

Diaspora Studies: A Panoramic View of Literary Theories

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ABSTRACT

The displacement of individuals has always been an essential aspect of civilisation. The process of migration has helped individuals grow vertically on the social ladder. These migrants struggle relentlessly to construct their identity in the new land. Diaspora studies have become a widely explored and discussed topic among scholars across boundaries. The current article attempts to bring forth valuable diasporic theorists and their ideas under one umbrella to understand the term and its underlying nuances better.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migrants, Postcolonialism, Literary Theory, Boundaries

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a product of an intertwined relationship between philosophy and culture. It emerges as a source by which we become aware of the worldwide scenario and multiculturalism. It acts as a channel to enhance the bonds between various nations worldwide. Since time immemorial, literature has been constantly used to represent societal developments under the asylum of fictional plots and characters. 'Diaspora', as a term, has occupied a position in the dynamic dictionary of masses as it is comprehensively employed in the mass media, popular jargon, and erudite literature. A reading of diaspora literature and critique substantiates the general notion that diaspora is an ongoing process that benefits both the homeland and the hostland

despite the socio-cultural and geo-political differences. Populations moved from their location to a new one in primaevial times in quest of hospitable natural habitation and later in settled, agricultural societies in quest of better prospects and shelter. Today, the diasporic Indian community is one of the world's largest migrant groups and one of the host culture's most impeccably absorbed communities. It is a thriving and prominent society that has essentially averted conflict with the new-fangled cultural locale. This is not to say that the mother culture's pull fades or that migrants consciously forsake it; the yearning to maintain and honour the motherland and culture stays robust. The paper attempts to bring forth the varied aspects and dimensions of diaspora as presented by diverse Indian diasporic authors across continents. Different reasons over the ages have governed the Indian Migratory movements. Evidently, the homeland's economic, social and political restlessness triggers migration. The inherent desire to achieve a peaceful life motivated the individuals to escape the tormenting situation. Natural calamities and continuous exploitation by landlords worsen these circumstances. These factors lead to repulsiveness, and the individuals migrate towards the lands where they find prospects of better economic status, job opportunities, enhanced agricultural methods and many more. The current incitement in the literature on numerous facets of the Asian Community in general and Asian Indians in

specific has concentrated fundamentally on either the varying status of Indian women or on the societal and cultural alterations they have experienced as émigrés from a massively different culture or on a feminine standpoint of Indian females in America.

UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION

Globalisation has led to the intermingling and interconnectedness of the world economy moored by the continuous movement of individuals. After birth and death rates, sociologists regard migration, the flow of people from one place to another across geographical boundaries, as the third most important factor affecting population change. Eisenstadt defined the term as a physical dislocation of a person or a community from one location to another, contrary to which sociologist Zelinsky described migration as the discernible and concurrent shift in both 'spatial and social locus'. Translocation creates an enormous physiological and psychological impact on individuals. As observed by the migrants, the mental pressure is far more complex and intricate than the struggle of physical displacement as it affects the psychosomatic attribute of an individual. This translocation is not a mere movement of individuals from one place to another. Instead, it is a process of restructuring the entire functionality and programming of the social-cultural existence of a person. Human beings have navigated from itinerant living to settled societies by confronting the challenges that obstructed their ways. This accomplishment has always inspired the human brain to be more inventive, ingenious, and audacious to explore the hidden treasures of the sphere and thus create a more conversant, advanced, and gratifying life. The aim has never been restricted to only materialistic betterment; it also embraces the need to reconstruct a milieu that responds optimistically to the sentiments attached to the origin and its ethnicity. This issue of physical and emotional settlement of the diaspora is a

subject of primary interest to diasporic writers.

