

Teaching Diasporic Literature to ESL Learners: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Migration is a customary and acknowledged activity not only of animals and birds but also of human beings. It has been taking place since the historical past because it is a necessary and inevitable part of the development process. It is argued that people move because it contributes to the prosperity and a better way of life for the migrants. The origin of the English language began, only when the people who were living around the Black Sea moved towards Western and Eastern direction by around 3000 BC. The movement formed the Indo-European family of language from which the English Language evolved. Hence the term 'diaspora' is synonymous to the term 'migration'. 'Migration' – the human face of globalization attempts to show the relationship between culture and development. Traditions may undergo a change due to the change of social environment. Though migrants had enriched their social and economic status due to migration, it accentuates inequalities and the migrants lose their own identity in a hostile environment. This paper explores issues related to 'diaspora' and diasporic literature, outlines connections between diasporic writers and offers reason for teaching diasporic literature to ESL students.

KEYWORDS

Diaspora and Language acquisition; Diasporic literature; Language teaching.

Introduction

Displacement and relocation are a part of Human life. It can bring a lot of changes in one's life. Significant movement of population took place as a result of economic deprivation and political upheavals in their land of birth. The process of migration leads to the mingling of culture and it gives a set of perspectives about the relations between ideas and practices of different people and their culture. Hence diasporic writing paves the way for understanding the concept of

'displacement' and narrates a harsh journey undertaken on economic compulsion.

The emergence of the study of diaspora for ESL is fairly recent. It has been increasingly receiving academic and disciplinary recognition. Research on diaspora is currently conducted from numerous perspectives including sociology, anthropology, human geography, international migration, post-colonialism, political economy and communication. Basically, diaspora is a

minority community living in exile. However, at present, it refers to the people living outside their traditional homeland and describes the social, cultural and political formation that result from this displacement.

Etymologically, the term 'diaspora' is drawn from Greek meaning 'to disperse' and signifies a voluntary or forcible movement of the people from their homeland into a new region. A typical example of diaspora is given by the New Websters dictionary and Thesaurus of English language - "the dispersed jews after the Babylonian captivity". However, the term diaspora and diasporic communities are increasingly being used as metaphoric definition for expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities.

Diasporic writers tend to portray the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. Their living in-between condition is very painful and they stand bewildered and confused. These writers are deeply attached to their centrifugal homeland and they are caught physically between two worlds and this double marginalization negates their belonging to either location.

As a learner of ESL, one can identify the tremendous creativity of the immigrant writers. Through their literary articulation, the migrants took English as a means of communication and become the spokespersons of their distinct identity and thereby put forth the cultural distinctiveness. Their political unrest and the amalgamation of various issues like apartheid, 'state of in-betweenness,' and seeking for their identity are well expressed in their works.

Some of the famous Indian diasporic writers are Bharathi Mukerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Uma Parameswaran and V.S. Naipaul who have chosen literature as a channel to pour out

their passions and emotions. They express their longing for their motherland as well as portray an objective picture of Indian society. Though they migrated to different countries in search of better economic prospects, they consider 'India' as 'Home' a safe place, where there is no need to justify themselves to others. But, as a member of diaspora they ought to redefine their own identity in the hostile environment. They are caught between two cultures and one can experience the conflict between the Indian ethos and the forces of marginal existence in the adoptive country. By analysing their works, students of ESL can envisage the native consciousness of the immigrants. The diasporic discourse gives an insight into the ethnic pluralism of different countries. It offers a fresh outlook and expands its vocabulary in order to accommodate the diversity of multicultural reality.

Despite the variations, a thread of certain common themes runs through the diasporic writings. These are:

1. They or their ancestors have been dispersed from a special original centre
2. The displacement leads to mingling of cultures which influence the beliefs and attitudes of individuals as well as those of the community.
3. Traditions may undergo a change due to the change of social environment.
4. They acquired the citizenship of the foreign countries and it becomes the usage of the host country.
5. They play a significant role in the lives and societies of the country of their adoption as well as the country of their origin.
6. They have an international audience and an international mindset.

Conclusion:

In literature different writers have been influenced by different aspects and provide common basis for valid generalization. Diasporic literature has made a significant contribution to Indo-English literature by its rich exposure to multiculturalism. Though the sense of displacement may be an essential condition of diasporic literature, it is not experienced precisely with the same identity by all; it differs according to time and place. The spirit of exile and alienation

enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in the minds of readers.

A large number of diasporic writers have given expression to their creative urge and have brought credit to the Indian English fiction as a distinctive force. Hence ESL learners can read and appreciate the great works of the diasporic writers and be aware of the intrinsic value of Indian Literature.

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