English. Western influence has changed the status of women in India. Agony is intense mental pain and intolerable suffering on emotional level.

"In their aim at self-definition and the expression of their expatriate experiences, women from 1970s onwards chose to use literature. Literature became a means of establishing autonomous selfhood. Third world women sought to find words and forms to fit their experiences and have chosen narrative strategies like the auto-biography and the quest novel to do so. They use the auto-biography to give shape to an identity grounded in these diverse experiences of expatriation and self-definition." (Rengachari, 2000, 35-36).

Men and women experience migration differently and women's identities vary by class and location. To begin with Anita Desai, a prolific woman novelist whose novels deal with uncovering the layers of women psyche. She has tried to decipher the mystery of heart of a woman from existential point of view. She finds women embroiled in culturally anguished situation struggling with neurotic problems they are sufferer not only because of they are living in male-centric society but as a human being they are also victim of post modernist sensibility caused by urban advance life and life style. They feel diasporic sensibility in dual stages of their life they are alienated. After marriage, woman is supposed to live in husband's house from where she does not belong. She is to live in a different cultural condition.

“Double consciousness and unhomeliness are the two features of postcolonial diasporas. ‘Double consciousness’ or unstable sense of the self is the result of forced migration colonialism frequently caused. In the diaspora this feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither, rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as unhomeliness. To be “unhomed” is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak” (Tyson 2004, 421).

Ms Desai throws a searchlight on the various aspects of love, failure of marriage and women struggling to find their identity with their cultural agony. Indian women fiction in English bears thematic concern like search for identity, cultural dislocation, alienation, cultural conflicts and a search for an original home they show exiled life of individual entity of woman and liquid identity affected by cultural agony. The women characters in Indian fiction by women author seek to have a permanent identity in their multicultural background and cultural dilemma. It is time to explore the changing realities reflected in women character and felt by woman in Indian Diaspora. Hybridity has brought there a sense of cultural agony and futility of existence it brings clashes in their personal and social life. Women are negotiating the traditional expectations and contemporary realities and feeling an agony against the immediate families. They feel a sort of cultural agony mainly because of changing sexual roles and tensions for identity. Women in India in Diasporic condition by Indian women writers have been projected and manifested in various shades on the canvass of Indian Diaspora through which they try to express their literature and society and changing human relationships and its intricacies and complexities as well.

Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Black Bird* deals with postcolonial diasporic migration of the Indian people. The character Dev, Adit and Sarah, Adit's wife and all the characters who face the problem of defining their identity in one or the other time in the novel. Adit in the beginning has a blind liking for English country and people like colonized Indian who has internalize the colonial attitude and believes in the supremacy of their western culture. Dev develops a longing for home and his motherland. His contempt toward his nation turns towards longing desire and patriotism. Eventually, he returns to India with his wife who is English, Sarah. It is now turn of Sarah to experience the diasporic dilemma and redefines her identity, suiting to the needs of her Indian husband. As for Dev is concerned plural identity inspires assimilation in him where as it creates crisis for Adit.

In all her novels, Desai has proved herself as novelist who gives importance for the sensibility of her female characters. Through these characters she has given vitality to her theme. Exploration of the inner psyche of the female is her main theme. Desai is an explorer of the feminine sensibility. Desai is excellent in delineating the inner furies of women and their rising voice for emancipation and empowerment. She has defined the term Diaspora in her novels very well. Her definition comes like this that it signifies the political as well as individual consequences of cultural alienation, a strong sense of exile and a terrible reality of homelessness resulting in the loss of physical boundaries. In her diasporic milieu her character make desperate attempt to grapple with the truth and extent of the loss. They constantly make effort to build the lost boundaries in their host space.

Bharati Mukherji's two novels *Jasmin* and *Wife* deal with two extreme gender portrayals in diasporic situation. Jasmine a young Punjabi girl migrates illegally to America in order to achieve her dreams. Being a victim of gender and race she transforms herself totally and changes her identity from a docile Indian girl Jasmine in to Jane Ripple Mayor, an adventurer in the American world. Dimple, the protagonist of the *Wife*, on the other hand, is another transformed who changes her identity from the dutiful Indian housewife to a killer of her husband. She has negative shade of transformation that comes out of cultural agony. A migration into American land has thrown a cruel shadow upon her character, since America disappoints her dreams of material comfort luxury and freedom. Apart from this racist views towards the third world intensifies her situation when she tries to cope with American culture and she fails in her attempt and ultimately ends up being a nowhere woman.