UNDERSTANDING DIASPORA

For a long time, the term 'diaspora' has been exclusively used for the Jews exiled from their homeland. They had dispersed across boundaries throughout multiple lands and suffered oppression and moral degradation. This phenomenon is noted in history as the "Jewish Diaspora" or the "Classical Diaspora". With the passing of time and changing conditions, the term diaspora has become more generalised and multivalent. It is a 'metaphoric designation' for many communities, including refugees, immigrants, alien residents, expatriates, etc. The phrase once unambiguously indicated the distribution of the Jews. Now, it has occupied a recognisable spot within a contemporary social structure. The term is likely to conjure a surfeit of transnational migration and movements. A subsequent extension of the diaspora's theoretical possibilities has also ensued in current years. It has progressed as a wandering symbol connected with images of movement, dislocation, crossings, and boundaries. Diaspora is a complex amalgamation of various attributes, including residing in a foreign land, calculating the cumulative loss and profits, reminiscing the mythology, memories, and riches of the past left behind, and fashioning a novel identity in the new socio-cultural surroundings. This vastness of the term has opened innovative and creative spaces for the literary shaping of migration and diaspora under the penning skills of prominent writers. Literature in the diaspora is peopled with the quest for identity through their physical and psychological travels. Diasporic writers like V.S. Naipaul, M.G. Vassanji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Uma Parmeshwaran, Salman Rushdie, Bharti Mukherjee, and many more dwell deep into the pages of history and acquaint the reader with the

journey of diaspora from dislocation to relocation.

THEORIES RELEVANT TO DIASPORIC STUDIES

In postcolonial studies, when diaspora literature or diasporic authors are mentioned, then what is indicated are the works produced by those authors who lived in old colonial areas that were once a part of the colonising process. Diasporic authors write about their indigenous nations or the native countries of their parents, thus bringing forth insights into their original culture. Since their works deal with issues of having come from elsewhere or remembering another culture, the results of these authors are included and studied in postcolonial studies. Edward Said's beginning point in *Orientalism* is that the presence and improvement of every ethnicity compel the company of a diverse and predictably aggressive "other" or "alter ego." Edward Said's *Orientalism* was initially released in 1978. The concept received substantial consideration and controversy due to its confrontation of the fundamental beliefs of the academic subject of oriental studies and also on the overall portrayal of East and West. Orientalism is concerned with constructing the Orient as "other" by the Western world. Said examines how the concept of the East has been formed based on the critical writings of the West. Said further emphatically states that this laid the groundwork for the West's socio-political and cultural supremacy of non-Western regions. One of the most critical implications of Said's work is that even a scholarly study of the Orient is inherently political, as it is a vital aspect of the imperialistic power and manipulation structure (Said, 1978). The chief significance of Said's *Orientalism* is that although colonialism is ostensibly over, the systems of thinking, talking, and representing, which form the premise of colonial power relations, persist (Said, 1978). Said's book became a central text of postcolonialism since it seeks to

reveal colonialism's fundamental principles and structures embedded within different systems of data and representation.

In his article, 'The Law of the Hyphen and the postcolonial Condition,' Vijay Mishra accentuates the hyphenated individualities of writers and their works. He states, "The hyphen – Indo-Americans, Indian-Americans, Hindu-Americans, Muslim-Britons – signals the desire to enter into some kind of generic taxonomy and yet at the same time retain, through the hyphen, the problematic situating of the self as simultaneously belonging 'here' and 'there'". He describes that the 'hyphen' implies optimistic and pessimistic facets that a diasporic author encounters during migration: the transformable values of socio-cultural absorption along with anguish, suffering, distress, and insecurity constructed by new migration. This hyphenated identity illuminates the émigrés who struggle with two concurrent selves. Thus, they fail to route either of the territories, which is an imperceptible background of rootlessness.

The diaspora as a new-fangled literary genus appears to be a creation of twentieth-century propagation of various theories that stance for the scattering or cultural supplanting of a community outside its traditional homeland, floating on a mysterious island, distant from home, living in an incoherent inner skirmish and psychological agony stemming from the intense nostalgic urge for land and the native social roots. Diaspora studies investigate the significance and complexities of diasporic development and examine the powerful subtext of action that maps the inspiration for diffusion. It likewise permits us to wrestle with quicker issues interrelated to scattering, the possibility of a country, and the effect of a lost country on the host country. Diasporic space is a mixture of space propelled by verifiable changes.

