Diaspora: A New Dimension of Literature

Sumit Kumar
*Research Scholar, Department of English, CDLU, Sirsa.

ABSTRACT

Last two decade, Diasporic literature contains in itself a huge significance which has no limitation and its meaning is extended in various directions. Generally, it is considered an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works which are written by the authors outside their native country, but their works are associated with native culture and background. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Indians have been migrating across the globe for the last a few decades. Diaspora literature means works written by authors who live outside their native land. Indian Diaspora writers not only concentrated on the migratory aspects, the processes of integration and adjustment in specific context but also focused more on the aspects of culture, identity formation and retention, means the cultural process dealt by Indian Diaspora is viewed in terms of either maintaining its culture of the home or integrating in due course with the host society in the long run. Diaspora writings occupy a significant position among cultures and countries and the writers of the Indian Diaspora through their literary contribution have greatly enriched English Literature. In the words of Bhuik Parekh: “... the diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up far from being homeless he has several homes and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world”

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The word diaspora (from Greek diaspora, “scattering dispersion”) is “the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established homeland” or “people dispersed by whatever cause to more than one location”, or “people settled far from their ancestral homelands” (https://en.wikipedia.org/1).

The word get popularity in modern society as it is used broadly for any movement of population sharing common national and ethnic identity. The diaspora people tried to maintain cultural connections around the world from ages immemorial. In other words, Diaspora is nothing but alienation, displacement, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also contains the immigrant experience and their settlements. Uma Parameswaran has defined it as follows;

----first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethno cultural issues. The fourth is when they have ‘arrived’ and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (Parmeswaran, 165)

In broad context, all those writers can be considered as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but always closely associated to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Indians have been migrating across the globe for the last few decades. Indian Diaspora has been shaped by scattering of population in the form of infrequent migration. Indian Diaspora writers not only concentrated on the migratory aspects, the processes of integration and adjustment in specific context but also focused more on the aspects of culture, identity formation and retention, means the cultural process dealt by Indian Diaspora is viewed in terms of either maintaining its culture of the home or integrating in due course with the host society in the long run.

The Indian Diasporic writers have been categorized into two distinct groups— the first group comprises of those who have spent a part of their life and have carried the belongings of their local land off shore. In the words of Devika Khanna Narula:

They are split into a complex space between two worlds and two cultures; they can neither forget the world/culture they have come out of and which would be different if they returned to it now; nor can they fully assimilate into and be acculturated by the world/culture they have adopted because they cannot subvert their own identities totally. (35, 2005)

The other group comprises of those who have been grown up since childhood outside India. They have had a observation of their own country only from the outside as an ‘exotic place

Diasporic writing unfolds the experiences of unsettlement and dislocation, at some or the other level. A diasporic text can be investigated in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. The changing designation of home and accompanying uneasiness about homelessness and hopelessness of going back are recurrent themes in diasporic literature. The longing to regain lost home often culminates in the creation of a different version of home. As Salman Rushdie observes;

“--- one physical alienation from India at almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of redeeming precisely the thing that was lost, that will, in short, create fictions not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of mind.”(Rushdie, 1991:10)

Overall we see great transformations in the cultures of the migratory populations. Though their physical or geographical position is de-localized, their social and cultural position is still to the old memories of the culture from which their living patterns have emerged. Diaspora writers expressed the pain of leaving the mother country behind in his writings. They tried to pass on the message that departure from the motherland is not preferable. A collection of Memories always remain a noteworthy aspect in expatriate writing. The memories evoked by past times, place and people as they were when the writer experienced them, as they are now, at this point of time they may immeasurably distorted. Besides, these memories are now colored by thoughts and melancholy. Diaspora brings to mind various contested narratives. It can be a optimistic site to build up an identity, or, a pessimistic site of fears of losing that identity. Diasporic writing deals with multiple mixtures of aspects like cultures, languages, histories, people, places, and times. It does not only mean that people are dispersed in diverse places but that they gather together in other places, forming new communities. It is agreed that the expatriate writer is like a explorer opening out from a fixed point and shifting along to wherever life takes him or her. The reason behind the journey is the aspiration to discover, to leave behind familiar spaces and move out into unknown regions, to reach out to the unbounded blue skies. The artist or a writer is just like a voyager, an explorer, who out of the quarrels with himself, out of his or her personal discontent, moves on impatiently, in search of new adventure, discovering new continents, new worlds, find solutions to problems encountered on route, often regretting world left behind, lamenting on the banks of Rivers of Babylon, or by the Thames or by the Ganges, coming to terms with the changing circumstances. As Salman Rushdie maintains, “The immigrant, the man without frontiers, is an archetypal figure of our age.” (Rushdie, 2002:115) Stuart Hall in his article ion “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” says

Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference […] It is because this New world is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plentitude, recreating the endless desire to return to the ‘lost origins’ […] And yet, this ‘return to the beginning’ is like the imaginary in Lacan— it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery. (236)

One of the most celebrated expatriate writers is V.S. Naipaul whose writing is a complaint against the colonial centre. He discusses how the marginal culture adapts to a cosmopolitan society and the changing value system and its impact on the characters. The sense of alienation and nuclear insanity in modern American Society are well explained in the novels of Vikram Seth. Salman Rushdie, an exceptional writer, discusses the issue of migrant identity. All his characters like the author himself are migrants drifting from shore to shore in search of an ‘imaginary homeland’. The recurring themes of all his works are ‘double identity’ divided selves’ and ‘search for identity. A new dimension of the Indian English works can be seen in the works of Anita Desai. Her writing focuses on alienation, estrangement, anxiety, anguish and threats to individual identity.

Anita Rau Badami, one of the modern writers in the field of Diasporic literature even with her few literary writings have been able to carve a niche for her in the literary world.

Her novels a fluent and somewhat old fashioned story teller….is to be commended for taking on bitter subject, and for turning it not into a page-turning thriller but into a thoughtful highly readable, and even slightly hopeful narrative. It deserves a wide readership. (Quill & Quire, Internet)

V. S. Naipaul’s characters like Mohun Biswas from A House for Mr. Biswas or Ganesh Ramssumair from the Mistic Masseur, are instances of persons who are generations away from their original homeland, India, but their inheritance gives them a realization of their past.

Nila Sha in her article, Re- Narration of History in Such A Long Journey and A Fine Balance stated that: “The ethnocentric nature of Mistry’s work discerns the assertion of difference and fragmentation of identity, creating its own space within the national and the diasporic context. The author’s own expatriate position makes him aware of the element of alienation ( 79: 2003).”

The great writers of Indian English fiction like Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, had a strong dedication to expose cruel realities of life to effect the desired change in society. Nationalism, Partition Poverty, Peasantry, Subjugated Women, Rural-Urban Divide, East-West encounter, Feudal Practices, Casteism, and Communalism were some of the themes quite closer to their hearts. All of them are well known for realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian life. While remaining on the margins of the most cultures, they undergo complex experiences of anxiety, confusions, yearnings and aspirations. These Diasporas live in what Homi K Bhabha calls in between condition that is very agonizing to them, and there is a yearning for ‘home’ which remains a “mythic place of desire in diasporic imagination.” (Bhabha, 1994:77)
Conclusion

For the migrant writer the concept of homelessness, separation, numerous migration, and individuality are all conditional and vulnerable because they are related to the socio-cultural context and their content must always be constructed relative to the context. The paper has attempted to examine the mirror image of Diaspora Theory and its various aspects in literature by discussing features of Expatriate or Diasporic literature. It has also analyzed the Indian involvement to diasporic literature in English. Thus diasporic writings occupy a significant position among cultures and countries and the writers of the Indian diaspora through their literary contribution have greatly enriched English Literature. In the words of Bhiku Parekh: “… the diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up far from being homeless he has several homes and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world” (110).

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