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Diasporic Dilemmas in the Diaspora Novels of Indian English Literature

Anil K. Kate

Head & Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
B.N. Mahavidyalaya, Kokrud
Dist-Sangli.

Abstract:

Fiction is the most developed and well received genre in the postmodern period both at home and abroad. This genre of novel of Indian English Literature, has won international recognition. The postmodern Indian English fiction strikes us by adhering various aspects which have broadened our perspectives positively towards the fiction. One of the most impressive types is the diaspora novel and their broad thematic range in the postcolonial period. Along with many themes, East-West encounter in the diaspora novel is explained in terms of hybridity and multiculturalism. The diaspora novel, these days, is one of the major creations that attracts attention of every reader and lover of Indian English fiction. The major aspect in these novels is diasporic dilemma which provokes many questions in the mind of the reader.

The present paper is an attempt to highlight the role of diaspora novels and their diasporic dilemmas in the context of multiculturalism. The major aim of this paper is to foreground the concept of “multiculturalism” and the ‘diaspora’ which highlights the post-colonial consciousness in the postcolonial fiction. The survey that has been taken of Indian English Novels, especially, produced by the diaspora novelists visualizes total areas and concerns of these creative writers in the premises of their homeland as well as countries of dreamland. The different novels which have mentioned in this survey are the fact mingled with fiction having the balance of writers’ and their characters’ vision reflecting their diasporic dilemmas in the purview of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Diaspora, Multiculturalism, Diasporic dilemma

Introduction

Indian Writing in English is an important genre of literature and it has been emerging widely in the post-colonialism and postcolonial theory of literature. These days, the term post colonialism replaces the terms of Commonwealth Literature or Third World Literature. The post-colonial studies, generally, deal with the themes like cultural studies, language, art, feminism, globalization, displacement multiculturalism and Diaspora etc. In the Indian context, the postcolonial writers, especially, diasporic writers have gained their position by writing on the various issues and aspects like culture and multicultural issues in the canon of Indian English literature. One of the most striking things about such post-colonial multicultural literature is many

Indias they represent. Moreover, the huge amount of diasporic fiction that has so become a part of Indian English fiction today and has further complicated the idea of nation that is “imagined” rather than real. (Das R. Abstract).

Fiction is the most developed and well received genre in the postmodern period both at home and abroad. This genre of novel of Indian English Literature, has won international recognition. The postmodern Indian English fiction strikes us by adhering various aspects which have broaden our perspectives positively towards the fiction. One of the most impressive types is the diaspora novel and their broad thematic range in the postcolonial period. Along with many themes, East-West encounter in the diaspora novel is explained in terms of hybridity and multiculturalism. (2006:56). The diaspora novel, these days, is one of the major creations that attracts attention of every reader and lover of Indian English fiction. The major aspect in these novels is diasporic dilemma which provokes many questions in the mind of the reader. Moreover, the huge amount of diasporic fiction that has become a part of Indian English fiction dealing with the idea of nation, nationalism, culture and cultural pluralism.

The present paper is an attempt to highlight the role of diaspora novels and their diasporic dilemmas in the midst of multiculturalism. The major aim of this paper is to foreground the concept of “multiculturalism” and the ‘diaspora’ which highlights the post-colonial consciousness of the writers in their fiction. The survey that has been taken of Indian English Novels is a small effort that visualizes total areas and concerns of the creative writers called diaspora who are being appreciated in the premises of their homeland as well as countries of dreamland. The different novels which have mentioned in this survey are mingling the fact with fiction having the balance of writers’ and their characters vision reflecting their diasporic dilemmas in the purview of multiculturalism.

Diaspora and Multiculturalism

The dictionary meaning of diaspora is ‘dispersion’ used collectively for Jews, after the Babylonian captivity and also apostolic age for the Jews living outside of Palestine since sixth century B.C.(OED). It also connotes a dispersion, scattering or decentralization of national or religious groups living outside their homeland. They still maintain their cultural identity. The diasporic sensibility is valuable for attempting to bridge cultures through a widening of experience.(Sharma,2006). This term hence emerged as a word, a label used for the expatriate, exiled and immigrant individuals writing their existentialist narrative in various literary forms. In this sense, diaspora is a general category of wanderers, citizen of the world, voyage of self-destined quest for material process; many of these refugees exiled or isolated individuals, forcefully colonized slaves or servants, misguided businessmen, job-seekers and so on (Girdhari, 2010). He, further, says that so far, diaspora involved the national and cultural boundaries. It affected individual’s consciousness and formed a sort of psychological crisis. Despite all these implication, the diaspora writers represent a set of contradictory conventions—the quest for freedom and for bondages, the pursuit of material progress and the desire to be aloof from that. (30).

