

## ASPECTS OF DIASPORA THEORY AND MULTICUTURALISM

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### **Abstract:-**

*The present paper attempts to throw light on the origin and different aspects of Diaspora. It has attempted to analyze various features of this term. It has attempted to describe how the journey of this expatriate experience of mankind has turned from expatriation theories into diasporic one. In the past, these theories have associated mostly with exile, anguish, and suffering. Today, it gets linked with pride, glorification and entrenchment in the national literature. Eminent scholars have interpreted multiple strands of diasporic theories. Diaspora Theory with its various aspects has been reflected in the literature of every language of the world. The paper will also attempt to deal with the concept of multiculturalism which has always been used with diaspora theory.*

**Key Words** –Immigration, Diaspora, Globalization, Cultural identity, Multiculturalism

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### Literature and Society

**T**he relationship between literature and society is reciprocal and mutually dependent. It is said that literature is a mirror held up to the society, the nature of the age in which it is produced. The age is found reflected in it. Geoffrey Chaucer, the first great poet of England, wrote a grand but unfinished book '*The Canterbury Tales*'. Its '*Prologue*' offer us the introduction of the pilgrims in an inn, on their way to the pilgrimage of Canterbury. The '*Prologue*' regarded as one of the best portrait galleries that provide us with a cross-section of the English society of his times. Such types of examples can be multiplied that highlighted the close relationship between Literature and Society.

It is also a well accepted fact that the theme of all literature is the human being, his/her action, thoughts and feelings, beliefs and faiths. The writer deals with all these themes with his creative imagination. It is this fact that makes literature universal, and it has universal appeal to our artistic sense. Literature also deals with number of historical, sociological movements, concepts aesthetically in its various genres like short stories, fiction, drama, and poetry. 'Diaspora' is one of such sociological concepts that find its reflection in today's literature. In fact the term 'Diasporic Literature' generates from this sociological and historical concept of 'Diaspora'. Diasporic Literature deals with 'Expatriate Sensibility' dominates today's literary scene. It highlights the lives of the immigrants and their inner and external conflicts in a foreign land. It focuses reactions of different individuals to different situations in an alien culture. By highlighting issues like the cultural dilemma, quest of identity, multiculturalism and universal aspects of human existence, diasporic literature occupies an important position in today's literary field.

A massive presence of the Indian diasporic writing in English literature across the world during the last three decades has encouraged various thoughts of the cultural theories of the nation, race, and identity. All these theories have been used profoundly to interpret the literary works of the writers of Indian origin who have settled in countries such as the U.S.A., Canada, England, Australia, Caribbean, Africa, Far East and other parts of the globe. The demographic profile of the 25 million Indian diaspora scattered across 110 countries in the eight major areas of the world has resulted in a rich harvest of writers who enjoy popular and critical recognition on the international level. In this connection, it is said that modern India's achievement story is nowhere more evident than in its information technology and literature contributed by the expatriates.

On the background discussed above, diasporic studies get remarkable importance in the new age of mass migration, globalization, and information technology. The old 'melting pot' perspective has given way to the pattern of multiculturalism in the modern societies. This pattern involves the complex questions like belonging, identity, citizenship become obsessive concerns of the writers of the Indian diaspora.

We can observe that expatriate experiences are very common to the human being since its origin as a species. Exile, refugee, immigrant, expatriate and even slave, indentured labor are words that describe different kinds of mobility and shifts of the population in the history of mankind. These words, terms, and concepts also describe the difference in relationship to the culture of adoption and that of origin. These terms also raise numerous questions related to identity, status and power structures. The journey of this expatriate experience of mankind has turned from expatriation theories into diasporic one. In the past, these theories have related mostly to exile, anguish, and suffering. Today it gets connected with pride, glorification and enrichment in the national literature. Distinguished scholars have interpreted several threads of diasporic theories. These theories have been investigated from the different point of views in this age of globalization, dual citizenship, and outsourcing.

## **The Concept of Migration**

Before dealing with the concept and origin of Diaspora, it is necessary to discuss the concept of migration through which 'Diaspora' emerges.

Migration is the movement of people from one place, origin or country to another. In today's era of globalization, it becomes a dominant factor in our lives. People have constantly migrated since their emergence as a species.

The migration of human beings from around the world has been massive. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, it is continuing to grow. Many societies around the world have become more and more multicultural in nature during the past decade. Most often it is found that people from developing countries are migrating to developed countries. India is not an exception to this fact. Several families are found to migrate to different developed countries with definite goals and lots of dreams. The migrating masses are heterogeneous in nature, consisting of scientists, engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and writers too.

The migration has given birth to Diaspora and also another term like multiculturalism that is always associated with Diaspora.

