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Diasporic Indian Literature: Immigrant and Identity

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Abstract: Displacement from the motherland, nostalgia, craving for acceptance, and establishment in foreign land are characteristics of a diasporic dilemma. Migration from one place to another, from one land to another is always unpleasant situation and nostalgic. If harassment persists there on the new soil, the immigrant becomes nostalgic and craves for the homeland. Migration may be due to economic necessities, geographical hardships, and socio-political reasons. In the present context, it has become very common for people to settle on the new soil. On account of the issues like homeland, identity and race have become topic for discussion. Literature truly mirrors the change in the society because of immigrant and identity crisis. The Indian women novelists of nineties have depicted the change in migration and mobility. Women writers like Shobha De, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and others have delineated the theme of immigration and identity crises in their novels. Shahi Despande primarily focuses on the struggle of women to search their identity in the context of Indian Society. Manju Kapur's 'The Immigrant' about migration the complications arise in setting on the new soil. The novelist depicts the sense of drift and identity crisis during her stay in Canada.

Keywords: Diasporic Indian literature, Diaspora, Indian literature, contemporary diasporic Indian literature.

Displacement from the motherland, nostalgia, craving for acceptance, and establishment in foreign land are characteristics of a diasporic dilemma. Dislocation and displacement is an unpleasant phenomenon to those who immigrate. But the situation has changed. Modern times have changed scenario were the migrants hardly feel distraught or craving for their motherland but sometimes the reminiscence for the homeland causes melancholy and pain. The nostalgia becomes acute when the people who migrated suffer terribly at the hands of the natives and the circumstances in the lands they settled. People have been migrating to unknown lands since ages for a variety of reasons. The history of the world is replete with the instances of exile, displacement, mass migrations, uprooting of the communities. The reasons might be economic necessities, geographical hardships and/or social-political persecution. Thus, immigration is crossing the frontier of one's land, making the whole world one's abode. Diaspora is used for the people and communities exist away from their own country of origin. In the post-modern context, the term has assumed a variety of connotations. Now- a- days the immigrated communities share one common aspect of national, religious or ethnic identity despite their existence as a distinct minority in a host society or country. Today, the major issues like homeland, identity, and race have become center of debates.

Critic R. Cheran observes

“Diaspora and diasporic communities today are increasingly being used as a metaphoric definition for expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents; immigrations displaced communities and ethnic minorities.”

Another prominent scholar, Stuart Hall uses the term diaspora,

“To put stress on the hybridity and identity and the process, experience and practices that develop from displacement and cultural shifts”

Our scriptures and chronicles express the diasporic conditions as that of Rama and Sita spending fourteen years of life in exile.

Another prominent critic Steven Vertsvee defines the term in modern context:

“The term Diaspora is often applied to describe practically any population that is considered in/and other than that in which it currently resides, and political networks across the borders of nation, states, or indeed span the globe.”

Dr. L. M. Sanghvi defines the word diaspora as

“Communities of migrants living or settled permanently in other countries aware of its origins and identity and maintaining varying degrees of linkage with the mother country”

In short, the diaspora is a kind of displacement of communities having a little hope or desire for the future return passage and if the homeland exists it can result into a feeling of nostalgia as people re-root themselves maintaining some kind of attachment with homeland through their culture religious, tradition may be different.

Migration from one place to another has become a powerful force shaping the family in the twentieth century. Migration from one place to the other affects family also as a family is the basic unit of life. One has to migrate from one place to another, one state to another and even one country to another for economic gain or any other reason. Migrated people make new relationships where they settle. The family unit has been much affected by the migration from rural to urban or any other place because of economic problems.

Literature truly mirrors the change in the society. Socially conscious literature has a greater responsibility towards depicting this kind of change. In the novel of women novelists of the nineties, there is an attempt to depict the change caused due to migration and mobility. In Shobha De's *Starry Nights* (1991)

migration of Astha Rani from India to Wellington brings a change in her life when she has no moral scruples in the absence of her mother. Within ten days she falls in love with James Phillips and gets married. Astha Rani migrates to India and makes sexual relation with Jojo. In her absence, her husband also enjoys sexual relation with Nanny, the

Githa Hariharan's novel 'The Thousand Faces of Night' relates about Devi who studies in the USA where her classmate Dan asks her to marry but she leaves. Dan says:

"Going back is a bigger risk, I thought that you would see that...But in America, you could brazenly, plead your rights as an individual"

If Devi's mother did not call her to India with a view to sending her to France or England for further studies, she would have got married to Dan. Migration to another country brings changes in the thinking of some members of Indian families.

