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DIASPORA IN INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH: A STUDY

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Abstract

Diasporic Literature is written by authors who live outside their homeland; and is characterized by alienation, nostalgia, loneliness, search for identity and constant displacement of the self. It deals with emigrant sensibility and focuses on the lives of immigrants and their internal and external conflicts in an alien land. Dislocation, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalisation, identity and cultural clash, and many other issues caused by migrancy and diaspora are widely reflected in contemporary Indian writings in English. By portraying issues like cultural predicament, quest for identity, multiculturalism and universal aspects of human existence, Diasporic Literature occupies an important status in the literary field.

The diasporic writings also known as 'expatriate writings' or 'immigrant writings' give voice to the traumatic experiences of the writers owing to clash of culture and racial discrimination they are subjected to. Writers of diasporic Indian English literature include Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Kamala Markandeya, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Meena Alexander etc. Indian diaspora writers have taken a centre stage globally for their prominent works in the past few years.

Diaspora writers have established a trend since the country's independence and readers from all around the world are drawn to Diaspora literature, regardless of language, style, literary form or technique. Diaspora is an emerging term in literature; needless to say it has gained tremendous popularity across the globe. The present study is an attempt to focus on a few Diaspora writers and their significant work.

Keywords: Diaspora, migration, identity, multiculturalism, displacement

Introduction

The word “diaspora,” was originally coined from Greek term, ‘diaspora’ which means dispersion or scattering. Historically, the concept of diaspora refers to the dispersion of the Jews from Babylon in the 6th Century BC, and later was used to refer to all migrants who left their homeland to go to another country for various reasons. Diaspora literature revolves around the idea of a homeland or a place from where the displacement happens, and it deals with the narration of harsh journeys taken on by the characters due to their expulsion. It has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures and reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement. Diasporic or expatriate writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures.

Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to synthesis or disintegration of cultures, as they are torn between the two places, cultures and often languages. Thus diasporic literature arises under these circumstances and unfolds these experiences of unsettlement and dislocation at some or the other level. A diasporic text can be investigated in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. The changing designation of home and accompanying nervousness about homelessness and unfeasibility of going back are recurrent themes in diasporic literature. Nostalgia, loss, betrayal and duty are the foundations of new homes as diasporic protagonist adjust to new countries.

Writers of Indian Diaspora

Indian Diasporic writing has acquired a new Identity due to the mutual process of self-fashioning and increasing acceptance by the adopted country. Diaspora creates an encounter between languages, culture, thoughts which produces what Homi Bhabha theorized a “hybridist”. The modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two different classes. One class includes those who have spent a part of their life in India and the other class comprises of those who have been raised outside India. These writers portray displacement, nostalgia for the homeland, culture clash and identity crisis. Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Mark Andaya’s *The Nowhere Man* are two of the novels which have constructively depicted diasporic Indian characters.

These novels reveal how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of 1960’s isolates the character and deepen their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee’s novels like *Wife and Jasmine* depict the life of Indians in the United States before globalisation gained impetus. Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verse* deals with the metaphor of migration by adopting the technique of magic realism. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* depicts Tilo, the protagonist, as an exotic character to showcase the migrant’s anguish. Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Shadow Lines* shows the extent of rootlessness encountered by a character born and brought up in a foreign land. Dislocation, unfriendliness, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalisation, the crisis of identity, cultural clash, and many other difficulties caused by the experience of migrancy and diaspora are widely portrayed in contemporary Indian writing in English.

Diaspora and Literature

Diaspora plays a significant role in literature, especially in Indian Writing in English. Literature from the Indian diaspora functions as an alternative for the homeland on a global platform, and it traverses across historical periods and geographies. It explores questions of representation, and delves deep into the experiences of dislocation, marginalization, migration etc. It also evaluates issues such as gender, politics, conflict of race, class, culture and transnational encounters. Diaspora literature in English is largely associated with writers like V.S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander, Salman Rushdie, and also with the more recent Benyamin, Deepak Unnikrishnan and many more. Literature is one of the most prominent mediums through which migrant experiences are transmitted from one generation to the other.