The diaspora is a blend of cultural quandary and emotional seclusion. Regardless of their determinations and appreciably wide-

ranging accomplishments, their solitary and hazardous crusade in the unknown self-afflicted orbit goes on without a genuine escort. They fail to find a partner in their progress and often end up distressing in self-exploration. The inner explorations, metaphorically represented in their way of life by thinking-talking-acting while drinking the unpalatable potion of sordid experience, are complemented by external factors which act as catalysts in bringing the eventual recognition. Their venturing to an alien land is similar to a magnet that attracts a lifeless iron to create vibrations when it comes into its vicinity. The émigrés rarely happen to confide in anyone as they are stricken with a sense of betrayal. Their hearts palpate for their native place, and their cultural string, supported by their homely instinct, find an expression in various literary works that many diasporic authors have attempted. The literary canvas is populated with the results of different diasporic pearls that have relentlessly portrayed multiple characters' convolutions across time and space.

In his 1996 article 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', the theoretician Stuart Hall reasoned that cultural distinctiveness is not only a question of a "being" but of 'becoming', "belonging as much to the future as it does to the past". From Hall's point of view, individualities endure a continual alteration, transcending time and space. Hall toenailed the line amid "intellectual pessimism and ahistorical optimism", all the time opposing an imposing and authoritative perception (Hall, 1996). Acculturation is a critical terminology related to the cultural experiences of an immigrant. It can be defined as the procedure of social, cultural, and psychosomatic change and acclimatization that appears when two or more cultural communities and their representatives come into contact. This method specifically refers to adapting to a host society's beliefs, principles, and manners. It also involves preserving ideas, values, and beliefs of an émigré's culture of

origin. For Berry et al., migrant individuals use acculturation tactics and approaches in countering new socio-cultural situations. According to Berry, persons and groups existing collectively are antagonised by two matters that are vital for the acculturation process: newcomers' fondness to preserve their inheritance and their desire to have associations with the affiliates of the primary/host group, to contribute to the everyday life of the greater society (Berry, 2008).

Homi Bhabha puts forth the three significant concepts in his work *Location of Culture*, which are crucial to my research-Hybridity, Mimicry and Third Space. First, Bhabha argues that a new hybrid identity or subject matter status surfaced from the intertwining of components of the coloniser and colonised, confronting the authenticity and genuineness of any essentialist cultural identity. Hybridity is positioned as an antidote to essentialism, or "the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (Bhabha, 1994). Second, Mimicry appears when members of a colonised society imitate and take on the colonisers' culture (Bhabha, 1984). Jacques Lacan asserts, "The effect of mimicry is camouflage...it is not a question of harmonising with the background but against a mottled background." Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognisable Other as a subject of a difference, as Bhabha writes, "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994). The Third Space is an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals/cultures interact. It "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force, authenticated by the original past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people".

For a diaspora, another critical aspect is its connection with the homeland. A homeland is where one's roots are and where the thread of one's identity originates. It has many memories, histories and said-unsaid tales and legends that become a part of one's personality. For Avtar Brah, 'Home'

became progressively nebulous, even miasmatic. Her notion of diaspora bargains a critique of accounts and discourses of static ancestries while considering a homing desire, which is not equivalent to a longing for a “homeland” (Brah, 1996). So, native land had emerged as a homing desire, and soon, the home itself became metamorphosed into an essentially placeless, though undoubtedly poetic, space. According to Brah-

“‘Home’ became increasingly vague, even miasmatic. By contrast, her concept of diaspora ‘offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire, which is not the same thing as a desire for “homeland”’. So, homeland had become a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical, space”. (Brah, 192)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, a diasporic study is an umbrella of wide-encompassing attributes like culture, marginalisation, gender studies and many more. To comprehend an overview of a diasporic narrative, it needs to be looked at from multiple perspectives. The growth and concept of diaspora all over the globe have engaged historians, policy researchers, economists, social scientists, psychologists, and academicians to explore the term in all possible meanings. As diaspora is mainly about human migration, the term refers to the building of a society, culture, consciousness, politics, and economy, for the safety and security of the people in diaspora. The vastness of the term with all its associated history has taken a literary shape under the writing skills of various authors. The journey of struggle and settlement has provided a broad canvas to the writers who have witnessed the phenomenon or inherited the same stories. These writers have preserved the historical

treasure and presented their imagination power to make the readers revisit the past they have nurtured in their memories.

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