Shashi Deshpande's primary focus on the world of women – the struggles of women to a search of their identity in the context of modern Indian society. Unable to fully defy traditional patriarchal norms of society these women characters attempt to preserve their identity as human beings.

In Rani Dharkar's 'Virgin Syndrome', the narrator migrates from Aashiyaanna to work in a school. Later she also works as a lecturer at a university. Her coming of a situation brought a with Raina and Shyam. Ultimately she decides to live with Sidharth without marriage in London. Living in loneliness in the migrated country changes her from the traditional ritual of family and develop a new form of marriage and family.

Arundhati Roy writes in 'The God of Small Things' that,

"The truth is that in his years at Oxford, Chacko rarely thought of his parents. He needed no money and was deeply in love with Margaret."

He meets his first love, a female friend, Margaret Kochamma and falls in love. He forgets the responsibility of his old parents.

The major focus of Manju Kapur's 'The Immigrant' is about Nina's migration to Canada and the complication arise there in settling down in an environment altogether different from the familiar one. Problems like cultural, financial dependence and appearance combine together to create a psychological distress and personal identity crisis in the newly adopted community.

Manju Kapur concentrates neither in acclimatization like Markandaya's novel nor sticks to the marital conflicts in a diasporic scenario as in the recent novels. Still, 'The Immigrant' can be considered as diasporic. Manju Kapur herself during her student years at Canada depicts the sense of drift and anchorless, the pain of non-acceptance in her novel. Ananda is a dentist in Canada. Marriage proposal comes to Nina Batra, a lecturer in

English, from Ananda expressing his willingness to marry her. Along with her unwillingness to leave her aging mother to loneliness and also leaving a secured job, she marries Ananda and goes to Canada. To avoid her loneliness she borrowed books from the library. Then she thought of becoming a mother but Ananda did not show any interest. She advised him to go for sex therapy. That challenged his manhood. The relationship begins to get complicated. She obtained a part-time job in the library. She joined a course in library science. Beth introduced her to a Support Group of Women. This is all to express as to how a woman feels lonely when migrated to another country and how she tries to establish her own identity there in a distant land. There in the library she comes in contact with Anton, a Canadian and had physical relation with him. She got what a woman desires and what Ananda couldn't satisfy. Ananda also involved in a sexual relationship with Canadian female. Each of them found their own way of 'belonging,' their fights and misgivings. All that makes her more and more morose and disappointed for an immigrant there was no going back.

Immigration is essentially a process of displacement. Every individual has a comfortable existence in his/her natural environment but on being displaced from ones native surroundings to a very stressful situation beyond human control may come up. Re-rooting in the new soil is possible only through the total uprooting from the natural soil. Nina is a complex example of not only re-rooting in the new soil but also seeking self-definition on her own terms, not as an Indian immigrant, nor as a wife of a successful immigrant dentist but as herself, a woman with individuality and self-respect.

Manju Kapur has interwoven, in her novel, the theme of the life of the immigrants and their problems in adopting and adapting to a new soil. To sum up, this research paper is an attempt to display as to how the immigrant finds it difficult to re-root on the alien land and establish their identity.

Homi Bhabha wrote:

“Where once the transmission of nation tradition was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories, the colonized or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions may be the terrains of world literature encapsulate migrant experience as a contemporary reality that has to be reckoned with”

Diasporic Indian literature expresses feeling of different generations of migrants settled in foreign land. The feeling of being dislocated and foreign in different land is a psychological discomfort for the migrants. Diasporic Indian literature shows what Indians go through in foreign land and how nostalgia keeps them analysing the opportunity cost for what they have left their mother land. Majority of Indian writers

have gone through such experiences which they express in their works. With globalisation scenario is changing opportunity cost is less because of technology and communication advancing. Family stays connected and economic benefits are higher in foreign land which rewards individual skill and talent. The impact can be seen in contemporary diasporic Indian literature.

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