

THE REFLECTION OF THE WORLD PEACE IN MULTICULTURAL NOVELS

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Abstract

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is one of the noteworthy aspects of the globalized literature. The reflection of culture in literature is an earlier aspect of all types of literatures produced in the different periods of literary development. Along with culture and multicultural themes, many of the literary texts, today, deal with the themes of conflict, hybridity, identity, displacement, diversity and assimilation. The diaspora literature is recognized as the literature of the multiculturalism. While depicting different cultures, the multicultural diaspora literature crosses the borders of the different nations. As a result, it highlights different communities and societies—‘mainstream’ and ‘other’ existing from the emergence of the nation state in the specific localities. Since, the diaspora literature reflects the two or more cultures, various characters, different cultural settings etc., the ultimate aim is to assimilate its people, localities, borders, cultures into the mainstream societies and it is meant for the World Peace on the broad level. The writers of the diaspora literature expect the ‘Unity in Diversity’ in their literary texts. The present paper is an effort to peep into the select diaspora novels of the multicultural perspective which reflect some aspects of the World Peace through the assimilation that is an ultimate goal of the literary texts and of their creators.

Key Words: *Diaspora, Conflict, War, Multiculturalism, World Peace, Culture*

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Introduction

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is one of the noteworthy aspects of the globalized literature. The reflection of culture in literature is a phenomenon of all types of literatures produced in the different periods of literary development. 'Multiculturalism' is a wide ranging and brain teasing theme in the study of literature and society. The major concern of multiculturalism that we find in the world history and particularly Indian History traces cultural pluralism and cultural assimilation on the broad level (Chakraborty ix). E.D. Hirsch, in his *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (1994) explicitly defines the term, 'Multiculturalism' as "the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest".

In the study of 'Multiculturalism' the basic and pivotal term is 'Culture' that is widely used in almost all discussions today. Though, the term outwardly deals with a meaning concerned to the behaviour of human beings. It is dominantly used in the fields like literature and humanities. From the earlier years, 'the culture' and 'cultural studies,' especially, in the field of literature is a predominant phenomenon that has brought many new thoughts which affect our knowledge and understanding of various subjects. Kushal Deb in his book, *Mapping Multiculturalism* (2002) remarks, 'Although multiculturalism, as a concept and as a value, has emerged and has been popular mainly in the West, as an analytical category, it has immense potential for usage even in the Third World or developing nations'(13).

The issues concerning multiculturalism and minority rights have come to the foremost of debates in political theory from the 1990s because of the collapse of the communist regime in the Soviet Union and the East European nations, and the resultant upsurge of ethnic nationalism in all these countries. We also observe the continuing importance of ethnicity in the nativist backlash against immigrants and refugees in the Britain, the United States, France and Germany. Therefore, the issues which are discussed in this study related to multiculturalism, are highly important and timely when the nations and societies at large are going through an upheaval of understanding terrorism and bringing in peace (qtd. in Kushal Deb 8).

The diaspora literature is recognized as the literature of the multiculturalism. While depicting different cultures, the multicultural diaspora literature crosses the borders of the different nations. As a result, it highlights different communities and societies—‘mainstream’ and ‘other’—existing from the emergence of the nation state in the specific localities. Since, the diaspora literature reflects the two or more cultures, various characters, different cultural settings etc., the ultimate aim is to assimilate its people, localities, borders, cultures into the mainstream societies and all these are meant for the World Peace on the broader level. The writers of the diaspora literature expect the ‘Unity in Diversity’ in their literary texts.

The present paper is an effort to peep into the select diaspora novels of the multicultural perspective which reflect the aspects of the World Peace, that is, an ultimate goal of the literary texts and of their creators. The select diaspora novels consist of conflicts which have resulted into war and riots among the different communities depicted by the novelists. The select novelists and their novels are — *A Bend in the River* (1979) by V.S. Naipaul, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh and *The Holder of the World* (1993) by Bharati Mukherjee. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the vision of the World Peace manipulated through the realistic experiences of the novelists in their novels.

