

INDIAN DIASPORIC WRITINGS AND POST 9/11 WORLD: RESPONSES DECODED

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Abstract

The term Indian diasporic emerges from forced migration and voluntary migration. Some of the Indian diaspora writers responded to these issues post 9/11. However, the Western Indian English diaspora fiction writers had been silent on issue. The themes are imperative to be explained through the Indian writers. The acculturation journey is not a teleological trajectory. There are several conceptual problems. They describe the integration strategy as the developmental end goal in the immigrant's acculturation process.

Keywords: Indian, Diasporic, Indian Diasporic, Post-9/11, Themes

Indian writing exists in the form of essays, short stories, novels and poetry. It is definitely in abundance. Most of the writings are originally written in one's own mother tongue or native language. Indian writing in English is mostly dependent upon the translation of the original works and texts.

The term, Indian diasporic writing can be explained by understanding the meaning of the term 'diaspora'. Diaspora is defined as a group of people who come from a particular nation or whose ancestors come from that particular nation, but who now live-in other parts of the world. Indian Diasporic writings are divided into 2 forms-writings emerging from forced migration and writings emerging from voluntary migration. Forced migration is when the writers are forced to move out of the country due to various reasons. Voluntary migration, on the other hand is when Indian writers voluntarily opt to move out of India to settle abroad. These divisions therefore harbor the Indian writers who then, either criticize the country or praise it.

It basically puts forth the idea of how exile, in the form of migration, has led to emergence of a large number of writers who have contributed to the progress of the English Literature. The major contributors are writers like Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, who were accepted as world citizens. Indian-English writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru have established themselves as fine writers in

the tradition of the Indian Diasporic writing Aishwarya Johnson (2019).

If it is noted that most of our diasporic writers are still occupying that safe space of their original homelands, one needs to figure out why this pattern persists. Are they afraid of writing about the place they are standing on? Or is it that they are not really standing here but back there? Or is it because they have realized it is more marketable to stand there and not here? In the above observation, it is clearly hinted at the interface between the forces of the market and the production and consumption of Indian English diaspora fiction and was, perhaps, also suggesting that submission before the market made the fiction of the Indian English diaspora writers inauthentic in terms of the representation of the "real" problems of the Indian diasporic communities in the host lands. It was difficult to question such an observation even some ten or twelve years back, as in the hands of most of the Indian diasporic writers, the problems of acculturation remained skin-deep and barring a few rare exceptions like Kamala Markandaya's 'The Nowhere Man' (1972) or Meera Syal's 'Anita and Me' (1996), the diasporic novels of the Indian writers remained myopic to serious racial and ethnic problems faced by the Indian diasporic communities in the host lands like the UK and the US. In fact, intra-community class and caste conflicts and tensions were also mostly ignored by these writers. Post-9/11 developments, however, have made some of the Indian diaspora writers respond to these issues. Marina Budhos's 'Ask Me No Questions' (2007), Kazim Ali's 'The Disappearance of Seth' (2009) and Hari Kunzru's 'Transmission' (2004), document post-9/11 hate crimes against the South Asians/Southeast Asians in general and the Muslims in particular in the US that expose the racialised fabric of the nation. It is interesting to observe that unlike Budhos, Kunzru and Ali, other well-established writers of Indian English diaspora fiction in the West are still silent on issue like racial and ethnic conflicts/tensions that could be unpalatable, mainly, to the Western readers. On October 25, 2001, in the 'Prepared Remarks for the US Mayors Conference', John Ashcroft, the former Attorney General of the US, declared: "On September 11, the wheel of history turned and the world

will never be the same".

Uma Parameswaran asked whether the Indian diasporic writers were afraid of writing about the host land, whether they were standing "here" (in the host land) or back "there" (in the homeland). The essay in which Parameswaran raised the question was actually a pre-9/11 plenary talk delivered at Red River World Literature Conference in April 2000. Is it then that the new generation writers of Indian diaspora are not really indifferent to the realities of the host lands, rather, we, the academics, are apathetic towards them? A question like this will generate further questions. Have these novels been properly promoted and marketed by the publishers? Does the myopia of the critics, then, owe to the lack of marketing and promoting these novels? But can this be really cited as a strong reason in this age of net-marketing and net-shopping, where a book is just a click away from the stack? Are we, then, to blame ourselves? In 'Ask Me No Questions', Nadira, once is tired of playing hide and seek with her teachers, neighbours and friends about her illegal identity, however they are not the only illegal in America; there are indeed many who could be spotted if their signals are picked up correctly: "We're not the only illegal at our school. They're everywhere. One just has to look.... To find us one has to pick up the signals." In a similar way, it could be said that some of the new generation writers of Indian diaspora are standing firmly in the hostlands. "If they are not seen, the fault is ours, not theirs. We just have to look. We just have to pick up the signals" Angshuman Kar (2017).

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. The word "exile" 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.