## **The Origin and Concept of Diaspora**

The word Diaspora is derived from the Greek word 'diasperio' which means to distribute. It is a compound of 'spiro' i.e. to sow, to scatter like seed and 'dia' means from one end to the other.

The Oxford English Dictionary 1995 Edition (second) discovers the etymology of the word 'Diaspora' back to its Greek root and to its appearance in the Old Testament. It is mentioned that God's intentions were that the people of Israel should be dispersed across the world.

The term is associated with the Jewish historical experience. They were banished from their motherland Palestine forcefully. To survive, they spread throughout the world. This process of scattering gave birth to the new term 'Diaspora.'

Today, this term has obtained a more extended meaning beyond the original implications of aggression, calamity, alienation, loss, exile and return. The ordinary usage of the term Diaspora in today's world contains an indication to a common inherited homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration and a sense of estrangement and marginality in the country of residence.

The word 'Diaspora' expresses the process of becoming scattered. When a particular community or a group is spread from their native land, the process is referred to as Diaspora. The community living in the foreign country is also referred to as Diaspora. The Indians migrated to America, Canada, and other foreign countries are grouped under the title of India Diaspora. Diaspora means the place of geographic space in which the dispersed groups live.

The process of migration in today's globalized world made the term Diaspora much more multifaceted and complicated. The question of acculturation, assimilation, belonging and not belongingness, the loss of identity have made the term complex and multilayered. It would be apt to share observation made by Sushma Varma and Radhika Seshan as they comment;

'However, the Diaspora is a broader term. It is not homogeneous whole nor a series of concentric circles. Issues concerning the Diaspora would include not only the question of identity, but also questions of culture and power, multiculturalism, and transnationalism.'  
(Varma, Seshan, 2003:29)

As per time, the term implies different meanings in a broader way. Nowadays Diaspora deals with decolonization, increased immigration, global communication and transport

which promote multi locale connection, dwellings and traveling within and across the nations.

This term cuts across various branches of learning. The term occupies a place within Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies and Political Science. Every discipline has something to say about the process of 'Diaspora'. This process of Diaspora refers to:

1. The process of becoming spread.
2. The community is living in foreign parts.
3. The place of geographic space in which the detached groups live.

In this connection, Ashcroft Bill and others define the concept as, "Diaspora is the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions." (Ashcroft, 1998:68-70)

Some scholars consider diaspora around the process of European colonization. Diaspora is of significance to postcolonial studies because the descendants of these people have produced unique cultures that both maintain and build on their sensitivities about their original cultures.

Under this process of colonization, the diaspora is regarded as a diverse movement connecting with the temporary or permanent movement of Europeans all over the world resulted in colonial settlements. It followed financial exploitation of the settled areas. This also leads to 'Diaspora' resulting from the enslavement of Africans and their relocation to places like British colonies. After the slavery system was banned by law the constant demand for workers created indentured labour. This resulted in mass migration of indentured labours from poor Asian and African countries.

Along with the passing of time, a number of new meanings of the term are emerging. Nowadays, Diaspora refers not to its historical origin only. Robin Cohen introduces conceptual categories to display the diversity of meanings the word evokes. The Diaspora

includes those people who reside outside their 'natal (or imagined natal) territories' and understand that their traditional motherlands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, religions they adopt, and the cultures they live. He finds out a common thread running through the varieties of Diaspora. He classifies such Diasporas into the various forms such as: Victim diaspora, Labour diaspora, Imperial diaspora, Trade diaspora, Homeland diaspora, and Cultural diaspora

Diaspora itself expresses some notions that are beyond the time. Diaspora expresses banishment, exile and consciousness of exile. The notions of Diaspora are related with sufferings, lost and oppression of personality. Here, sufferings include physical and psychological anguish of the immigrants. It has to be studied on the psychological grounds. The change is not a mere change in geographical location, but the whole life is whirled in the process of immigration.

These immigrants develop a feeling of loss. It cannot be considered in terms of money. Here, the loss is the loss of tradition, past, cultural roots, sense of belongingness, etc. The dispersed community faces dual loss. One is the loss of its native culture as he/she cannot assimilate with the new world completely. They shuffle in between these two cultures. This hyphenated identity is the result of their predicament. As immigration is not just geographical shifting from one place to another.

The speed of material progress and advancement in the past three decades has enlarged the number of global diasporas and the range and diversity of the new semantic field of the diaspora. The present-day common usage of diaspora perceived the term as a mass migration or movement or a departure from one location. It highlights clearly the fact of scattering and its many effects on both the host community and the diasporic community.

Nowadays, the term 'diaspora' has become handy and catchy expression in the number of academic fields as well as in popular media.

Scholars in various fields have used 'diaspora' to refer a continuously altering, an unsettled concept of cultural identity. It is usually agreed upon that the concept of culture and diaspora are now associated with a vast field of meaning, including global processes of de-territorialization, transnational migration, and cultural hybridity.