Diaspora and Multiculturalism

‘Diaspora’ is a term used by historians to refer to those settlements inhabited Jews in all parts of the world outside the state of Israel. The Diaspora, as the term now used, has come to mean any sizable community of a particular nation living outside its own country and sharing some common bonds that give them any ethnic identity and consequent bonding. Today, there are over twenty million people of Indian origin spread across a hundred and ten countries. These people, originally hailing from the Third World countries and now free in the First world, were not forcibly moved from their locations (Anand 160).

In the postcolonial era, Indian diaspora has become an important place in the world of politics, culture, and especially in the field of literature. In the Indian context, the postcolonial writers, especially, diasporic writers have gained their position by writing on the various issues like culture and multiculturalism. One of the most striking things about such postcolonial multicultural literature is many Indias they represent. Jaidev Anupama (2006) writes, ‘The diaspora writers have emerged as a significant presence in the international literary arena during the last three decades. And they have indeed been alternatively lapped up by the academia for various reasons. For one, question of identity,

politics and legitimacy which have always been crucial to the diasporic discourse, do increasingly command serious attention in our fast changing, increasingly alienated and volatile world (72).

The theme of multiculturalism occupies a significant place in the contemporary literature. The problems encountered by these immigrants are realistically presented in the contemporary literature. The writers of Indian origin migrated to Canada, America and other countries keenly observed the changes that took place in the immigrants. They recorded these changes and resulting pains in their writings which is popularly known as 'Diasporic Writing'. It includes the issues like sense of belongingness, feeling of 'other', cultural conflict and multiculturalism (Kousadikar 41).

Ashok Chasker in his book, *Multiculturalism in Indian Fiction in English* (2010) writes, 'Multiculturalism is not an intellectual discipline but a movement for social change. It is about respect, recognition, tolerance and protection to all cultures and subcultures. Multiculturalism is not merely an issue of academic debate and discussion but an invitation to dialogue for social cooperation. Thus multiculturalism, as a principle to be acted upon, requires from us all receptivity to difference, an openness to change, a passion for equality, ability to recognize our familiar selves in the strangeness of others. The impact of multiculturalism, thus, can be seen in the diverse fields like trade, industry, commerce, politics, education and literary studies. Thus multiculturalism, mirrored in the literary texts, can be considered as a call for dialogue between groups, cultures and religions' (101).

The Indian Diaspora fiction in English forms the major volume of Indian English writing. The various issues relating to immigration like culture, multiculturation, transformation and marginalization are the central aspects of the diaspora writings that are gaining tremendous popularity among the lovers of literature. Multiculturalism in its different aspects has become the culture of the day particularly, that of the diaspora world. It is one of the important social and literary issues in the study of post-colonial and diaspora literature on the broad national and international levels.

Aspects of Conflict and War in Multicultural Novels

V. S. Naipaul is a diasporic writer of Indian origin. He often gives the pictures of the Indian diasporic community and individuals in his works. In his novel, *A Bend in the River* (1979), Naipaul records closely the migrants' life with post-modernist vision relating to the conditions of migrancy. In the second part of the novel, 'The New Domain' there is an influence of power on Salim, the protagonist in great manner. Especially, his conflict is high when he is caught in the political and social dealings of the Congo. Here, the change as a new dimension in Salim's life occurs as a result of conflict between social classes competing in the region. His placement is linked to a local sense of

place and identity which results into a shift on account of the effect of colonialism and globalization. The concept of identity and the placement in the traditional sense to one's original roots can offer a stable identity. Nevertheless, "the concept of place is not static but unstable" and "places are processes" (Massey 155). He says,

Places do not have singly, Unique "identities", they are full of internal conflicts [---] such as conflict over what its past has been (the nature of its "heritage"), conflict over what should be its present development, conflict over what could be its future. None of this denies place nor the importance of the uniqueness of place. The specificity of place is continually reproduced in the context (155).

