

Indian Diasporic Expressions: Springy Journey of Indian Migrants

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ABSTRACT

Globalization opened vistas to mass mobilization in the world, which is historical. Flexibility with the new culture becomes a significant feature of displacement. Deliberate attempts are made by the migrants to ease the change at a personal or professional level. The process of adaptability is difficult as every individual carries his own socio-cultural and a very strong religious and communal stamping on his personality. India witnesses a huge diaspora community embracing new ways and lifestyles. The statistic shows that over 1.33 crore Indians live in foreign countries. The emerging trend of Indian Diasporic Writing voices tough but springy journey of Indian migrants acclimatizing with the culture of the new land. In this regard, the contribution of the Diaspora to Indian Writing in English is worthy. The present paper highlights the snapshots of Indian Diaspora community presented by major Indian Diaspora Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

KEYWORDS

diaspora; expatriates; migrants; adaptability; multiculturalism.

The sense of yearning for the motherland is the most overwhelming sentiment of the Indian diaspora, whenever it exists. When travel was hazardous and unusual, the yearning was intense, as they knew well that they would never return home. Though the age of technological advancement has made traveling easier and the distance shorter, their imagination continued to nurse the feeling of inadequacy in being away in a distant land. Their nostalgia together with a curious attachment to the homeland's traditions, religions and languages gave birth

to diaspora literature. (Shreenivasan 2017)

These lines precisely bring out the struggle between the inherited and accepted existence of the expatriates. The immigrant leaves home, crosses the boundaries and tries to assimilate with the new surroundings but at specific times ardently desires to go back home, the native land. As V.S. Naipaul calls him 'peripheral man', who eventually remains a person on the edge. Expressions of these immigrants come out from the pains of departures from their native land. The process of adaptability is difficult as every individual carries his own socio-cultural baggage and a very strong religious and

communal stamping on his personality. India witnesses a huge diaspora community embracing new ways and lifestyles. The statistic shows that over 1.33 crore Indians live in foreign countries. The emerging trend of Indian Diasporic Writing voices tough but springy journey of Indian migrants acclimatizing with the culture of the new land.

The available data of 'Indian Immigrants in the United States' published in August 2017 by Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova of Indo-American diaspora shows that in 1960, just 12000 Indian immigrants lived in the United States representing less than 0.5 percent of the 9.7 million immigrant population. Migration from India swelled between 1965 and 1990 as a series of legislative changes removed national origin quotas, introduced temporary skilled worker programs and created employment based permanent visas. In 2016, Indians were the top recipients of high-skilled H-1B temporary visas and were the second largest group of international students in the United States. The American dream of hybrid culture attracted a great number of migrants from the four corners of the world. The voice of the Indian American diaspora population was represented by some of the talented writers such as Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Diwakaruni.

The immigrants find themselves caught in two contradictory worlds. One is with values and tradition and the other is of dreams and promises. The polished and sophisticated life style in developed countries make the migrants feel inferior to the native people. Despite the open welcome to migrants in new country, the new entrants are caught between deep affection for their motherland and incapability to get one adjusted with new lifestyle and high-speed technology. The feeling of 'otherness' fill their lives,

resulting in alienation, loneliness and dejection.

In an interview, Anaya Chabra an Indo-American speaks about the difficulties faced by her parents, the first generation migrants when they started living in United States of America. Anaya acknowledges the fact that Indians try really hard to adopt the American culture. She states, 'I know Indians who don't even identify as Indians view themselves as Americans.' Voicing the low profile Indian people in America, she says that there are certain stereotypes of Indian families because of their thick English accent and because of their phonotypes, people may assume that they may work at certain types of low income jobs (gas station, grocery stores). However, she emphasises that because of the fact that her parents managed to speak English without an accent they did not face any discrimination in the United States.

The immigrant writers catch and experience this dilemma of migrants which eventually find space in their writings. In the work of Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri twinges of parting, search of core identity, displacement of the migrants are commonly expressed. These diaspora writers are celebrated and widely read in India and abroad. Through the tinted lenses, they have presented the diaspora world very effectively to the readers.

Displacement occurs because of the change in socio-cultural set up of the new land. Socio culture changes with the crossing of the boundaries of the host land. This change extends the horizon of experiences of the expatriate and adds to his maturity and flexibility. Many times the migrant goes quickly back to his native land with the wings of his memories. It can be called as a springy journey of an immigrant. A sense of nostalgia makes migrant to relive his past with his kith and kin in his motherland but he has to come to the present moment where he finds

himself to be the part of new culture. This flexibility or springy approach has to be adopted by the expatriates. This approach provides them a positivity to cope up with the challenges of the new place. No doubt dislocation offers opportunity to acquire the quality of adaptability but it disturbs peace of stability, harmony of native memories inevitable to the immigrant. It is rightly said,

The work of the word impedes the question of the transparent assimilation of cross-cultural meanings in a unitary sign of 'human' culture. In between culture, at the point of its articulation of identity or distinctiveness, comes the question of signification this is simply a matter of language; it is the question of culture's representation of difference-manners, words, rituals, customs, time – inscribed without a transcendent subject that knows, outside of a mimetic social memory. (Bhabha,178)

Flexible adaptation in terms of different cultures give rise to multiculturalism, an eminent feature of diaspora literature. The fluidity of new concept of cross cultural issues are brought out by Kiran Desai. Her writing exhibits her rearing in American culture and society but it also presents her deeply rooted sensibilities in rich Indian cultural heritage. Kiran Desai's novel, *An Inheritance of Loss* is set partly in India and partly in the United States of America.

