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## **An over view of Indian Diasporic Literature**

**J. G. Ravi Kumar**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, GITAM University, Bengaluru, India.*

### **ABSTRACT:**

*Since times immemorial Indian Diaspora has been an interesting subject and topic of discussion. In each and every genre of literature, writers have experimented with this concept of Diaspora by giving it different terms such as migration, emigration, dispersion, overseas Indians, nomads, refugees, exiles and so on. However, the term literally means to scatter, to spread or to disperse. Through their writing, these writers make a conscious effort to establish social and cultural patterns whose roots have been traced back to India and this leads to the revival of renaissance of Indian culture.*

### **DEFINITION:**

The philosophy of Diaspora itself has been the branch of literary study. The term Diaspora is derived from Greek language. Etymologically it means dispersion and metaphorically it denotes “sowing or scattering of seeds across”. Diaspora refers to the Jewish people who lived outside Palestina that led to the cross-cultural agglomerations residing in different distant countries from their native lands. Discussion about the term Diaspora has become hot topic of the day. Diaspora is a process wherein people migrate from one place to another for various reasons such as unemployment, business and trade. The term ‘Diaspora’ was originally used for expansion of wide horizon since it has been broadly used for all expatriates, exiles, refugees and immigrants.

### **CONTENT:**

Diaspora writing is the one which covers every continent and all parts of the world. In this regard Diaspora writing has been spread from Caribben island to Australia and made a significant contribution in the field of different genres. Some diasporic writers have also been awarded awards and recognition for their contribution and endeavours toward diasporic field both home and abroad. These writers try to depict the diasporic experience of Indian immigrants who are migrated to distant places for varied reasons. But whatever be the reason, they all share common experience – trauma of being away from their homeland, of an imaginary homeland to which they have to return one day. In the words of William Safran, the important characteristics of diasporas are that “they continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in a way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (pandey 119).

In fact, it’s very difficult for these Indian migrants to break the ties with their ancestral homeland and these migrant communities form an ethnicity group among themselves to preserve their culture and also develop a relationship with other groups. In this way these Indians have spread all over the world forming substantial minority communities in Asian countries and have a significant presence in Australia, Canada, the U.K, and the U.S.A.

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However their migration to distant countries helped them to interact and mingle with diverse cultures and made them understand the Dynamics of culture. The people with their various culture along with its flora and fauna has made Indian diaspora – a relevant field of study and research in each and every genre of literature and has enabled the writers to coin the new term called diasporic literature.

**Diasporic literature has gone through three different phases—**

The **First phase** of Diaspora during ancient times when Buddhists moved to remote corners of Central and Eastern Asia. Trade with East Africa has also led many small trading communities like Ismails, Bhoras and Banyas of Gujarat region to have permanent settlement there.

The **second phase** of Diaspora took place during European government has created an enormous demand of cheap, submissive, and dependable labours, especially to work on their plantations in Asia, Africa and many other countries. As a result, they started as luring Indian labours that became scapegoat for this and started emigrating overseas. These subservient labours can be classified into three categories—

- a. Indentured Labour emigration during which labours were officially sponsored by the colonial government. It continued from 1834 to 1930.
- b. Next in order was Kangani and Maistris labour emigration which is the second phase of emigration. It began in third quarters of 19<sup>th</sup> century and abolished in 1938, Kangani labours are especially from the Tamil families in remote villages of Madras residency. They were the first who immigrated to Barma.
- c. The second phase of emigration was followed by Passage or ‘Free’ emigration.
- d. The last phase which includes the emigration of trading communities from Gujarat and Punjab to South Africa and East Africa and from South India to South East Asia. These emigrants were not sponsored officially. They themselves paid their passage and they were free to take decisions for they were not bound by any contact.

The **third phase** of Diaspora took place during post-colonial period. During this time Indian emigrants had been divided into three different categories –Anglo Indians emigrated to Australia and England; Professionals and Semi-Professionals to the USA, England and Canada; and the emigrants of skilled and unskilled labourers to West Asia.

Keeping in view the above mentioned phases; the Indian emigrants are broadly classified into two categories: The Nationalist and the Colonial.

**In the Nationalist** way most of the Indians were taken aboard under the rule of colonizers. These Indian immigrants have no instinct to emigrate overseas but they were lured and duped by colonizers. They went there not to plunder the country but serve for its further development. They were not lazy and cunning but industrious. They were tolerated by these colonizers unless or until they listen and get suppressed by them. But once they started revolt

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against these colonizers and asked for their rights, they were pushed out and forced to face difficulties created by colonizers.

