



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Search of Indianness in the writings of selected Indo-Canadian contemporary women writers

Kadri Nashrin. A

Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of International Studies, Diaspora Research Center, Gujarat University, Gujarat. India.
e mail-nashykadri@gmail.com

Dr. Vidya Rao

Associate Professor Bhavan's Seth R.A. College of Arts and Commerce, Khanpur, Ahmedabad. Gujarat. India.

Abstract

Migration and dispersions have been continuing since ancient times in humans. As we know that, the Indian diaspora is one of the largest in the world. It is believed that If you want to know the tradition or culture of some nation, you should follow their literature. Diaspora literature depicts the lives of migrants and the uncertainty that surrounds and fills them in foreign lands, and the struggles they face to find their identity. They are placed in a complex space between many worlds and cultures: they can neither forget their native land from which they came, and it would be different if they returned to it now; nor can they fully assimilate into the host land they have adopted. There are many various types of identity such as, gender identity, ethnic identity, communal identity, national identity and so on. When people migrate from their native land to abroad, he does not migrate alone but he carries with him his national identity and ethnic identity as well; these identities lives with him until his death. This research paper explores the Indianness in the writings of Indo-Canadian contemporary diasporic women writers, such as Anubha Mehta, Uma Parmesvaran and Anita Rao Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin. These writers artistically describe Indian culture, nostalgic feelings, and their experiences through their works.

Keywords: Indianness, Indo-Canadian, contemporary, diaspora, writers, identity, women

Introduction

Generally, we use the common word for the diaspora to migration. People have become aware of the difference between migration and diaspora in the present time. People migrate to a developed country for a better job, good life, and facilities in the modern world. After immigrating to the countries of the first or second world countries, migrants try to settle there. It does not mean that they completely cut off contact with their homeland. Even after settling there, they have a feeling of attachment to their motherland. Their second-generation always find themselves 'in the middle.' Moreover, the main point to be discussed is that they always get confused about their identity. They question to, a) What is their original identity? b) Which country is to be referred to as their native land? And c) The most important question for their second generation is that to which tradition, custom, and culture do they have to follow? The one clears where they were born, and the one they have settled in the host land. It creates hyphenated identities, such as Indo-American, British-Bengali, Indo-African, British-Indian, Indo-Canadian, and so on. This amorphous identity separates them from both worlds; here, they don't feel a special attachment. This indifference is apocryphal for them.

Humans have been migrating for food and essential needs since ancient times. With time, people's needs have changed, and reasons for migration have also changed. People move from their native land to developed countries for better life and future. It is generally known as one aspect of 'diaspora.' According to the United Nations, the Indian diaspora, one of the largest in the world, is estimated to have 18 million people living outside their native land in 2020 (Hindustan Times. 2021). In context with Canada, Canada contains the world's eighth-largest Indian diaspora. The East Indian or Indo-Canadian community in Canada is highly concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia. Either Sikh or Hindu is the majority of Indian origin in Canada. There were 34% Sikh, 27% Hindu, another 17% were Muslim, 9% were Catholic, and 7% belonged to another Christian group in 2001(Statistic Canada, 2015). If we look at the migration history of Indians to Canada, there were some primary reasons for migrating to Canada, such as poor economic condition, exploitation of British government and money landers of India as well. The prosperity and dream of better life attracted Indians to migrate Canada. The primary factor diaspora is an 'identity issue' which brings harshness in their life. However, those who have left home and settled abroad, they and their second and third generations always get confused in duality of their identity. As their parents abide them with home culture, thus, it's difficult to ablate. This identity crisis creates more struggle and challenges for Indians and Canada is not an exception.

Since the origin of Indian English literature, it has now reached many miles. Literary critics in India have started to explore Indianness in Indian English poetry and literature in different genres. Indianness is not merely an idea, Indianness is an action in Indian English literature that draws the reaction from the readers. Indianness is about implanting values and history in a literary work that has originated, evolved, and transformed on Indian soil. About Indianness in Indian diaspora literature, it can be claimed that Indian diaspora writing is now at its peak. Under Indian English literature, writers like Uma Parameswaran, Anita Rao Badami, Anubha Mehta, and many others are expatriate writers, and their writings can be classified. Their writings explore the quest for identity, nostalgia, familial and marital relationships apart from re-rooting, uprooting, multi-cultural milieu, etc.