The conflict resulting through the war is one of the significant aspects in the novel. It deals with the war which is resulted by social issues like trade and business in the region. Especially, the army in the town comes from a warrior tribe involved in the war. It (Army) was marching day-by-day to the region to disturb the balance in the town. The army had a real war to fight (BR77). Salim, under the impression of the war, thinks deeply over the village people who were becoming the prey of soldiers' guns. Salim thinks,

That is the sound of war that sound of a steady, grinding machine made me think of guns; and then I thought of the crazed and half. Starved village people against whom the guns were going to be used, people whose rags were already the colour of ashes. This was the anxiety of a moment of wakefulness (BR 78).

Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) highlights the post-colonial reconstruction. Ghosh highlights the awareness of growing internationalization of the world. He shows the coming together of different societies and cultures which has also emphasized their distinctions. Ghosh describes the orthodox Bengali family at three stages-before partition, after partition, and in recent times. Both the parts "Going away" and "Home coming" are influenced by the riot ridden days of the partition. Amitav Ghosh describes the violence of the state and the fear of the victims as:

"That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the fear of the victims of an earthquake, of people who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth [---] it is not comparable to the fear of nature, which is the most universal of human fears, nor to the fear of the violence of the state, which is the commonest of modern fears" (SL 225).

This reality resulted from history of two countries brings the religious conflict at its top level. Therefore, the Muslim refugees attacked Tridib. This incident shows that there is a need to critique the myths of nationalism and globalization in the wake of communal violence and hatred. It means the religious conflict over-powered the minds of two community to survive their self and religion in the nation. Other than the story and plot, the readers pay their attention towards the historical incident; the partition which resulted in the war between these nations. The critic, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, “*The Shadow Lines* questions the idea of nationhood but is consolidated through the baptism of wars” (qtd. in Sharma 146).

This idea of nationhood and the war in the form of communal strife in Culcatta and Bangladesh reflect the cultural, social and communal conflict in the novel. The communal riot resulted through war with Pakistan that killed Tridib. It’s this war with Pakistan (262). With this death, Ghosh wants to highlight that the religious conflict is the main issue in the novel. Therefore, he writes, ‘I had any inkling that Tridib’s death was the result of something other than an accident’ (263).

Bharati Mukherjee’s novel, *The Holder of the World* (1993) is slightly different novel portraying the three times; time travelling by the two protagonists-Hannah Easton who is a translated self and Beigh Masters a twentieth century American woman who is involved in the “assets research”(HW 10). The very first line of the novel: “I live in three time zones simultaneously, and I don’t mean Eastern, Central and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future”(5). All these reflect the protagonist’s journey through the ages full of conflict of historical event. In the later part of the novel, the diamond –‘The Emperor’s Tear’ becomes a source of conflict. It is the Emperor’s Tear; ‘The Holder of the World’ is responsible to do even ‘assets research’ by Beigh Masters who reads ‘Auction and Acquisitions’ and ferrets around for antiques and precious stones. Beigh Masters traces the history of a diamond, which is stolen by Salem Bibi, and Hannah Easton who appeared in a Mughal miniature painting in the Maritime Museum in Massachusetts.

The title, *The Holder of the World* is the literal translation of Alamgir. It is a name for the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. The novel depicts the colonial rule of the British Raj in India, and also the clash between the Muslims and Hindus in India (Online). This clash and conflict are carried forward and resulted into the war between a Hindu Raja Jadav of Devgad and Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. The Nawab of Aurangzeb’s state, his ruthless commander Morad Farah is sent to arrest Raja, usurp the diamond and bring Hannah, the *firangi* lady. On the way to Nawab, the Raja attacks the Mughal army. Hannah kills Morad Farah saves Jadav Singh’s life and brings him back to Panpur.

She tries to communicate with the emperor and end the war but she is taken a hostage by him. She disdains the emperor for the bloody war and suffering of numerous innocent lives. The diamond is ultimately found by Beigh Masters in cyber spatial finale (Ghanshyam and Nadig 153).