On contrary to this, in **the colonial** way most of the Indian went overseas in order to satisfy their own personal and economic needs. They were not deceived by colonizers but their own desire and greed to earn the foreign currency and get the employment abroad has tempted them to emigrate overseas and thus after moving there they faced the difficulties mostly because of their own decision making. One can observe that over last few decades, there has been an upswing of Indians emigrating abroad; their desire to become green card holder i.e. get the nationality of the host country has made their own native country alien to them.

Diaspora literature also gives an account of how some Indians emigrants tend to give more preference to economic integration than cultural assimilation and some in the course of adaptation have adjusted themselves to the culture of host country (assimilation of the elite). In this way, through Diaspora which leads to interaction and mingling of culture, Indian writers help to understand the dynamic of culture. The most notable thing retained by these immigrant communities is their language. Their belief is that by speaking their mother tongue, they are preserving their ancestral culture. But then it has been proved that there is no relation between languages and culture.

Caught between the two distinct worlds, these migrants search for a new space, where they can explore their feelings and desires and thus arises a need for new literary space in Diaspora literature. This literature has now become a platform through which these immigrants projects their anguish and anger towards the adopted society by writing their experience of disillusionment, rootlessness, nostalgia, dislocation and so on. Their main aim of writing in diasporic literature is to be felt present, known and accepted. Thus,

“The story of Indian Diaspora is one of sweat and toil often washed with tears, of achievements despite impediments of education advancements and economic progress. The expatriate writer, writes with Indian in his bones, yet be aware of the literary and cultural contexts of the country of his residence. Diasporic creativity may have its traumas, anguishes and challenges, but finally it is about open spaces and not about closure. It is the joy of double vision and the pain of being split through and through of carrying a nation on their backs as they work through a different history distant culture and fluid memory, which characterizes the diaspora, it’s Indianness and its’ experience” (Pandey122).

**The first generation of writers** include Santha Rama Rao’s *Remember the House* (1956) is a charming story about young Indira’s growing up that relates the pleasures and pains of growing up to issues of location and dislocation. She is in her search of her true image torn between the traditional values that she has absorbed from her childhood and the new values that the education has bestowed upon her. The novel ends with the resolution of her dilemma through a definite act of will. Attai Hussain moved to England with her family immediately after partition and her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*( 1961) is a classical account of protagonist Laila’s perception of partition and its aftermath. The novel consists of four parts and covers a period of twenty years in the life of Laila the narrator heroine. Kamala Markandaya’s *Nowhere Man* (1972) is one of the earliest fictional representations of immigrant experience. Here Markandaya forges home as the central metaphor and weaves a

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tale of an immigrant's search for home in alien land around that metaphor. These writers do not fit neatly into any of the theoretical categories but their work is important in historicizing postcolonial diaspora.

**The next generation of writers** include Bharathi Mukerjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Indira Ganesan, Chitra Bannerji Divakaruni, Meena Alexander etc and these writers describe multiple patterns of diasporic movement motivated by different factors: inter racial marriages or preference for alternative sexualities. Each one of them etches out her own trajectory of dislocation and relocation particularly highlighting problems peculiar of female migration. These tales do not confirm to the popular diasporic subjectivities that are in wide circulation. But their work is extremely important since they use gender and sexuality as sites of diasporic negotiation in interrogating racist, nationalist and traditional discourse enclosing them.

**There is yet another generation of writers** called post immigration writers. There are second generation Indian Americans like Jhumpa Lahiri, Atima Srinivastava, Sujata Massey, Amulya Malladi etc who are engaged in negotiating passages between cultures and histories defining their own identities in fictions and poems which deal with both grand visions and everyday life, what new forms of expression are created by these writers in order to articulate their vision which cannot be embodied in any existing generic forms? The question of belonging is obviously central to all Diaspora writing. Women are born into an “expatriate state and they are expatriated in patri hence their writing of the Diaspora is different from that of their male counterparts. Sheila Rowbotham,s context of women perpetual elsewhereeness is worth quoting here: “But always we are split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or another... we were never altogether in one place, we are always in transit, immigrants into as alien country” (Rowbotham 1973:31).

**Women writers** project a new vision of elsewhereeness and develop what may be called discourse of double displacement on reading writers as different as Bharati Mukherjee and Suniti Namjoshi, Kamala Markandaya and Chitra Divakaruni, Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhat, one may single out three recurring tropes in their work- home and family ethnicity and identity, body and sexuality—through which they articulate a perspective of women's experience of exile in particular and women's alienation in general. Home as a symbol of metaphor dominates all the diasporic imagination and hence has been theorised upon sufficiently. It is more directly and complicatedly involved in the emotional need to retain the security of a family but resist the re-enactment to the dominant patterns of patriarchal subjugation. Home therefore directly linked to issues of marriage, motherhood, child-rearing and parenting, all of which acquire specific nuances when sited in diasporic locations.