Indianness in the writings of Indo-Canadian contemporary women diaspora writers

William Safran, the political scientist, said that “the dispersal from homeland from two or more foreign regions, those who are away from their homeland, will have a collective memory of it, and have a belief that they will always be outrageous in their host state” (Johnson. 2019. para.8). Originally, the term 'diaspora' refers to the scattering of Jews after their exile from Babylon in the 6th century BC. Since ancient times, the word diaspora has been used as a means of describing the Jewish experience. There is no specific definition for 'diaspora,' and it is dynamic and changing from time to time. In the context of Indian migration, it can be classified into three categories: 1)The classical period- in this period we find cultural annexation of Hinduism and Buddhism, and we get the information about the Indian traders, 2) the colonial period- the bonded labor or indentured labor system was prevalent in the European colonies, especially the British, in the colonial period, 3) the contemporary period-This is known as the brain drain wave because most of the migrants have been highly educated and professional. Most of the male members were the first to go abroad in the initial migration. After the end of their term, many migrants returned, but some migrants renewed their time for a second term. Many people settled in the host land forever, invited their families, and thus in this way, began the chain of migration. (Neerja & Saraswat. 2010. p. 33).

Indianness is not merely an idea or term. Indianness is introduced values and history in a literary work that originated, developed, and changed on Indian soil. In Indian English literature, interestingly, it contains not only Indian writers who write about India: but also, those who write about India in foreign. Undoubtedly, through the contributions of Indian diaspora writers, Indian literature in English has gained more recent and notable recognition in the world. It is further observed and believed that expatriate writers use themes from their native culture. They build alternative worlds by exchanging one tradition for another and one home for another. There are a few books that cover the lives of first-wave immigrants to Canada. *Maluka* was the first Indo-Canadian novel written by S.S.Dhami, and it was published in 1978. In the late 1930s, Dhami came to Canada. The other two books talk about the first wave - *Dharma Rasa* (1999) by Kuldip Gill and an annotated photo collection titled *Zindagee*, which covers the brief life story of Indo-Canadian women born between 1900 and 1950 (Sanchez. 2020. P 89).

Anita Rao Badami is one of the foremost contemporary writers in modern Indian diaspora writing in English, living in Canada. Anita Rao Badami was born in Orissa in 1964 and moved to Canada in 1991. Anita Rao Badami has carved a unique place among Indian diaspora writers. *Tamarind Mem* is her first novel which is based on her own life. In the novel, Anita Rao Badami presents various perspectives of the mother, Saroja, in India and that of the daughter Kamini in Canada. Badami mainly depicts the mother-daughter relationship and their different perspectives, which adds more richness to her novel. There is always a sweet quarrel between mother and daughter relation and Badami artistically describe in the dialogue when Kamini talked to her mother and told her that she yearned to get away from this cold city, and her mother replies in a sarcastic tone:

“Well, who asked you to go?.....Did somebody tie your hands behind your back and say ‘Go-go to that Calgary North Pole place?’”

(Badami. *Tamarind Mem*. p. 7).

It is also seen typical Indian mother's care for her daughter, in the dialogue:

“I hope you wear that sweater your Aunty Lalli knit for you, you catch a cold so easily.”

(Badami. *Tamarind Mem*. p. 7).

It depicts Indian tradition and family values through Saroja; she supposed that Kamini wears a sweater woven by her aunt Lalli, in Calgary. One of the characteristics of Indian diasporic writers is that Indian diasporic writers always recall the stories of *Panchatantra*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* through their writings:

“Noni” said Dadda, “come, I will tell you about the Lakshman-jhoola bridge. That bridge is hundreds of years old, it is said, made of rope and wood and prayers. It swings thin as a dream over the River Ganga thundering down a rocky gorge, and on the underside of the bridge is a city of bees. You can hear their buzzing over the sound of rushing water, and you have to walk across the Lakshman-jhoola without shaking it even a bit, for then the queen bee wakes up from her sleep and sends her armies after you.”