Another Indian women novelist Jhumpa Lahiri authentically presents the diasporic sensibility in her first collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (which won Pulitzer prize in 2000) and her first novel *The Namesake* has been a best seller and still amazing reader from various background regardless of age, sex and gender. She has tried to depict the maladies of diaspora and transformation of identities and a cultural dilemma with cultural agony in her characters. *The Namesake* of Jhumpa Lahiri discusses and tries to decipher the dilemma of name and sense of belongingness and issues of multiculturalism and cultural dislocation faced by the success story of the Indian immigrants. She also has two different names-different on her passport and birth certificate. Talking about her own dilemma of name she says in her interview with Jeffrey Brown, "It's what my world is and I am always been aware of my parents came from Calcutta I have faced myself sort of caught between the worlds of left behind and still clung to and also the world that surrounded me at school and everywhere else, as soon as I set foot out of the door." (pbs2008) Her focus is on the mindscape of characters and cultural agony of women characters in its wider perspective. She explores psychologically the intricacies and complexities of human relationship. Like the mythological king Trishanku they stood suspended between two worlds unable to enter either and making a heaven of their own. Gogol situation is like Trishanku in the novel. The novel starts with the birth of a son to Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali couple settled in Boston. They need both a 'bhalonam' a good name for the outside world and a 'daknam' a pet name to keep with Bengali tradition. They find the name as Gogol.

"Pet names are persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder too, that one is not all things to all people. They all have pet names. Ashima, s pet name is Monu Ashoke is Mithu and even as adult, these are the names by which they are known in their respective families, the names by which they are adored and scolded and missed and loved." (Lahiri 26)

The novel further probes in to the inner working of human psyche in diasporic background and puts forth stirring and teasing sense of identity by collision of culture and the outcome comes in the form of cultural agony. We can observe their sense of belonging when they feel themselves in tight corner whenever they are supposed to answer the question from where do they belong.

At the core of every culture remains the uploading of basic human values. A so-called global society is emerging on the monitor but there is some society who does not wish to leave aside their historical uniqueness. Cultural displacement involves the loss of language, family ties and a support system that gives birth to cultural agony. Gogol's personality is torn between two nations, Indian/Russian, between two value system and therefore his whole identity and entity is

oblique. The sense of cultural agony is clearer in case of Ashima, epitome of motherhood in foreign land. She could not forget her relations in India and longs for them she creates her own space by creating a web of friends and finds to avoid the American way of life. She recreates Indian world by wearing Indian clothes, eating Indian food and evading American friends.

Jhumpa Lahiri amalgamates the past and present wonderfully to create an insight to probe into the alienated and isolated beings in foreign lands. Ashima's nostalgia and memories create and combine both the beautiful picture of her country and a visualisation of culture. Perhaps, the author herself relieves her cultural agony in this way by offering the reader a glimpse of Indian culture and heritage. Diasporic writings are constructed not on the principles of harmony but on the principles of simultaneity. On the whole *The Namesake* is the story of immigrant's life who feel displaced and homesick floating in an anonymous ideal far away from home.

Kiran Desai is the youngest female author to win the Man Booker Prize. Her second novel *Inheritance of Loss* is based on her experience of leaving India. The characters of Kiran Desai love and reject traditional way of life and old values. She herself is migrated writer who is able to portray the socio cultural picture of Indian migrants and their struggle to find a homeland but with a cultural agony. We can feel her longing for homeland in these lines, "was a return journey to the fact of being Indian, to realising the perspective was too important to give up. America might give me half a narrative but I had return to India for the other half of the story for emotional depth historical depth." (Rochester 1) According to Cohen, "Diaspora can be characterized as being of a mass nature with catastrophic origins and as having been dispersed from an original centre to two or more foreign regions" (Cohen 11) Diaspora can be taken as dark shade of globalization. *The Inheritance of Loss* tells the story of marginalisation of migrants they feel unimportant and insignificant in the migrated land. They challenge the so called globalisation in the host country. In the novel the judge and Biju experience a bitter encounter with marginalisation. The judge is an old man who spends most of his years in the west learning their ways and disassociating him from being an Indian yet in England he fails to be an Englishman and in India he fails to be an Indian. The humiliation and shame what he has faced in a foreign land forces him to feel inferior in front of others. Biju has entered into United States on a tourist visa and simply overstayed and work illegally but that city full of possibility became a source of cultural agony and pain for him. According to Paul, their interest in modernity and west breeds a kind of cosmopolitanism linked to the forces of globalization like the ones Biju struggles with in New York, but which here come into conflict with local identities and nationalist aspirations." (Jay 132) Kiran Desai, s novel is pregnant with shame, humiliation and closes with total identity loss and sense of marginalisation. Both the judge and the Biju have been migrated to the west for a better life and find only a vacuum.

Deracination exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer over. The basic response of such conditions is search for identity, the quest for home, through self discovery or self-realization (14).

Cultural otherness, generational and cultural alienation from their ethnic community leaves the Indian diasporic women trapped in a space between the culture of homeland and that of the host nation. They look for support and emotional aid from their family and this isolation leads diasporic women who are emotionally and economically dependent on their husbands to the problems like depression, loss and nostalgia with a sigh of cultural agony. People are always in search of a utopia which we all know is nowhere and nonexistent. But women writers writing in English are able to portray strongly their story related to enigmatic feeling of Diaspora.

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