

**THE DEPICTION OF NOSTALGIC EXPERIENCE OF DIASPORA
IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH**

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INTRODUCTION

When we talk about Diaspora we come to know that it is generally violent and compulsory migration of people from their homelands to other regions. As a central event in colonization, the diasporas may involve millions of people who voluntarily displaced themselves from their countries to work chiefly in advanced countries. Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity. Yet, a peculiar but a potent point to note is that writers in their displaced existence generally tend to excel in their work, as if the changed atmosphere acts as a stimulant for them. These writings in dislocated circumstances are often termed as exile literature that has negative connotations but if the self-exile of a Byron is considered, then the response to that very word becomes ambivalent. If a holistic view of the word "exile" is taken, the definition would include migrant writers and non-resident writers and even gallivanting writers who roam about for better pastures to graze and fill their oeuvre. World literature has an abundance of writers whose writings have prospered while they were in exile.

The Indian-English writers, notably, Raja Rao became an expatriate even before the independence of the country; G. V. Desani was born in Kenya and lived in England, India, and USA; and Kamala Markandaya married an Englishman and lived in Britain. Nirad C. Chaudhuri preferred the English shores because his views were not readily accepted in India. Salman Rushdie's "imaginary homeland" encompasses the world over. The Iranian "fatwa" phase has added a new dimension to Rushdie's exilic condition. Colonial and post-colonial India are divisions that are now more relevant to a historian than a

littérateur because Indian-English literature has transcended the barriers of petty classifications and has become almost part of Exile Literature and the Diasporic Indian Writer mainstream English literature.¹ A major contribution in this regard has been that of the Indian writers, like Rushdie and Naipaul, who live as world citizens - a global manifestation of the exilic condition. Indian-English writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru have all made their names while residing abroad. (Mehrotra: 2003)

The non-resident Indian writers have explored their sense of displacement—a perennial theme in all exile literature. They have given more poignancy to the exploration by dealing not only with a geographical dislocation but also a socio-cultural sense of displacement. Their concerns are global concerns as today's world is afflicted with the problems of immigrants, refugees, and all other exiles. These exilic states give birth to the sense of displacement and rootlessness. The Indian diaspora has been formed by a scattering of population and not, in the Jewish sense, an exodus of population at a particular point in time. This sporadic migration traces a steady pattern if a telescopic view is taken over a period of time: from the indentured labourers of the past to the IT technocrats of the present day. Especially after Indian independence the Indian diasporic community has acquired a new identity due to the processes of self-fashioning and increasing acceptance by the West. It is interesting to note that the history of diasporic Indian writing is as old as the diaspora itself. In fact the first Indian writing in English is credited to Dean Mahomed, who was born in Patna, India, and after working for fifteen years in the Bengal Army of the British East India Company, migrated to "eighteenth century Ireland, and then to England" in 1784. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794, Klyas Chunder Dutt's "imaginary history" *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* published in 1835. The first Indian English novel, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, was to be published much later in 1864. It shows that the contribution of the Indian diaspora to Indian writing in English is not new. Also interestingly, the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers in the so called "girit

colonies" have predominantly favoured writing in English, the lingua franca of the world. The likes of Naipaul and later Shiva Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul, M. G. Vassanji, Subramani, K. S. Maniam, Shani Muthoo, and Marina Budhos are significant contributors in that field. V. S. Naipaul's characters, like Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsumair from *The Mystic Masseur*, are examples of individuals who are generations away from their original homeland, India, but their heritage gives them a consciousness of their past. They become itinerant specimen of the outsider, the un-housed, for the world to see. Their attempts at fixity are continuously challenged by the contingency of their restless existence -a condition grown out of their forefathers' migration, albeit within the Empire, from India to Trinidad. Naipaul's characters are not governed by actual dislocation but by an inherited memory of dislocation. For them their homeland India is not a geographical space but a construct of imagination. The novels of the older generation of diasporic Indian writers like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Balachandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhuri, and Ved Mehta predominantly look back at India and rarely record their experiences away from India as expatriates. It is as if these writers have discovered their Indianness when they are out of India. Obviously they have the advantage of looking at their homeland from the outside. Ultimately Indian writers in the West are increasingly identifying themselves with the literary tradition of the migrant writers of the world. Rushdie says that "Swift, Conrad, Marx [and even Melville, Hemingway, Bellow] are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy". 2 (Srikanth: 2004)

The modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two distinct classes. One class comprises those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been bred since childhood outside India. They have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of their origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement whereas those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have produced an enviable corpus of English literature. Two of Vikram Seth's novels *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* have as their subjects

exclusively the lives of Americans and Europeans respectively. Two of the earliest novels that have successfully depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. These novels depict how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of the 1960s alienates the characters and aggravate their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife and Jasmine* depict Indians in the US - the land of immigrants, both legal and illegal - before globalization. Salman Rushdie in the novel *The Satanic Verses* approaches the allegory 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 bring out the migrant's angst. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* has the character Ila whose father is a roaming diplomat and whose upbringing has been totally on foreign soils. She finds herself as much out of place in India as any foreigner. But when she conjures up the story of her doppelganger Magda being rescued by Nick Price from Denise, it shows the extent of her sense of rootlessness. Amit Chaudhuri in his novel *Afternoon Raag* portrays the lives of Indian students in Oxford. Similarly, Anita Desai in the second part of her novel *Fasting, Feasting* depicts Arun as a migrant student living in the suburbs of Massachusetts. The important point to note is that in a cosmopolitan world one cannot literally be a cultural and social outsider in a foreign land. There are advantages of living as a migrant - the privilege of having a double perspective, of being able to experience diverse cultural mores, of getting the leverage provided by the networking within the diasporic community, and more.³ (Dharwadker: 2004)