Elements of Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Lowland'

The novel '*The lowland*' is represented by Subhash and Gauri. It is an ambitious novel which focuses on the story of Indian immigrants in the United States. The main characters, Subhash and his wife Gauri who born and brought up in India are shown as two diasporic identities in the story of the novel. Even though they grow up in India, but in their twenties, they start to leave India and they spend the rest of their lives in America. Subhash, the main character holds his native culture firmly and gradually adjusts himself with new culture in new place. "There were hotels he might have entered in this part of the city to have a whiskey or a beer, to fall into a conversation with strangers. To forget the way his parents behaved, to forget the things Gauri had said." (The Lowland, 2013: 134-135)

The character Gauri also experiences same as Subhash. As Gauri arrives in America, she slowly adjusts with the new culture. In a less time, she absorbs the culture of America and adapts herself with the American culture by avoiding Indian attire and wears jeans. "Most of the other Indian women wore saris. But in spite of her jeans and boots and belted cardigan, or perhaps because of them, Gauri knew she stood out." (The Lowland, 2013: 206). The two main characters, Subhash and his wife Gauri who born and brought up in India are shown as two diasporic identities in the story of the novel. Even though they grow up in India, but in their twenties, they start to leave India and they spend the rest of their lives in America. Subhash, the main character holds his native culture firmly and gradually adjusts himself with new culture in new place. "There were hotels he might have entered in this part of the city to have a whiskey or a beer, to fall into a conversation with strangers. To forget the way his parents behaved, to forget the things Gauri had said." (The Lowland, 2013: 134-135). Thus, when he returns to India, he forgets to act like Indian instead as an American. Subhash already gets adjusted to American culture. In order to prove himself as an American, he even consumes beer when he meets his college mates or professors in a party or an event. He does everything as Subhash wants the American to define him as a citizen of America and eventually starts accepting the location and surroundings.

Bharati Mukharji's 'Jasmine'

'*Jasmine*' is a tale of an Indian lady which begins with her birth and then initial life in a little settlement in India. It further relates her emigration to America and her struggle to search for herself and further goes on to turn into an American. Jasmine continues beyond the realization of the prediction indicating repositioning of the stars and the heroine gaining enough strength for a nomadic transformation from a meek submissive Indian wife to a strong independent Indo-American woman who lives mostly in the now and the present and stops worrying about the future and is also indifferent to the past. After her marriage with Prakash her husband gives her a new name Jasmine. "He wanted to break down the Jyoti as I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name; Jasmine....Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities." (77).

After reaching USA, within a week Jasmine gives up her introverted personality and dresses up in jazzy Tshirt, tight cords and running shoes. With the change in clothes comes the change in the culture so much so that the intrinsic qualities of her personality start disappearing. With this change she moves from being a "visible minority" to being just another immigrant." The shift of the protagonist's identity from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane to Jase is indicative of the passing of one persona and an appearance of a new, but it does have positive-implications.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

The Inheritance of Loss is an excellent example of diasporic novel in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The beauty of the text lies in its intermingling of history, myth and contemporary life. The novel begins picturizing the nature's beauty of Kalimpong which is filled with snow from the peak of Kanchenjunga. Desai introduces Sai, a teenage Indian girl, an orphan who lives along with her Cambridge -educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, and the cook at Cho Oyo in the town of Kalimpong. Sai comes from Dehra Dun after her parent's death, but she was born in Russia. Till the age of six she was in Russia and then she joins the convent in Delhi and now she is in Kalimpong. Her maternal grandfather Jemubhai Patel is a westernized literate who always thinks about his journey from Pilphit to England and from England to India.

Kiran Desai talks about the cook's son Biju who is the illegal immigrant from India working in America and Gyan, a Nepali who tutorins Sai the science subjects falls in love with her. The other characters Lola, Noni, Uncle Potty, father Booty are settled in Kalimpong away from their homelands. Settlement in alien land makes them experience dislocation, which is also considered as a break with the old identity. They experience the sense of loneliness in an alien land and face non-acceptance by the natives and also experience ethnic discrimination.

Conclusion:

The Indian Diaspora plays a significant role in reflecting the complexities of diasporic experiences in literature. It aims to examine the displacement and the nostalgia for their homeland and alienation caused by displacement or dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identity. Diasporic writers tend to portray the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. The spirit of exile and alienation enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in English Diasporic literature.

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