Issues related to migration like cultural encounters, clashes between the cultures, dilemma of immigration, insecurity etc., are part of her life at a certain stage. Despite these issues, the issues faced by migrants like illegal existence, unskilled nature, fear for cross border terrorism etc. are taken into consideration in her writings. Kiran Desai, as a writer of Indian Diaspora presents the pangs and anguishes of the immigrants in

a very truthful way. Her contribution as Indian Diaspora writer has been praised as,

Desai portrays migration as a universal multifaceted experience, rescuing it from the clutches of myth and fetishism. Almost fifty years after, the judge went to England, Biju, the cook's son leads a gruelling existence as an illegal immigrant of New York. (Sawhney 22)

An Inheritance of Loss is set partly in India and partly in United States of America. The novel brings out varied shades of socio-cultural scenario in multi cultured society in the global village. The characters are the victim of rootlessness and loneliness. Many times, this rootlessness and isolation is caused by change of culture and dislocation to the new land. The novel reveals various losses inherited by the characters. Sense of rootlessness is clearly indicated through the protagonist Jemubhai Patel. At England the colour of his skin, his accent, his life style makes him feel lonely and alien among the English people. Feeling of humiliation, negligence, inferiority make him introvert and isolated.

I salute the city of Chicago for promoting and celebrating the act of reading and the importance of literature on such a grand, civic scale. In a world where so many senseless and destructive events are constantly taking place, it is specially consoling and commendable.

This is the reaction of another eminent Indo-American woman writer, Jhumpa Lahiri known for carving a niche as a fiction writer in United States of America. Her *Interpreter of Maladies: Bengal, Boston and Beyond* is the milestone in diaspora literature and portrays cultural quandaries and dislocations of Indian people. It is about their struggle to settle

in foreign land, how they face challenges and overcome difficulties to cope up with the new world. It is also about upbringing of their children with new culture. Lahiri's versatility as a writer reflects skilfully in her short stories volume.

With a remarkable versatility, Jhumpa Lahiri has brought out the lifelike diaspora characters in her *Interpreter of Maladies*. Shobha and Sukumar's married life proves a 'temporary matter' at America which is in contrast to Indian concept of marriage. Pirzada's visit to Lilia's house make her parents feel the essence of their native culture. 'Interpreter of Maladies' exhibits cross cultural marriage issues through the couple of Mr. and Mrs Das. 'Sexy' presents another picture of an Indian woman's faith in the bond of marriage. Mrs. Sen's strong connection with her native culture does not allow her to forget her roots at an alien land.

Lahiri brings out nuances of diaspora sensitivities of immigrants with various themes like multiculturalism, alienation, marital relationships, generation gap, illegal relationship, miscarriage etc. Her novels, *Namesake* and *The Lowland* bring out the issues of immigrant people in more genuine way. Dislocation offers opportunity to acquire the quality of adaptability but it disturbs peace of stability, harmony of native memories. It is inevitable to the immigrant but remarkably revealed through Lahiri's art of characterization.

A prolific Indian diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a Bengal born writer migrated to United States of America. Her characters are seen keeping an equilibrium between two cultures. They are the Indian migrants, try to achieve peaceful life in America. Divakaruni portrays the women characters from different strata of society. She says,

My characters struggle in the balance between family responsibilities and individual happiness which is in way, at the centre of conflict between our Hindu culture which always shows the mother as the giver, nurturer and sacrificing herself for the good of the family and the western concept of self-happiness. (Sumathi, 48)

Her novels such as *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* present the women characters oscillating between the two lands and two cultures. The protagonists Anju and Sudha face the challenges of the host land. Her *Queen of Dreams* also is woven around the theme of diasporic consciousness. The first-generation Indian migrant Mrs. Gupta's life in America and her daughter Rakhi's feeling to be an American but the attempt of seeking out her identity as Indian speaks volumes of migrant's search for identity. *Mistress of Spices* presents Tilo as torn between her native culture and host culture. Tilo too suffers homelessness, rootlessness and experiences of lingering shadows of the homeland.

To conclude, culture is an integral part of human life and personality which sustains human existence. To expatriates, it becomes tough to change and get accustomed with the new land and new culture. Hence they live in duo-cultural existence. Their life balances between the habitual culture of the native land in their memories and acquired culture of the adopted land in reality. Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee are the writers who actually have faced and experienced the nuances of diaspora life with cross cultural or multicultural elements. Their narratives are original documents pointing out the cultural identities of migrants through their characters commendably.

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