But it is often these advantages that make diasporic Indians, especially of the second generation, encounter the predicament of dual identities. Such ambivalence produces existential angst in their psychology. The world simply refuses to become less complex. The diasporic Indian writers of the first generation have already established their credentials by winning numerous literary awards and honours. But recently the ranks of the second generation of Indian writers in the West have swelled enormously and many among them have won international recognition. Meera Syal, who was born in England, has successfully represented the lives of first generation as well as second

generation non-resident Indians in the West in her novels *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. Hari Kunzru in his novel traces a part of the lives of three diverse characters Leela Zahir, an actress, Arjun Mehta, a computer expert, and Guy Swift, a marketing executive - traversing through Bollywood, the Silicon Valley, and London. Sunetra Gupta has shown with candor both the unpleasantness and the Exile Literature and the Diasporic Indian Writer pleasantness of intercultural relationships through characters like Moni and Niharika from her novels *Memories of Rain* and *A Sin of Colour*. Jhumpa Lahiri's book of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* and her novel *The Namesake* convincingly illustrate the lives of both first generation and second generation Indian migrants in the US. Santha Rama Rau and Nergis Dalal attempt to portray the various aspects of Indian life along with the East-West encounter and clash of the generations.⁴ Santha Rama Rau's novel, *Remember the House* reflects the vivid picture of the East-West encounter through young Indira, how she is affected from adolescence to maturity. Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Wife* delineates the picture of exasperated Bengali wife, who suffers a sense of alienation in New York. Anita Rau Badami's novel, *Hero's Walk* explains how the Indian communities in the west have confronted the problems through the seven years old protagonist, Nandana, who is wrecked in a cultural shock that her ancestors have experienced in Europe and America. Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* delineates the problems of Indian immigrants in the U.S.A. through the character Draupadi who has never been to India. As early as 1894 in *Kamala*, Krupabai Sathianadhan explored the cultural clash suffered by a Hindu woman and the experience of being caught between two cultures has remained a prominent theme in writing by Indian woman.⁵ (Bhabha : 1994) (Chaudhuri:2001)

There are many Indian women writers based in the USA, Canada, Britain, and other parts of the world. Some are recent immigrants, while others, such as Jhumpa Lahiri, are second generation immigrants. These authors write about their situation in cross-cultural contexts - states of 'in-betweenness'. The theme of migration that leads to self-discovery, with a negation of the traditions of the country of origin, is a recurrent one among migrant authors, Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1998), Ameena Meer's *Bombay Talkie* (1994) and

Bharti Mukherjee who presents the sense of migration in her novel *Desirable Daughters*. Mukherjee depicts a liquid society in her novels, i.e. a society in flux. It is a society of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of machines, flow of criminals, flow of power structures, flow of people and commodities. Atima Srivastava and Meera Syal both work in Britain, and are also playwrights. The clash between the older and younger generations of immigrants is one of the central themes of their work. Srivastava's first novel, *Transmission* (1992) is about young people who have adapted to their new land. Similarly, The social milieu as depicted in the novels of Chetan Bhagat is alarming. His novels are about the Indian youth of the twenty first century. He writes about India as an Indian. He writes about each aspect of India like its culture, its problems, its language and depicts the life of young generation who, in spite of being Indians, are facing the problems of immigration and transnationalism. 6(Ghosh: 2002)

CONCLUSION

The traditional Indian society is in a state of metamorphosis. The extraordinary achievements of the twenty first century, the maintenance of progress in the face of increasing competition-these things have only been gained and can only be held by great mental effort. The demands made on the efficiency of the individual in the struggle for existence have greatly increased and it is only by putting out all his mental powers that he can meet them. Off late such trivial themes are gaining vital importance specially in Indian English fiction because big issues like religious intolerance and racial discrimination are no longer the main concern of the contemporary modern Indian English writers. What matters now in the current world are the small things. Little, unacknowledged things gain enormous importance in changed circumstances. It is here that the differing reactions by Indian, Western, and diasporic characters towards similar situations are found to differ only superficially. Alienation is a part of the experience of the Indian diaspora and even if people are at home in any part of the world it does not mean that they will not become victims of the sense of alienation. Increasing acceptance into the host society does not indicate that the diasporic characters can feel at home. Social alienation is replaced by metaphysical alienation. Real pain is mental pain. Everyone feels pain because

everyone has a dark side to their life. The immense extension of communications which has connected people from every nook and corner are misused to spread discontent from one part of the country to the other. The works of the modern Indian English fiction writers describe the consequences of colonialism and global issues of religion, race and nationalism along with special reference to alienation thus bringing out experimentation both in delineating theme and form of the novel.

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