

## ISSUES OF NATION AND IDENTITY IN INDIAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:**

*Various issues generated by the experience of Migrancy and Diaspora such as Displacement, Alienation, Rootlessness, Fragmentation, Racial Discrimination, Marginalization, Identity Crisis, Cultural confrontation and many others are largely raised in contemporary Indian writing in English. Many Indian Diaspora writers, writing in English and other languages have portrayed in their works certain community, religion and culture specific conflicts in the new lands of location revealing the diversity of Indian culture. But their major concern about Diaspora issues have been Dislocation, Fragmentation, Nostalgia for Home, Marginalization, Racial Hatred, Cultural and Gender hatred, Conflicts, Identity crisis, Generation differences, Transformation of subjectivities, Emergence of new patterns of life with Cross Cultural interaction and disintegration of family units of Indian Diaspora leading to anguish, traumas and dilemmas suffered by the members of such families in varying degrees and mainly by the children of these unhappy and broken homes. Moreover, their concerns and sensibilities vary to a great extent as per their generation, individual perceptions and their community.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Displacement, Alienation, Rootlessness, Fragmentation, Racial Discrimination, Marginalization, Identity Crisis, Cultural confrontation*

The term 'Diaspora' was initially used in connection with the scattering and exile of Jews from their homeland and their nostalgia for the lost country and the Cultural alienation experienced by them in the Cultures of New location. But in the 17th century there was an upsurge in migration from India. The Nostalgia and yearnings of such people and their return to their homelands that were displaced in the form of indentured labor have been captured very inclusively by V S Naipaul in his early novels *The Mystic Massuer* and *The Mimic Man*. Many people were uprooted in the 18th and 19th centuries for serving the British Empire in various parts of the world. The

yearnings of these displaced people for their homelands signified political freedom for them. In the early part of the 20th century, many Hindus, Muslims and mainly Punjabi Sikhs went to Canada for earning their livelihood as they worked as lumberjacks in sawmills. They had to work on lower wages and suffered racial Hatred and discrimination. The protest against such atrocities by Indian Diaspora in Canada united them in 'Gadar party' which became a leading force in the struggle for freedom going on in India. Sadhusingh Dhama has portrayed this phase in his novel 'Malukah' (1997)

A new dimension to this life in exile got added in Post-Independence period in India when many people in the 60s and 70s started moving towards developed countries on their own accord either to escape political or economic difficulties of their native land or to study or as professionals, which Gayatri Chakravorty calls as part of 'Brain drain'. Since then, this move to other countries has been continuing. It is important to note that whatever the reasons for migration be, the immigrants do experience sense of unbelonging and uprootedness in the new lands. They may try hard to assimilate or acculturate in the New Cultures, but they remain on the periphery of the Host culture and are treated as 'Other'. While remaining on the margins of the host cultures, they undergo complex experiences of anxiety, confusions, yearnings and aspirations. These diasporas live in what Homi K babha calls 'In between' condition which is very painful to them and there is a yearning for home which remains a "mythic place of desire in Diasporic imagination".

They create 'Imaginary homelands' from the fragmentary and partial memories of their homeland. They undergo Cultural dilemmas, feel culturally displaced and threatened of their Cultural identity, at the mockery of their cultural practices and traditions whose baggage they carry with them and try to preserve it. They also show resistance to the discourse of power in the Host culture in various forms. However, the children of these migrants occupy different spaces in their representative culture because of their better

assimilation and better settlements. Their confusions, feelings of Rootlessness, Displacement are also less intense and are not of similar nature as in the case of their parents and grandparents. Another fact of Diaspora existence, Reality and experience in the world quality is that the treatment to them in the host country also depends on the color of the skin of the Diaspora. Blacks and Asians born even in the white countries are thought of as people whose real home is elsewhere. It should also be noted that living in the new locations, Diaspora identities do not remain isolated and static, rather due to continuous interaction with the host culture and other cultural communities; they constantly produce and reproduce themselves. The transformation in the subjectivities and Modes of thinking of Diaspora becomes possible because they have the advantages of living on the border zone of two cultures and having a relationship of two geographical spaces which overlap each other in, what is called a 'hybrid space' or 'third space'.

In the present global scenario, with interaction and intermingling of the cultures, the new routes and Modes of thinking about Diaspora identities are emerging. Various theorists now feel that the discourse and narratives of Nation, Ethnicity or Race which are the modes of belonging and place individuals in certainty of roots, are not suited anymore when the migrants are thinking in different ways about their relations to the new place, home and their past. Moreover, since a considerable change has been visible in the outlook, location and identities of Diaspora the Diaspora individuals and communities cannot be placed only in relation to some homeland to which they all want to return. Avtar Brah and Uma Parmesvaran claims that Diasporas after having crossed the political borders must cross the Psychic borders and make a mark of identification and recognition for themselves in the realistic, historical and political space of the place of relocation because as Uma Parmesvaran believes, "Both Exiled and Home is here, within the new homeland".