(Badami. *Tamarind Mem*. p.8).

They try to keep Indianness alive in the second generation through depicting the mythological stories, their past experiences in the homeland, telling stories of their childhood, etc. Badami is a marvelous Indo-Canadian storyteller, painfully real in her portrayal of characters in conflict with cultures and with each other.

Shauna Singh Baldwin is also a well-known diasporic Indo-Canadian writer. Her novel *What the Body Remembers* is set between 1937 and 1947 in undivided Punjab, chronically the last decade of colonial rule and partition of 1947. Shauna Singh writes into history a female script around two women Satya and Roop, co-wives of prosperous Punjabi whose family is displaced by the partition. She describes the moments of pain, desires, sorrows, patriarchy system, marriage, and joys of these two women.

It has been cleared from the starting that the story will focus on the inferior social status of women in India in this time frame. 1930s world of India is a world in which women are passed from father to husband through arranged marriages, indicating classic patriarchy, a social system. It is only through marriage that a woman can achieve social status, and this uncertain status is to be maintained on the condition of her fertility status. This is the context in which Baldwin tells the story of both wives, Roop and Satya. The complex fabric of Baldwin's novel weaves together women's issues identity, male dominance, inter-religious violence, polygamy, and patriarchal barriers.

Uma Parameswaran is one of the prominent writers of South Asian Canadian immigrant writers. She immigrated to Canada in 1966, and she is a retired professor of English at the University of Winnipeg. She has won many awards, such as Lady Eaton Award in 1967, for *The Door, I Shut behind Me*; Caribe Playwriting Competition Award in 1980; in 1999, New Muse Award and Jubilee Award in 2000, both for *What Was Always Hers*. She has written broadly about the experiences of South Asian immigrants in Canada. She is an accomplished lyricist and writes amazingly lyrical poetry that covers personal, social, cultural, religious, political aspects of Canadian life. Her collection of poems covers a period of twenty years as a sequence of sixteen distinctive voices representing diverse generations of immigrants of South Asian descent of Indian origin in general and in particular. She focuses on Indian anxieties and frustrations, the dilemmas and problems of cultural adjustment of people of Indian origin community in Canada. The speakers in her poems are haunted by the memory of India, looking back again and again and reconsidering indifferently to return to their native land and also tried their best to assimilate into Canadian society.

Anubha Mehta is an Indo-Canadian writer and artist. She has Canadian public service experience and has been awarded for her leadership work for diverse communities. Many Canadian magazines and journals have published her short stories and poems. *Peacock in the snow* is Anubha's debut novel. It was an instant best-seller and launched in Canada and India. The novel starts with the wedding ceremony of Maya and Veer. Anubha depicts every single ritual and tradition of the Indian wedding, feelings and emotions of Indian mother and father, dressing, makeup and jewelry of bride, garland ceremony, rituals around the holy fire, and etc. Anubha portrays the feeling of the girl before marriage that no girl wants to leave her parents and their house, at that time parents console a girl by saying that you will always be our and we gain a son in the form of a son-in-law, but somehow deep down they know that this is not really true. Anubha describes this emotional conversation of daughter and mother beautifully in the dialogues:

".....I am not going anywhere Ma, I will always be with you," I lied and she sniffed.

"We are not losing you, Maya, we are gaining a son," Ma said somewhat tritely."

(Mehta. *Peacock in the snow*. p.11).

Veer Rajsinghania, a man who belongs to a wealthy, established Delhi family; Veer goes against the wish of his parents and marry Maya who belongs to a middle-class family, and they had to work for everything they needed, with no servants to assist them. Upon getting married, she will have to live in Veer's family mansion with aged Sheela as her personal maid. Sheela is aware of all the family secrets, and Maya learns that she resembles Veer's deceased grandmother Gayatri. Veer's mother does not like Maya, and she believes that Maya only married her son for his money, not for love. Sheela, knowing the dark past, convinces Veer to go away with Maya and their newborn daughter Diya. Maya and her family go to Canada and learn that this new, adopted nation offers difficult corners, hardships, and rewards.