It would be apt to share William Shefer's views on the various elements of Diaspora.

According to Shefer, all diasporas have been formed as an effect of voluntary or forced migration.

In most cases, preferences to join or set up diasporic units have been made only after migrants have settled in their host countries.

Diasporans usually have been determined to preserve their ethnic identities and have been competent of doing so. These identities have been significant bases for encouraging solidarity within diasporic entities.

Most Diasporans have created intricate support associations in their host countries. They have been participated not only in financial activities in their host countries but also in significant cultural and political interactions with their homelands and other diasporic units of the same national origin.

They have retained contacts with their homelands and other dispersed sections of the same nation.

In some cases, deliberate opposition and bias have enforced individuals and groups to join or establish ethnic-national diaspora associations.

For Sheffer, the most vital and common characteristic connecting all diasporas is their collective identities and behavioral patterns which are closely linked to real or imagined homeland which has also been described as 'imaginary homelands' by Salman Rushdie. Apart from actual contacts with the homelands diasporas also preserves relation with it through narratives and memories ---personal as well as collective. This feature of diaspora

is very important for the psychological needs of people living away from their homeland to maintain their distinctive identities. It can be said those people who try to preserve psychological connectedness with homelands undoubtedly belong to a diaspora of today's world.

It should also be noted that the concept of diaspora has made a substantial development in recent time. In the past it is linked with many negative things, at present it reveals positive implications. Diaspora is always intimately connected to displacement that, on the one hand, points out disturbing experiences and on the other hand also relationships with different cultures which promotes the understanding of human life among the diasporans.

So, the term 'Diaspora' today communicates any population that is regarded 'de-territorialised' or 'transnational' – that is which has originated in a land other than which it currently lives in, and whose social, economic and political contacts across the borders of nation- states, or certainly span the globe. In the older days, more importance is given to defining and to describe Diaspora as a social structure. As it is originated with Jewish dispersal and is related to negative elements of the forced dislocation, victimization, alienation, loss and a dream of return.

Some scholars have discussed 'Diaspora' as a mode of cultural production, the concept that is generally conveyed in the discussion of globalization. In this sense – usually anthropologists examined globalization as a world-wide flow of cultural images, objects, and meanings resulting in a multicolored process of creolization, back and forth transferences, reciprocal effects, new negotiations and constant alterations. Here, the diaspora is explained as involving the production and reproduction of transnational, social and cultural experience. In this experience, the study of diaspora is highlighted in cultural studies through which concepts like 'hybridity', 'translated men', etc. have emerged. Global media and sophisticated communication technology are the key avenues for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of diasporic identity.

## Common Features of Diaspora

1. Dispersion from a native land, often to two or more alien regions and cultures.
2. The extension from a homeland in search of a job, in pursuit of a trade or to promote colonial ambitions.
3. A shared memory and myth about the homeland, containing its location, history, and achievements;
4. A glorification of the recognized ancestral home and a joint obligation to its preservation, restoration, protection, and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The growth of a return movement that gains collective approval;
6. A strong cultural group consciousness constant over a long time and based on a sense of uniqueness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
7. A disturbed relationship with host societies, signifying a lack of recognition at the least or the likelihood that another calamity might befall the group.
8. A sense of compassion and harmony with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
9. The possibility of a unique, resourceful, inspiring life in host countries with open-mindedness for pluralism.

In brief, the diaspora is the study of all types of immigrants and settlers beyond the countries of their origin. These immigrants are living or settled everlastingly in other countries, aware of their origin. They try to maintain varying relations with the motherland. These relations may be both imaginary and real. Studies on diaspora communities often centered around the issues of immigration, the process of settlement, persistence of culture, the extent of assimilation or adaptation, socio-economic and political participation in the host society. These immigrants had to define both their past heritage

and present geographic and social realities. Diaspora studies deal with the nature of immigration, the status of the immigrants and the process of assimilation.

Today, Diaspora has become a blanket term that covers the variety of experiences of alienation, political compulsions, and ambition and material, academic pursuits.

## **Multiculturalism**

The concept of Diaspora gives birth to new issues and concepts. Multiculturalism is one of the important concepts often used with Diaspora.

The process of immigration resulted in the multicultural society. The migrant carries culture wherever he goes. The migrated community has to live with the two cultures at the same time. One is of the origin, and other is of the host culture. They cannot fully assimilate the new culture as they cannot get rid of their own culture completely. This results in bi-cultural society, which eventually leads to the formation of multi-cultured society. Particularly, in this age of globalization, no country can limit itself to one culture and one religion. Nowadays, these limitations are outdated. The society has become multicultural. This new society is dealing with new qualities in personal life and ways of life.

