

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRESENTATION OF COMPLEXITIES OF MIGRATION AND ITS EFFECTS IN THE LITERATURE OF INDIAN DIASPORA

Surinder Kaur

ABSTRACT

Indian diaspora pertains to Indian migration, their socio-economic and cultural experiences, experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies. Literature written by these diasporic writers is clearly inspired by their personal experiences. The pain of migration and displacement felt by these writers flows in their narratives too. Novels and stories are the tales of deep anguish, nostalgia and of rootlessness where characters feel more emotionally and mentally tortured than physical fatigue. Predicament of dual identities i.e of their homelands and of nations they migrated to, corrodes their psyche. In a cosmopolitan world one cannot be a cultural and social outsider in a foreign land for long. Sunetra Gupta in her novels like *Memories of Rain* and *A Sin of Colour* presents the intercultural relationships. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* too pins the Indian migration to US.

1. The Term Diaspora

The New Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Diaspora' drawn from Greek, 'the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian captivity', carrying with them the fond hope of returning to the motherland one day (Shodhganga, 2008:8). Etymologically, the term Diaspora is coined from greek word 'Diaspeirein' where Dia means 'about, across' and Speirein means 'to scatter' hence meaning – to scatter about, disperse. It was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a dominant city, state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire (Bhatt, 2008:37). Nowadays the term Diaspora is a metaphor for 'expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities living in exile' (V.Swamy, 2012:210). Indian diaspora pertains to Indian migration, their socioeconomic and cultural experiences, experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies (Shodhganga, 2008:8). The push and pull combination worked best- inadequate opportunity in Asia pushed Indians out of country while bright prospects of west pulled them. Now Indian migration is largely a success story settled in U.K, USA and Europe.

2. Diaspora and Literature

"Creative or imaginative literature has a power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that

make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artifacts used by academic researchers” (White, 1995:15). Diasporic literature faithfully represents migrated sect’s life. Alienation, schizophrenia, time lag, estrangement, racism, nostalgia, identity crisis, migration are major themes of diasporic literature. Majority of the diaspora writers write about their own experiences, the problems that they have to face while settling on the new land (Bhatt, 2008:38).

Salman Rushdie rightly observes,

“The Indian writers who write from outside India...is obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost...create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible Imaginary Homelands, Indias of the mind” (Rushdie, 1991:10-11).

The present paper is limited to the theme of migration and its effects as presented by diasporic writers in their writings.

3. Indian Diasporic Writers

The modern Diasporic Indian writers can be grouped under two categories. One category contains those writers who spent a part of their lives in India and then migrated to other countries. The second category comprises of those writers who were born on foreign land. Former category has a literal displacement but latter category writers find themselves rootless. These writers view India from “outside as an exotic place of their origin” (Saha, 2009:193). Prominent writers of diaspora are Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamala Markandaya, A.K. Ramanujan, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt.

4. Migration

In its traditional usage, migration refers to very specific events- for example, the seasonal migration of birds or the (voluntary or involuntary) geographical uprooting of people. Etymologically the concept of migration originates from the latin ‘migrare’ meaning simply to ‘wander’ or ‘to move’. The word migration nowadays possesses a wide range of complexities of meaning as Soren Frank refers to the modern application of this term in literary studies as “the oscillatory and inconclusive processes that manifest themselves on different levels in the literary work – for example, in relation to personal, national and cultural identity, language, narrative form and enunciation” (Frank, 2008:8).

5 Migration And Its Effects as a Theme in Diasporic Literature

Indian diasporic literature portrays a vivid picture of the ways “migrant characters cope with their new life places, the uncertainties and insecurities they suffer from and the communication problems” they face (Fatemah & Abdolali 2014:680).

5.1 Displacement

5.1.1 Physical Displacement

Migration displaces an individual from his home country. Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity (Saha, 2009:186). The moment one steps in on a foreign land, the social ties and social roles he enjoys in his motherland are lost and he is alone to face the hardships welcoming him in new land. From having a home, family and comforts of life in India, migrant becomes homeless and lonely. Adjustments are hard causing migrants not only physical alienness but spiritual too. Salman Rushdie in *Satanic Verses* (1988) explores the theme of migration through the lives of two characters namely Gibreel Frishta and Saladin Chamcha. He discloses the complex process of migration which not only dislocates a person physically from a geographical area but it also dislocates one spiritually and causes the feelings of rootlessness. Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) describes Indian migrants' disillusionment in England. Dev migrates to England to pursue studies but silence and emptiness of London make adjustments a real difficulty. Homelessness is fatal curse that befalls human beings during the course of history (Roddannavar, 2014:19). Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) narrates the sufferings of Indian soldiers of Empire in Malaya, Singapore and Burma and their tragic deaths and longingness for homes.

5.1.2 Cultural Displacement

Cultural displacement involves the loss of vernacular language, family and social ties and a support system of friends. Emigrants, with similar ethnic background in small groups, try to recreate native culture on a foreign land. Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2003) forms a close knit web of immigrant friends. This group practices Indian customs, speak the Bengali language and in many respects, becomes a substitute family for the vast collection of relatives back in India. Hence migration relocates a person from his homeland physically but psychologically they cherish old memories and culture from which their living style has emerged.

