

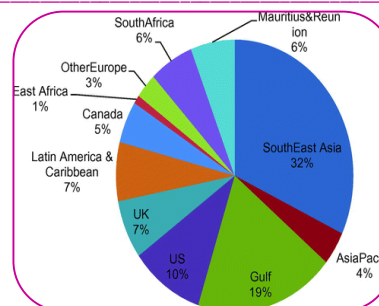


HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND PRESENT SCENARIO OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

'Indian Writing in English' is a relatively recent phenomenon; as one may trace its roots into a century back India. Indian writing in English has come into force only in the last couple of decades as some of writers have achieved worldwide fame. Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora, such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent.

KEYWORDS : *Diaspora, Indian, migration, politics, identity, subordinate, ethnic minority, voiceless and isolation.*

INTRODUCTION

The literature by the Diasporic writers is a type of self-analysis, a sort of therapy for survival in this Darwinian global village, in which surrounding forces determine the creative output. The predicament and problems due to cross-cultural encounters in immigration have remained an issue of discussion for the South Asian Diasporic writers. The predicament of diaspora portrayed by Diasporic writers may be studied from different points of view such as the cultural, feministic, political, psychological, biological, sociological, economical, geographical and so on. A study of their predicament in immigration as presented in the novels and short stories, may lead to the findings of the common and diverse problems faced by them in the alien countries, which may be concluded with a collective Diasporic consciousness.

What is Indian Diaspora? Historically Indians are spurning isolation, but have been going to different parts of the world as traders, teachers, preachers, adventurers and soldiers. In ancient times Mesopotamia Meluhha and Dilmun bear witness to the outgoing and enterprising spirit of Harappan and Indus businessmen of the third millennium B.C. Since then with the vibrant links to the rest of the world, Indian civilization is celebrating its limitless capacity for accommodation, assimilation, readjustments and restatements. Indians sought and strive to disseminate Indian spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic ideas through diffusion of Hindu-Buddhist philosophies, art and agricultural traditions which influences the lives of a vast segment of humanity providing a corrective alternative to many in the West disillusioned or disenchanted with their own heritage. Thus, the lands and islands of South-East Asia, Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan cannot be fully understood without reference to India.

Later, in the face of sustained Muslim onslaughts, defeated and dejected Indians turned to their Gods for redemption. Travels to foreign lands and islands were prohibited by the purveyors of false purity; and the instruments of ostracism punished who dared to oppose the self-appointed custodians of Hindu religion. When the Mughal Empire tottered and disintegrated, India succumbed to the imperial domination of the Britain, which dragged India against its will into the world around. The old taboos against foreign travel became ineffective and inoperative in the face of stark economic and political compulsions. The British industrial revolution and colonialism in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific and Caribbean needed cheap labour

and India was inexhaustible reservoir of expendable indentured and voluntary labour. Out of the Indian diaspora to different parts of the British Empire a large number of indentured labourers sought salvation from penury and privation in the far-flung lands out of their free will and volition. The painful legacy of partition in 1947 and its later effects caused Indian diaspora to continue and it still goes on unabated, including skilled workers, businessmen, professionals, scientists and men and women of letters.

Indian diaspora of around twenty million is serving in their host a hundred and ten countries with distinction as entrepreneurs, workers, teachers, researchers, innovators, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and even political leaders. The Indian origin, their consciousness about cultural heritage, and their deep attachment to India give a common identity to all these people. Why people emigrate from India and what they achieve in the Western countries, are the questions of debate. Ashis Gupta points out,

The cancer of poverty, corruption, confusion and rootlessness that afflicts the Indian subcontinent appears to rage with equal ferocity as a cancer of the spirit in the 'developed' nations of the world. There is no escape, no exit. The Cowpath to America leads eventually to a gilded hell. (Gupta; 1998, 48-49)

Historically India has received migrants and absorbed them instinctively with their culture, language, economic and social status and this has equipped Indians to easily interact with other cultures and ethnicities abroad. This rich legacy of adaptability is most important factor in the success of the evolution of the Indian diaspora. Homi Bhabha compares the Indian diaspora to the banyan tree, which is the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life. According to Bhabha, like the banyan tree, the Indian diaspora spreads out the roots in several soils and draws nourishment from one when the rest dry up. It has several homes and feels at home in the world.