All these aspects of Conflict and War depicted in the novels, *A Bend in the River* (1979), *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *The Holder of the World* (1993) have emerged from the cross-cultural realistic role played by the novelists and lives of the characters in these novels. The displacement of these writers and their protagonists from the homeland into dreamland into different cultures and localities confirm their diaspora experiences. And out of these experiences, realities and the cross-cultural immigration they come across, and conflicts of various types which remain pivotal for War between the two communities of the different societies and communities depicted in the novels.

The Vision of the World Peace

Behind every literary creation, there is a vision of reconciliation and assimilation of many cultures. The unity in diversity, positiveness and optimistic attitude of the writer remains at the centre of human communication. The diaspora novelists —V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh and Bharati Mukherjee also look for the vision of reconciliation and assimilation which bring together individuals, groups, nations, communities in the society that reflect the phenomenon of the World Peace in their novels. The cross-cultural and multicultural themes in their novels depict a hope of assimilation of the different aspects— cultural assimilation, assimilation of borders, unity in diversity, hybridity, spatial assimilation, depiction of other's culture into the mainstream culture, etc. In Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, Salim, the protagonist changes his place. He goes in the interior part of Africa— 'a bend in the River' to be a part of mainstream culture. *The Shadow Lines* of Amitav Ghosh presents a historical, political event between India and Bangladesh. The Dhaka incident; killing of Tridib in the war out of conflict between two communities, Hindu and Muslim is a great culmination in the novel. At the end, we realize the writer's philosophy that the shadow lines between nations are referred to as 'looking-glass borders (Mondal 89). Anshuman Mondal, further, says that, Nations are both 'real' and 'imaginary', material and immaterial. It is for this reason that Ghosh suggests that the borders that separate them are 'shadow lines' (88). This is the new vision of Ghosh that denies borders between the nations and it reflects the World peace between these two nations.

Bharati Mukherjee in her novel, *The Holder of the World* puts her protagonists —Hannah Easton in the structure of the World peace. Being an immigrant into Indian culture, she searches her identity in the new culture. In one of her interviews (Interview 1988: 654), Mukherjee highlights her

opinion that the immigrants; the characters of the novels change citizenship, they are reborn (online). Her works accept—indeed, embrace—the violence that accompanies cross-cultural revision and personal change. The change in the life of Hannah is greatly influenced by the Indian patriarchal Hindu culture. Rajalakshmi and Sumathi point out that ‘Indian literature has been shaped and molded by the influence of Buddhism’. The fiction of Bharati Mukherjee has also been influenced by the archetypal presents of Buddhism in India (593).

In that sense, the character of Hannah Easton stands as a symbol of the true Holders of the World who does not vie for supremacy over other group. On the contrary, she ties between England, America, and India; each has been a “Holder of the World” in its own right. According to Rajalakshmi and Sumathi, ‘Hannah adapts so successfully that she recognizes parallels between places in ways that indicate her capacity to move into a postcolonial mindset much more quickly than her white English or American counterparts. It also gives her the inner premonition to stay in India after her husband is presumed dead, which results in her no longer calling herself an English woman’(596). This is the sign of cross-cultural tolerance and understanding of different cultures that promotes the vision of the World Peace in the novel.

Conclusion

The diaspora novels while reflecting the aspects of multiculturalism contain the conflicts of various types. These conflicts have resulted into the war and riots among the different communities. After all, each community involves in these because of its existence that aspires for the assimilation and reconciliation of themselves into the main culture which is dominated by the majority population of the specific community. The select diaspora novelists—V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh and Bharati Mukherjee have reflected on their vision of the World Peace through their novels. Their main objective in portraying their protagonists in the novels is to achieve the re-location; assimilation into the cultures of their own as well as others, and it is the basic requirement for the World Peace. The multiculturalism offers equal rights to the minority population which is called ‘other’ in the non-native nations. These writers look beyond the borders of the nations to re-establish a culture of the humanity for the whole Universe. Though these select novels are full of conflicts and riots, the ultimate aim is to assimilate different cultures and people together to form the World Peace.

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