Different issues raised in Indian Diasporic Literature

Indian Diasporic literature has raised different issues and aspects of Immigrants lives. The fictional narratives like Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1990), Meera Syal's *Anita and me* (1996), Jhumpa Lahiri's *the Namesake* (2003), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni *the Mistress of Spices* (1996) have shown the Indians living in England, America and where they have immigrated either to

improve their economic condition or to seek jobs due to unemployment at homelands or for better education for their children or for better Professional opportunities. Their life of hard work, tensions and anxieties because of various existential problems have also been portrayed in these texts and many immigrants are shown not feeling a sense of belonging and are yearning 'silently for home'. Some of these texts have also brought out the plight of the illegal immigrants who have to do menial jobs at lower wages living constantly under the fear of police and the immigration authorities. Another aspect that emerges from the novels like Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Chitra Diwakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is the violence and sexual abuse suffered by Indian woman, both at home and at work places for various reasons such as incompatible marriages with NRI man and the feudal attitude of the Indian husbands towards their wives and the sexual exploitation of Indian women by comparatively better placed men of their own communities and even by the priests of Temples and Gurudwaras. But some of the female characters in these novels are also shown adopting different resistance strategies to assert their identities and live life of dignity and self-respect by revolting against the oppressive relations and seeking the help of the police and the NGOs

Through this literature we also witness people of elderly generation who feel isolated since everyone in the home is busy from morning till evening. They are also presented feeling perplexed because of their inability to accept the new cultural ways adopted by their children and grandchildren. Torn between the non-fulfillment of their expectations from their children as per the Indian Cultural roots and the loss of their hold on the family units, they pass their time either in front of idiot box or in the company of the people of their own generation and from their own communities if available in the neighborhood.

We also observed that the life of neglect at home led by the children of the over busy immigrants and the racial discrimination suffered by them in social environment and at schools. Meera Syal, through mental torture suffered by the nine-year-old Meena and Chitra Divakaruni through the psychic repression and beatings hurled daily on Jagjit Singh, a 12-year-old sikh boy by the white American school mates because of his wearing a turban and being considered 'Paki', project how often the Indian immigrants feel oppressed,

struggle hard and look for different escape routes to make space for themselves in the culture of natives. Like Jagjit, some of them also get entrapped in the network of American mafia gangs from drug smuggling and other illegal activities who gives these neglected and bullied children support, money, motorcycles and promised them guns- the symbol of power which they consider to be their passport to real America. The presentation of these serious issues pertaining to the children of Indian immigrants who are joining the mafia gang, either out of frustration to earn money or to resist and overpower their Racial hatred and discrimination faced by them constantly in the discourse of power at every step in the country of whites reveals the deep concern of the Indian Diaspora writers for them.

This problem of racial hatred took a terrible form in America for the South Asians and specially for Sikh Diaspora after 9/11 which has been presented by Chitra Banerjee in her novel *The Queen of dreams* (2004), where a second generation Sikh young man Jaspal is given a horrible bashing by a few American youths, though he keeps on crying that he's an American like them. This is the precarious situation of the Diaspora identities which poses a question before the Diaspora theorist as to which Nation the diasporas actually belong. The Nation which their parents and grandparents had once left to settle in or the one which they had adopted and which never accepted them from the heart. Moreover, such reactions of the American youth towards Sikh Diaspora and the South Asians also raises few other issues, whether it was done because of their patriotic feelings and that the Sikhs suffered because of the mistaken identities or is it an expression of the feeling of anger and revenge against the Diaspora communities who are entering their country in large numbers because of Their country's liberal immigration policy and are snatching their job opportunities in their own country.

Literary works like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Meera Syal's *Anita and me* Chitra Banerjee *The Queen of Dreams*, have also portrayed the issue of Inter-generational gap of Indian Diaspora where the first generation parents expect from their children to live by the value system of the Indian

culture which they impose on them at home through food, dress, customs, rituals, language, beliefs etc. But the children encountering different cultural environment outside find the later half fascination, sandwiched between the two cultures and confuse like 'Gogol' in *The Namesake* and Meena in *Anita and Me* who daily hear and bear the racial comments because of their brown skin as they are not able to decide which is their real 'home', India or the country where they have been born and brought up. Jaywanti Dimiri has analyzed these dilemmas of the second generation Diaspora very appropriately.

*Expatriate experience is problematic for the second generation immigrants of the Third World for specific reasons. Born and brought up on foreign soil, expatriation for this new class of immigrants hence the background as an imaginary realty free from the stigma of nostalgia and the popular symptoms of Angst, Loneliness, Existentialism, Rootlessness or Homelessness, their predicament is in many ways worse than that of their predecessors. Despite their assimilation and acculturation, they cannot escape from being victimized and ostracized.*

We also find portrayal of the crumbling family units of Indian Diaspora because of commercially negotiated marriage, fast growing divorce culture among the Indians, expectations of Indian values by the male Indian immigrants from their green card holder America Born wives changing power relations in the house and also because of cultural and racial clashes. However writers like Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have also shown certain characters making conscious efforts to keep their family units intact and adapting themselves to the requirements of the culture and lifestyles of their children.

A few Indian Diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* and in her short story *The Last and Final Continent* and Kavita Daswani in her *For Matrimonial Purposes*, 2003, have presented positive aspects of Diaspora experiences which widen the horizons of the consciousness and bring transformation in the subjectivities of their characters. Through their protagonist they have shown that cultural interaction not only opens new routes for them relating to culture of new location and of their homeland but also makes them mobile carriers of cultures and ways of thinking to both

the land and more and make good synthesis of these, thus creating new Third Cultures and shaping Third History. According to Vijay Mishra, the latest advancement of information and communication technology and the fastest means of transportation have enabled,

--- *The late modern hyper mobile diaspora make the culture assimilation faster, bring global and local cultures together and transplant and reinvent their home cultures in New lands. (New Lamps for Old: Diaspora, Migrancy, Borders)*

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