During the colonial period the economically beleaguered labour force started seeking their livelihood in distant lands. And recently Indians are migrating in the neighbouring countries in search of opportunities and commerce as professionals, artists, traders, factory workers and so on. Later wave of migration consists of the professionals and the educated elite of India seeking economic betterment in the advanced countries where they are referred as 'model minority'. In the last decades of the twentieth century Indian talent has become a major source of knowledge for the technology-based economies of the First World countries. This 'model minority' has made Indian diaspora one of the most powerful Diasporas in the world.

As a result of colonialism a large scale peaceful immigration to South East Asia took place in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century after independence Indians migrated to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and other places in search of employment and because of geographical proximity they maintain close cultural ties with India. Gurbhagat Singh explores the reason and process of migration as,

The phenomenon of exile has emerged in our times due to the movement forced by colonial powers. The uneven development has led to unprecedented migration of the Asians and Africans to the West. The imposed, and indirectly hegemonizing shift from territories, has occurred within Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and also from these continents to the West. This movement has produced a new person whose mind works at least with two epistemologies. He/she has lost the centre that used to unify. (Singh; 1998, 21)

After the oil boom of 1970s in the Arab world nearly three million Indian people are taking opportunities as blue collar workers and professionals. Of the twentieth century Indian immigrants in Western Europe; two-third is found in the UK as a result of the interaction between the British Raj and India. This inter-culture interaction of India with other countries compelled by the British has been a great source of inspiration to the writers from India. Ramesh Chandha points out,

Owing to the close intercultural contact imposed on India by Great Britain, the British and the Indian writers have produced a considerable body of fiction that explores the seemingly infinite subject of cultural interaction, commonly known as the East-West dichotomy. (Chandha; 1988, 02)

The shortage of labour after the Second World War resulted in large migration from India. There was second flow of immigrants after the expulsion of Indians in Uganda. Today, per capita income of this community is higher than the national average. Out of many Indian millionaires abroad, about two hundred

are in Britain only. The second largest presence of Indians in the Western Europe is in Holland, because of migration of people of Indian origin from Suriname.

In spite of some atrocities, the Indian diaspora has achievements despite impediments, educational advancement and economic progress and political success. This story of the diaspora has provided material and scope for the diasporic writers to illustrate their history and heritage, their own awareness of their society and its problems, its achievements, its limitations and frustrations. A few have turned their attention to India to assess and explore their relationship with it by focusing on how they differ and diverge from many of the characteristics of Indian society. One may fully agree that the writers of Indian Diaspora have been aiming at re-inventing India through the rhythms of ancient legends, the cadences of mythology, the complexities of another civilization, cultural assimilation and nostalgia. Their connection with India affects their perceptions. Thus, some of them disown the India, some grudgingly, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes apologetically own it, while others proudly uphold and applaud it through their writings.

Diasporic Indian women writers, despite their different regions of India, have common features like multiplicity, ambivalence, lack of authenticity. The historical nature of their predicament with their sense of marginalization and search for roots are uniquely akin to one another. B. R. Nagpal observes,

The discursive nature of consciousness, quest for an idealized vision and the sense of inadequacy, incompleteness obtrudes upon the psyche of these writers who are apprehensive of their logic and regress to their sub-conscious fear of racial persecution, imperialist exploitation, white manipulation and a sense of self-annihilation. (Nagpal; 1998, 82-83)

There are many women writers based in the U.S.A. and Britain, like Jhabvala and Anita Desai, are late immigrants, while Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indians abroad. Uma Parameswaran states,

Perhaps women, with centuries of cultural indoctrinations and expectations are able to adapt more quickly and to accept and love two homes without conflict or ambivalence. (Parameswaran;1998, 32)

But this is acceptable in the case when both the homes lay in the same land, not across the oceans. In fact, most of expatriate writers recreate India through lens of nostalgia and lack the grasp of actual contemporary conditions. They deal with Indian immigrants, whom they know at first hand. However, the Diasporic literature is a rich resource of studying the challenges of diaspora and the various strategies of negotiation which delineate diasporic experience at various level of place, language, customs, myths, beliefs, geographical displacement and the combat with the gape and change adopted in the process. Actually, the people and the place that one parted with change in course of time, and when he or she writes about homeland, it seems often an anachronistic and outdated, as one has either over idealized or condemned it.

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