John Simpson in 'The Oxford Book of Exile' writes that exile "is the human condition; and the great upheavals of history have merely added physical expression to an inner fact". Indeed, it is so if exile is taken to be identical with self-alienation in the modern, post-Marxist, Brechtian sense of the term. Physical mobility often heightens the spiritual or psychological sense of alienation from the places one continually moves between. The world, in

existentialist terms, appears absurd and indifferent towards one's needs. In such a situation one cannot help but feel like an outsider. Therefore, it is well agreed that exile is a part of the human experience. Many a Shakespearean play has in it exile in the form of banishment and it dates back even before the time of Pericles of Athens. As for writers of yore there is Ovid whose hyperbolic lamentation on being exiled from Rome for publishing an obscene poem forms part of his 'Tristia I'. There is Virgil whose Aeneas leaves Troy urged by the ghost of his wife thereby displaying the writer's predicament Amit Shankar Saha (2009).

Even when individual immigrants claim to have integrated themselves into the mainstream host culture, structural and political contexts conspire to combat their assumptions. In other words, it is simplistic to assume that the burden of acculturation whether successful, failed, or reversed, and reworked lies primarily with the individual. Rather, the acculturation experiences of Indian immigrants, living in the diaspora, are constructed through a dynamic, back-and-forth play concurrently between structure and self, being privileged and marginalized and is caught in the web socio-political and historical forces. The post-9/11 spotlight and media coverage had suddenly thrust many South Asian male adults into the camp of the terrorist-enemy and their physical resemblance to "Muslim/ Arab/Middle Eastern" had made them vulnerable to attacks from the public. Their sudden visibility as non-white, foreign, and a potential enemy had interrupted their movement towards being integrated and welcomed on the great American melting pot. On the surface, it would appear that these professional Indians have "made it" in America and ultimately are structurally integrated within the larger society. Their status as model minorities had ensured them a material slice of the American dream in the suburban enclaves of America, where they owned houses, had the requisite middle-class comforts, and could send their children to expensive colleges and universities. Their experiences with fear, alienation, and racism after 9/11, however, forced them to reanalyze their identities as assimilated citizens of America. If nothing else, this rupture uncovers the tenuous and temporary nature of the acculturation process. At the very moment that an immigrant, particularly one who is non-white rests in the comfort being integrated, the proverbial rug gets pulled. Integration, assimilation, or even marginalization and separation are not end points but rather pit stops in an ever-spiraling double helix that moves both ways. In 1890, over 90% of immigrants were European, whereas in 1990 only 25% were European with 25% being Asian and 43% being from Latin America. This striking shift can be largely

attributed to the changes in immigration law in the 1960s, when several racially motivated "Exclusion Acts" were eliminated in order to meet the demands of the U.S. labor market. These new immigrants often find themselves struggling with asymmetrical cultural positions, racially charged contexts and an oppressive political rhetoric. Additionally, in contrast to their turn-of-the-century European counterparts, new immigrants have far better access to transatlantic travel and can take advantage of the accelerations in global communication technology. To recall, Berry and his colleagues argue that the four main acculturation strategies are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. An immigrant adopts an integration strategy when he or she attempts to maintain cultural and psychological contact in his/her everyday interactions with both his or her ethnic group as well as the dominant group. Similarly, the concept of "bicultural competence" suggests that an immigrant can possibly achieve a happy, balanced blend that entails "becoming effective in the new culture and remaining competent in his or her culture of origin". Those immigrants who do not achieve this goal, experience higher acculturative stress and/or are not as physically or psychologically healthy. Although integration and bicultural competency may be worthy goals to achieve, the narratives analyzed above show that for most people living in contemporary diasporas, their negotiation with multiple cultural sites is fluid, dynamic, interminable and often unstable. Achieving integration may simply not be an option and/or may be achieved temporarily only to be lost at some point and soon. First, Berry and his colleagues describe the integration strategy as being an end goal of an immigrant's acculturation without explaining the process by which such a goal would be achieved. Second, missing from their discussion on "integration strategy" is how issues of conflict, power, and asymmetry affect many diasporic immigrants' acculturations process. For example, integration, at least as discussed by Berry and his colleagues, implicitly assumes that both the majority and minority cultures have equal status and power. Furthermore, it is not clear what the term integration

exactly means? How does one know when someone is integrated or not with the host culture? Who decides whether an immigrant is pursuing a strategy of marginalization, integration or separation? (Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram 2008)

Thus, the discussions makes it clear that the racial and ethnic positioning of these Indian migrants made their acculturation process different from the previous great wave of immigration at the turn of the last century. The themes on which these diasporic writings largely focus on are homeland, dislocation, displacement, a feeling of Loss, alienation and cultural identity and ethnicity. In order to get a better insight into the Indian Diasporic Literature, it is imperative to explain every theme using the works of the Indian writers. World literature has an abundance of writers whose writings have prospered while they were in exile. Although it would be preposterous to assume the vice-versa that exiled writers would not have prospered had they not been in exile, the fact in the former statement cannot be denied. Cultural theorists and literary critics are all alike in this view. The acculturation journey is not a teleological trajectory that has a fixed-end point but instead has to be continuously negotiated and it can be concluded that there are several conceptual problems with describing the integration strategy as the developmental end goal in the immigrant's acculturation process.

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