5.2 Identity Issues

5.2.1 Ambivalence

In a cosmopolitan world, one cannot literally be a cultural and social outsider in a foreign land (Saha, 2009:194). Migrants "move between identities, experiencing the exile's desire to retain cultural roots, whilst at the same time, being drawn to the acceptance of and integration to the new culture" (Fatehmah & Abdolali, 2014:688). Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) uncovers the attempts of Ashima and Ashoke to hold on to their Indianness. They adhere to Indian value system at home but outside

they follow American code of conduct. Ashima feels that “previous life has been vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding” (Lahiri,). Arun in Anita Desai’s *Fasting Feasting* (1999) has adjusted to new lifestyles and is happy of having double perspectives, Indian and American.

5.2.2 Predicament of Dual Identities

For second generation the question of identity is a complicated issue. Parents want them to follow Indian traditions and values as well as exploiting maximum benefits of foreign land. But children remain confuse, as Gogol in *The Namesake* (2003) finds it difficult to handle dual identity. “Genetically he is tied up to his traditions and has unique self, racially he is alien and a second class citizen in America” (Bhatt,2008:43).

5.2.3 Identity Regain

Migration sometimes becomes an instrument in regaining one’s identity. In Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the ship Ibis offers a platform for asserting one’s true identity. In their homelands, Deeti and Kalua, were subject to deprivation but migration brings them at equal levels beyond caste and class bar:

“It was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari-ki-maa, the name by which she had been known ever since her daughter’s birth...her proper name was the first to come to mind and since it had been used by anyone, it was as good as any. Aditi, she said softly, Iam Aditi” (Ghosh, 2008:233).

5.3 Nostalgia

The memories of their homelands, social life with social taboos and inherited lifestyles, customs, keep looming in the minds of migrants and make their loneliness more acute. Sujata Bhatt beautifully mirrors the relationship of home and its memory in migrant’s mind in the poem:

Iam the one
Who always goes
Away with my home
Which can only stay inside
In my blood—my home which does not fit
With any geography. (Bhatt, 1997:54)

Even they miss Indian weather in England. Jagdish Dave writes:

The sun is half seen, unseen,
Black sun, white sun
Never seen the red sun
Never there is that intoxicating sun (Kumar, 2007:84)

5.4 Withdrawals, Empowerment and Violence

Adjustment failures badly shatter a migrant's confidence of facing society and affect their sanity too. He withdraws himself from social life. Bharti Mukherjee's novel *Wife* (1975) is a saga of Dimple Das Gupta who fails miserably to adopt the ways of new US society. She suffers the pain of being alien to society. She becomes an introvert. She spends most of her time watching TV and sleeping. She becomes so frustrated that she intentionally aborts her child by skipping. Out of fear and personal instability, she becomes mentally unhinged. She murders her husband and commits suicide.

Sufferings of a migrant sometimes act as a power house for strengthening one's ability to perform an act contrary to their personality. Jasmine in Bharti Mukherjee's novel of same name (1989) migrates to US after her husband's death. Here she is brutally raped by a ship captain. But she does not lose her heart. She draws strength from her sufferings and takes her revenge by killing that devilish captain.

5.5 Racism

Discrimination, racial prejudice against migrants alienates them and aggravate their sense of displacement, and leaves them discontented and miserable. Jemu in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) becomes the target of despising as well as biased racial attitude of the whites. He feels hesitant and nervous to go out and talk with people. He is embarrassed by his peers. He sits in library in order to avoid the giggle of young girls. He develops an inferiority complex. This creates a fissure in his personality he carries throughout his entire life.

5.6 Belonging Nowhere

Migration uproots a person from his home country. In trying to make 'home' alien country, migrant's real 'home' becomes alien. When these migrants travel back to their native country, they do not feel at home. Bharti Mukherjee in her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) narrates the story of Tara who gets married to an American and returns to India briefly but finds that she is unable to connect herself to her motherland. She fails to adjust the things once she loved and admired in the past. She feels like an alien in her own city (Roddannavar, 2014:19). Similarly *The Magic Seeds* (2004) portrays Willy Chandran's reverse journey from Berlin to India. However, all his hopes shatters as he is unable to feel home at places and cities in India.

V.S. Naipaul presents the actual case of immigrants that they become perpetual wanderers who are not at home anywhere but looking for home everywhere and finding it nowhere. Kamala Markandaya's *Nowhere Man* (1972) too expresses Srinivas discovery of belonging neither to England nor to India. A.K. Ramanujan in 'Looking for a Centre' very well expresses this situation:

Looking for the centre these days
 Is like looking for the centre
 For missing children
 Which used to be here, but now
 Has moved. (2013:103)

6. Conclusion

Literature provides an excellent pattern to reveal the fragmentation of the self and generating of feelings that can be stirred up by migration. Diasporic writers have beautifully narrated the “destructive, agonizing and painful” (Frank, 2008:18) experience of migration in their works. In a way “the experience of migration acts as a catalyst and conduit for nascent feelings, a re-conception of our sense of self and our relationships with others” (Jacobs, 2011:142). Indian diasporic literature uncovers a migrant’s struggle between desires and opportunities- as a reflection of past circumstances and of expectations for the future.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Surinder Kaur is an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English, S.G.A.D. Government College, Tarn Taran, India. She has published research articles on different literary topics. Her field of interest is contemporary English literature, in particular diasporic literature.