The immigrant women's struggle to negotiate a new territory, culture and milieu are often wrought with pain, fragmentation and psychic alienation. Dimple DsaGupta of Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) is a classical example of this category. The opening of the novel focuses the position of Dimple in a subsidiary position within the patriarchal systems “Dimple Das Gupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in matrimonial ads” (Mukherjee 1975:3). Marriage, she hopes, will bring her freedom. But she soon realizes that it simply means a shift from one cage to another. As a

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young bride living in a cramped Calcutta flat in joint family she longs for escape and immigration to the US or Canada becomes her dream way to freedom. As an immigrant in the US, she finds herself trapped among gadgets with little human interaction. Loneliness, frustration and loss of identity wreck her mentally. She suffers insomnia, depression, and phobias of different kind. Dimple's estrangement finally culminates in a violent act of self assertion when she kills her husband. Dimple's story is symptomatic of high incidence of insanity among immigrant women, particularly among those confined to homes.

Going home to India is not an easy solution available to immigrant women. In situation where women do make a journey back home, they rarely find what they have lost. Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter* (1972), Feroz in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993) are only a few examples of this category. Uma Parameswaran uses the mythical king Trishanku as the symbol of immigrant location. Trishanku who desires to reach heaven in his corporal form manages the ascent with the help of sage Vishwamitra. But he is refused admission to heaven and remains suspended between heaven and earth, an aerial surveyor looking at two worlds. To stay back and struggle for a palace in the new world often becomes the ethnic of immigrant existence. In more recent writing we find changing meaning of home in diaspora and complicated rehomeing processes. To rehome is not to go home but to undergo a constructive process in which different cultural passages are transformed to produce a new sense of dwelling around the axis of mobility, co-belonging concept like Rohinton Mistry's philosophy of extended family dialogue is what we find today.

In the story of mother and daughter relationship, often they represent two generations of immigrants with a major divide in their subject positions. Mothers want to keep their daughters within the traditional models of feminism they have in mind and daughter resisting it is a recurring theme we see in women's writing. Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2004) records the experiences of three generations of women in diasporic living and contrasts their respective constitution of subjectivities. Chitra Divakaruni's writing often centres around the lives of immigrant women. Her novel *Queen of Dreams* (2004) explores the lives of three generations of immigrant women with an insight that comes of inwardness to the experience being depicted. Rakhi, a young artist and divorced mother living in Berkeley, California, is struggling to keep her footing with her family and with a world in alarming transition. As Rakhi attempts to define her identity, absorbing her mother's Indian past and thus rediscovering her own roots, her life is shaken by new horrors. In the wake of September 11, 2001, she and her friends face with dark new complexities about their acculturation. Can acculturation ever be complete? Does immigrant community ever find acceptance from its host society? Rakhi's experience like that of her other Asian friends demonstrates the fragility of an immigrant's situation in the adopted hand.

Ethnicity becomes an important concern as one shift one's location and becomes a member of a minority community in alien environment. A shift in location and a change in location status make one conscious of their ethnic identity. Meena Alexander articulates her own experience when she says: "In India no one asked me if I were Asian American or Asian. Here we are part of a minority and the vision of being unsolved comes into our conscious" (26). An immigrant woman is it once made conscious of her difference in terms of colour, race and gender.

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Diaspora writing has developed its own theoretical position privileging a double vision. But these theoretical explorations work in different ways and throw up question which affect both personal social concerns. Issues of motherhood and bringing up children in the so called hybrid space occupy the concerns of women writers' considerable. Adjustment, assertion, assimilation, survival—all these may be handed through a range of coping strategies by adults. Mother –daughter relation assumes a special significance in the context of Diaspora discover several spaces within the diaspora. Uma Parameswaran made an interesting and valid statement “of the Indian Diaspora—have been successful in our careers and have found our individual relevance from our early education” (Parameswaran1998:30). Theorise of Diaspora deals with special sensitivity and actual lived experience.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Migrations have resulted in building up Diaspora communities which share the common sense of rootlessness and experience of agony due to homelessness in a new land. Diasporic aesthetics refer to all such aspects which are reflected in Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Aesthetics is here referred to the principles or characteristics of a particular work of art and artistic movement. Diasporic philosophy itself is an artistic movement among the writers of present generation.

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