In multicultural society, different cultures came into contact with each other. Their ideologies are different. Their behaviors are distinct. The physical appearance, language, clothing style and overall lifestyle of the immigrants can be quickly located among the native people.

The configuration of multicultural societies obviously gives birth to the much-discussed term of multiculturalism. Due to the number of reasons for cultural interactions, we are heading towards the end of monocultural society. In the present age, no country can maintain single culture. The free trade and globalization movement occupied even the most remote corner of the world. It leads to multiculturalism.

Generally, the term multiculturalism refers to the state of both cultural and ethnic diversity within the demography of a particular social space. In general, a multicultural society is created when people from different countries migrate to one place. In such multicultural society, there is no official culture. Instead, all cultures respect each other. Multiculturalism can also be described as a policy aimed at encouraging the interaction of people from various cultures in a country to enhance reciprocal respects for one another as well as give equal rights and opportunities.

The meaning of multiculturalism depends heavily upon the background in which it is discussed. In Canada, it is taken as a political policy while in America it is regarded as a social as well as political movement. It can also be illustrated as a social ideology as this concept involves an exchange of different cultures. This exchange may be non-violent or may give birth to social strife and violence. As a social ideology, multiculturalism becomes a positive force for generating socio-cultural harmony, mutual tolerance and respect for different ethnic groups and their distinct cultures.

The factor of Imperialism is also responsible for meeting and mixing of inaccessible and distinctive cultures. The previous rulers' approach was to expand their kingdoms. To execute their desires of large empires, an invasion was the only way. These political invasions interfered deeply with the culture and internal lifestyle of the invaded country.

We know that 'Culture' is an umbrella term that occupies almost all the life of an individual. Culture is an essential part of a nation. Oxford English Dictionary defines culture as "a particular form or type of intellectual development in a society generated by its distinctive customs, achievements, and outlook".

Nowadays the cultures are crossing at the speed of light through the use of modern technology and globalization. The entire world is harmonized into a global village. The different cultures are coming into contact with each other. Migration becomes the common phenomenon. The nation could not maintain the monoculturalism policy. On the contrary, the developed nation has to develop the multiculturalism policy. The nation has not only to

accept cultural diversity but also to promote mutual understanding among different ethnic groups.

In a multicultural society, every culture has equal weightage. Every culture has a freedom to maintain its ethnocultural legacy and identity. Multiculturalism encourages the exchange of cultures and cultural ideologies. It aims at the peaceful co-existence and reciprocal understanding among the variety of cultural groups in a nation. Every individual is free to follow his/her culture. Multiculturalism is to be seen as a helping hand to rebuild a nation instead of a danger to the national integration and social harmony. All cultural groups are expected to use their potential to foster the national growth. Their contribution to the national development should not be ignored due to their ethnic backgrounds.

Multiculturalism offers substitute ways of life. It helps to enhance cultural knowledge and experiences of life in the company of diverse cultures. Multiculturalism helps you to widen your views and clear bias about other cultures. Cultural diversity is not a problem or a barrier in the way of national development. On the opposite, it is a positive and essential element of culturally diverse society. Every culture has some deficiency and strengths. No culture is perfect. Cultural diversity is helpful to form the concept of 'eclectic culture'.

The immigrants come with their own cultures. Their cultural roots, religions, dressing, food cultures, language accents are different from that of the host culture. They can be easily recognized because their natural uniqueness and appearances in this new world. The relation between the host culture and immigrants' cultures should be peaceful. It should not invite any controversial issue. Obviously this relation depends on the attitudes of both cultures to each other.

The immigrants should assimilate into the host culture or the mainstream of the society. However, the process of assimilation is very slow and painful too. The native people do not accept the alien group wholeheartedly. The countries like America, Canada differentiates these immigrants as inferior and colored. The racial and color discrimination is harmful to make a peaceful multiethnic society. However, the following ways may be

helpful to fill up the gap between the central stream and the marginal groups within a multicultural society.

1. by changing its cultural patterns to those of the mainstream
2. by developing large-scale primary group relations with the main group
3. by making marital relation with the main group
4. by losing its sense of peoplehood as separate from the main group
5. by encountering unprejudiced attitudes.
6. not to raise issue that involves value and power conflict with the main group

The above discussion shows various aspects of diaspora theory. The multicultural society needs to have the value of tolerance to live a peaceful life. Tolerance is an essential and positive value in a multicultural society. If the society tolerates racial differences, cultural plurality, and religious diversity, it will help to minimize the chances of conflict. The differences based on culture, community, gender, race should be recognized and not to be treated as deficiency of a specific society. Cultural diversity needs to be considered as a positive force to a harmonious, peaceful society. Literature of any language can certainly play an important role in the same direction.

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