It is believed that depictions of the Indian diaspora in fiction written by the Indian diasporic female writers have more minuteness and sensitivity. Diasporic Indian English literature is enriched with the common experiences of the Indian diaspora, such as problems of adjustment, bigotry, identity issues, hybridity, nostalgia, and alienation. In the article *Debating Expatriate woman's Writing*, Ashalata Kulakarani, Latha Rengachari, has said:

"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 autobiography 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. p 35-36)

Thus, it is clear that women writers have an important role in this diasporic Indian English fiction which is enriched with experiences and the mindset of the Indian diaspora.

Conclusion

Migration has become a global phenomenon in the present world. Migration and immigration have become a popular phenomenon among Indians as well. Due to globalization and technological development, many people are aware of cultural diversity and migration. They carry with them their food habits, language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, and many more things, which are generally known as cultural baggage. Indian diaspora is one of the largest in the world. Indians settled in the western and middle-east countries to earn more money and better life. In addition, associations and meetings of the diasporic Indian English writers around the world create many opportunities to discuss, review and improve upon their literary works. Diasporic literature concentrates mainly on topics such as discrimination, cultural shock, and reverse cultural shock, problems in adjustment and assimilation, orientalism, identity crisis, alienation and displacement, dilemma, depression, hybridity, and generational gap. It would be fair to say that the Indian Diaspora English fiction is an important genre that depicts experiences and the mindset of the Indian diaspora in the broadest sense. It creates space for discussion about the Indian diaspora and provides emotional security to that particular expatriate. Being the representative of the Indians expatriates, diasporic Indian women writers succeed in this sensitively addressing the readers of Indian English Literature, simple style keeping a sense of universal feel of

immigration. There is an important role of women writers in diasporic Indian English fiction which is prosperous with the experiences and mindset of the diaspora

References

1. *At 17.5 million, Indian diaspora largest in the world : UN report*. The Times of India. 2019. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/nri/us-canada-news/at-17-5-million-indian-diaspora-largest-in-the-world-un-report/articleshow/71179152.cms>
2. *At 18 million, India has largest diaspora in the world: UN*. Hindustan Times. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/at-18-million-india-has-largest-diaspora-in-the-world-un-101610780174277.html> 2021.
3. Badami, Anita. *Tamerind Mem*. Vintage Canada. 2018.
4. Baldwin, Shauna. *What the body remembers*. Quill and Quire. Retrieved from https://quillandquiere.com/review/what-the-body-remembers/_1999_
5. *Census Profile, 2016 Census, Canada*. Government of Canada, Statistics. 2017. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&Data=Count&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Language&TABID=1>
6. Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An introduction*. Routledge. 1997.
7. Gupta, Neerja & Saraswat, Rakesh. *Summarising the History and Perspective of Global Indian Diaspora : Student's Edition*. Ashok Prakashan. 2010. pp.32-33.
8. Johnson, Aishwarya. *Exploring Indian diasporic literature*. Indianfolk. Retrieved from <https://indianfolk.com/exploring-indian-diasporic-literature-riya/> 2019. para 8.
9. Mehta, Anubha. *Peacock in the snow*. Inanna Publications and Education Inc. Canada. 2018.
10. Parmeswaran, Uma. *Trishanku and other writings*. Prestige Books. 1998.
11. Rengachari, Latha. *Debating Expatriate woman's Writing*. The Diasporic Imagination: Asian American Writing. Vol 3 Theory, Poetry and the Performing Arts. Somdatta Mandal. Ed. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2000.
12. Sanchez, Jorge. *Revolving around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives*. 2020. p. 89.
13. *The East Indian Community in Canada*. Statistic Canada, Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2007004-eng.htm> 2007.