Diasporic writing, today, connects the past and the present and forges new notions of fluid and transnational identities; it opens up spaces for new expressions of a transnational global culture. Thus, it also seriously challenges the centre periphery positioning central to 'traditional' post colonial studies. Diaspora is an emerging word in literature. Literature produced by the diasporic writers explores the problems and possibilities engendered by the experience of migrancy and diasporic life. The diasporic writings which are also known as 'expatriate writings' or 'immigrant writings' largely give voice to the traumatic experiences of the writers when they come across the clash of two cultures or the racial discrimination they undergo. Immigration proves a pleasant experience only to a few immigrants who succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment.

Indian Diaspora fiction in English forms the major volume of Indian English writing. The various issues relating to immigration like culture, multiculturation, transformation and marginalization are central aspects of the diaspora writings that gaining tremendous popularity among the lovers of literature. Anupama Chaudhary, in her article, *Interpreter of Maladies : A Saga of Diaspora and Multiculturalism* (2009) quotes, 'Diaspora is essentially a fabric interwoven with the mingled yarn of cultures, language, and histories of people who get disperse in different places from new communities and retain all identities, old and news. This displacement is not merely a change of address but is also socio-cultural (12). As a result, a majority of the expatriate South Asian writers are part of post colonial Diaspora literature. Since the Indian Independence, two classes of writers have emerged from the Diaspora. The first group consists of non-resident Indians who have spent a part of their life in India and have latter settled abroad while the second consists of those who have born and brought up outside India. Added to this, is the third category of Indian diasporic written where ancestors left India in the colonial period (13).

According to Subrata Biswas, 'as far as modern concept is concerned "diaspora" is seen as a sense felt by the deported population—living outside homeland either imposed or voluntary—of their ethnicity on the foreign land where they feel as a sense of alienation, identity crisis, two/multi-sectioned cultural heritage and which is the most important nostalgic longing for their habits, rituals and food. As a matter of fact no single meaning of it will be adequate for one's understanding. It is, in fact, a trans-state cultural, social psychological, economic, political ethnic and linguistic state in which three people carry a sense of xenophobia and displacement from one's own "original" land.(76). She further says that, 'Multiculturalism has become the culture of the day particularly that of diaspora world. Though both the two terms – Diaspora and multiculturalism associate transnationalism / multinationalism / exile from the homeland (forced or self imposed) it should be clear, they differ from one another in respect of the psychic association of homeland and the role of memory played in the mind. Diaspora may be result of multiculturalism or vice versa, but whereas multiculturalism only refers to the juxtaposition of two or more different ethnicities, Diaspora, resulting from the migration or emigration even by force refers to the memory of the home and a feeling of belongingness to the original homeland. (78). Further, the explorations in the works of diaspora writers relate to multiple dimensions like

the loss of Inheritance and tradition, hybrid cultures, pursuit of materialism, pain of unbelonging. Diaspora writers above all have been mediating between different modes of existence-local & non-local, native & non-native, social and global in a state peripheralised at the collective and historical experiences. For example, Jha G.S. in his book entitled, *Multiculturllism and Diasporic dilemmas..*(2011) highlights the Indian diaspora women writers to diagnose the culture that develops out of contact, of the indigenous and the alien, and the consequences that most likely bring about confrontation and reluctance of different sorts, a crisis of acceptability, and so on.(2)

‘Multiculturalism’, is a wide ranging and brain teasing theme, a recent trend in the study of literature and society. The emergence of multiculturalism as a social- political theory and also how it has emerged eventually come to be related to a literary theory—are the most impressing and thought–provoking aspects of the post-colonial scenario. In the broad scenario of the world history, the Indian history particularly traces the multiculturalism or cultural pluralism and cultural assimilation as inalienable parts of history. Especially, this also gets involved in the study of diasporic literature which is gradually widening its pasture (Chakraborty,2010). It is in this perspective there is a need of discussion of Indian English literature and its various forms emerging from the new and innovative discussions and ideas in the post-colonialism.

The term, “Multiculturalism” can be suggested of Canadian origin. Kanjilal Satyaki says that, ‘Multiculturalism is supposed to be a dynamic process in which the interacting communities undergo an identity modification or “refashioning” (69). Subhadeep Paul says, ‘Multiculturalism or plurality of culture encompasses a wide range of issues, ranging from ethnicity, religious practice and cultural expression and people of diverse histories of origin’(38). Sharmistha C. Sriwastav in her article, *Multiculturalism and A. K. Ramanujan*(2010) writes that, ‘multiculturalism becomes the current ideology to express freely one’s culture and core values while honouring the others’. She further quotes, ‘multiculturalism is an approach to living that respects, incorporates, and mediates the differences and similarities of our population. It suggests a reckoning with the erasure of cultural identities inherent in the melting pot indeed...’ (12).

Diasporic Dilemmas and Multiculturalism in Indian Diaspora Novels

The novels of Bankim Chandra, Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, explore the collapse of agrarian economy, struggle of the rural against the urban and the colonized forces, ethical and religious flights along with the suffering of men and women caught between two cultural orders. R.K. Narayan created a sociological interactive strain exhibiting the caste, class and regional structure of Indian society. In the post independence period, the men and women writers’ fiction depict communal disharmony and suppression of women and that has been the central occupation of these writers. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and K.A. Abbas reveal the impact of communism, Gandhism and political trends of the contemporary society. Travelogues, narrative fiction and nostalgic stories seem to be the whole chunk of diaspora literature. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* explores the horrors of Post-partition social upheavals

laying the foundations of the conflicting the cultural constructs. The gender perspective too occupied a special focus in the writings of Amitav Ghosh, Khushwant Singh, and Women novelists including Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya. Amitav Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is a densely textured work –addressing multiple concerns from reconstruction of history to cosmopolitan multiculturalism, from science to pseudo-science, from imagination to reality (Abstract). It dramatizes the encounter of colonial, pre-colonial and para-colonial milieu. According to Kavita Daiya, says this novel offers a grim exploration of the oppressions of migrancy.(38). His second novel, *'The Shadow Lines'* (1988) as a novel of displacement and diaspora highlights the post-colonial reconstruction. It reveals this sense of loss and alienation.(140). Ghosh highlights the awareness of growing internationalization of the world. He shows the coming together of different societies and cultures which has also emphasized their distinctions. In his *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh, underscores the need for multiculturalism and universal humanism. V.S. Naipaul records closely the migrants life with post –modernist vision relating to the conditions of migrancy. Being the diasporic novelist, Naipaul often gives the pictures of the Indian diasporic community and individuals in his works. His theme in novel, *Half a Life* (2001) is an intermix of diverse cultures. The other works involve the question of identity, restlessness, cultural difference, assimilation and so on. In Salman Rushdie's novels on the other hand, the past is fragmented with a sense of delight as an effort to redefine the experience. The cross-cultural encounters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal account for their native Indian sensibility. The bourgeois narratives of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and other women novelists reach back to revelation of multicultural interactions and disillusionment of a traveler. *The Glass Palace* of Amitav Ghosh relates the diaspora experiences of three families in Burma, India and British Malaya over the period of nearly two centuries. Bharati Mukherjee is the most prominent example among modern writers with Asian heritages. Mukharjee's, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1990) and *Desirable Daughters* (2003) show the positive nostalgia. Her heroines, despite the intentional embracement of the new society, her female leads, willingly or unwillingly, remain rooted to their culture as well. Mukharjee as an Indian Diaspora concentrates on multiple aspects of life in exile and favours assimilation in the alien land. Her novel, *Jasmine* (1991) deals with the enigmatic and traumatic complexities of human behavior. Kiran Desai in her *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) deals with both diasporic and intra-diasporic problems in an impartial way. In this novel, she seems to acquire maturity of a great writer. She swifts to certain fundamental questions of Indian and Western mind set in the present global scenario. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most eminent writers of Indian diaspora is predominantly concerned with the complexities of expatriate experience and the traumas of cross cultural adjustment. In *Namesake* (2003) Lahiri unveils the subtle process of gender differentiation at work in the family and male oriented society. Rohinton Mistry's *Such A Long Journey* (1991), portrays Indian culture and family life setting it against the backdrop of the subcontinent's volatile post-colonial politics. *His Fine Balance* reflects the reality of India – the predatory politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, violence and bloodshed. Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972) Bharati Mukharjee's *Wife* (1976), and M.G. Vassanji's *No*

New Land(1991) in which protagonists of Indian origin are uprooted from their moorings and are expatriated to alien countries. All these novels are tragedies of bicultural experiences in their gruesome aspects. Besides, Amita Rau Badami's *Can You Here the Nightingale Call?* and Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* are the diasporic texts which show generational, societal, racial and a variety of other conflicts.

Conclusion

In post colonial era, Indian diaspora has become an important place in the world of politics, culture, and especially in the field of literature. This survey of the novels is an exhaustive practice of understanding various themes sustained and developed by the diaspora writers related to the Multiculturalism and Diasporic dilemmas. The different novels of the Indian diaspora have been enriching the new sphere of Indian English fiction in Europe as well as in the world. The diaspora sensibility and its enhancement through the practice of various literary forms are an integral part of multicultural sphere in the world of globalization. The idea of plural society in these novels is raised by William James in *Pluralistic Universe* that relates with the essence of multiculturalism. Thus, Multiculturalism is a never-ending process of coming to terms with the major question of life and humanity. That is why, in an age of even closure intercultural contacts, cultural co-operation, cultural exchange and joint discussion on cultural matters are indispensably important. Therefore, in the late twentieth century the term "diaspora studies" has been coined.

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