



**A DETAILED STUDY ON VARIOUS THEORIES OF
INDIAN DIASPORA**

POORNIMA M.D

Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Karpagam Academy of Higher Education,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

DR.V.UNNIKRISHNAN

Professor,
Department of English
Karpagam Academy of Higher
Education, Coimbatore,
Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the theories which are proposed about Indian diaspora. By making a study on those theories, it can be found out that the 'reason' for one's migration has become the primary cause for the emergence of those theories on diaspora. Indian Diasporic writers are also listed out; their major theme is manifestation of diaspora: acculturation, assimilation, longing for their home country and the comfort that they receive in their host country. Diasporic theories of Nelson, Vijay Mishra, Bed Prasad Giri, M.L.Raina, Sudesh Mishra, Veena Noble Dass, Jasbir Jain and the other few are discussed. Various types of diaspora that are put forth by those theorists are also brought out and it also covers the idea of those theorists on diasporic writing.

KEY WORDS: *Diaspora, Indian diasporic writers, diasporic theorists, diasporic writing*

INTRODUCTION

"The civilization of India, like a banyan tree, has shed its beneficent shade away from its own birthplace ...Indian can live and grow by spreading abroad"
-Rabindranath Tagore

As Tagore said, the Indian diaspora is magnificent and widespread all over the world without confining to any religion, state or language, economic or political background. The Indian diaspora comprises Surinam, Africa, Trinidad, Jamaica, Mauritius, Malaysia, Fiji, America, Australia and many other countries. Mediterranean trading routes, the Indian Ocean trading system facilitated many Indians to migrate to those countries. It was clear from history that in those days' people migrated basically for commercial purposes. During the period of



colonization, some were forced to migrate in order to work in the plantations, and to build railroads in those countries. Their poor background was exploited by the colonizers and they were forced to settle in the foreign lands due to their circumstances. Later, many writers emerged to highlight the conditions of those people in their writings. Some writers, who were born and brought up in the foreign lands, have had first hand information to write about the diaspora. Concurrently, some writers who were born in India but brought up abroad could explore more about the diaspora as they have had the experience of both the countries.

Diasporic writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, M.G. Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, and Kiran Desai, Vikram Chandra, Farrukh Dhondy, Romesh Guneseera, Hanif Kureishi, Gita Mehta, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, and Bapsi Sidhwa. Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Prof. Satendra Nandan became popular by using diaspora as their theme in their works. The theme of diaspora comprises acculturation, assimilation, alienation, longing for their home country, comfort that they could feel in the new land and the psychology of the immigrants. Their works are analyzed by many critics with regard to the manifestations of diaspora. Some theorists began to theorize on diaspora. With the influence of Western theories, Indian theorists embarked on recording their views on diaspora. Diasporic theories of Nelson, Vijay Mishra, Bed Prasad Giri, M.L.Raina, Sudesh Mishra, Veena Noble Dass, Jasbir Jain and the other few are to be noted in the background of a discourse on diaspora.

VARIOUS THEORIES ON THE INDIAN DIASPORA:

Emanuel S. Nelson calls the Indian Diaspora the “historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian sub-continental origin in the other areas of the world”. Giri, Bed Prasad refers to the idea of Vijay Mishra on the Indian diaspora. He says that Mishra presents the “late modern” in the West in terms of metaphor of border... Members of this new diaspora... have accumulated a host of traumatic memories in the face of pervasive metropolitan ideologies of singularity (national, linguistic, racial) – ideologies that are opposed to the necessarily subalternised, racialised, hyphenated, and hybridized conditions of diasporic life” (249). Mishra uses the term “Diasporic Imaginary” for referring to “any ethnic enclave in the nation- state that defines itself ...as a group that lives in displacement”. But Giri senses that the term “ethnic enclave” appears to be mystifying and the relationship of ethnic diasporic enclave with the imaginary “must be sought in its process of self – representations, which, arguably, disclose the characteristics of self-other hostility, social alienation, narcissism, and so forth”(245).



Giri also puts forth the idea or notion of Mishra about the Sri Lankan- Canadian writers of mixed Tamil province. Mishra states that Canada's multiculturalist state policy notwithstanding, "a degree of 'unhappiness', marginalization and a sense of unbelonging underlies their literary output"(250). Bhim S.Dahiya opines on the diasporic writing as, "The phenomenon of multi-culturalism, responsible for the production of diasporic writing, is itself an aspect of post-modernism, which proclaims multicultural and ethnic societies, promoting the politics of differences...Diasporic writing draws our attention... our era in which responsibilities of citizens go across national boundaries. The earlier modernist notions of centre and margin, home and exile and familiar and strange are falling apart" (33). Even though the diasporic writers proclaim that they are at most assimilated with the new land and their culture, still they could not completely uproot from their native home country.

Vijay Mishra in his article, "The Law of the Hyphen and the postcolonial Condition," emphasizes hyphenated identities of authors and their works. He says " 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'"(185). He also explains that the 'hyphen' indicates both the positive and the negative aspects that a diasporic writer experiences through diaspora: the transformative value of cultural assimilation as well as the pain, trauma and uncertainty produced by the new diaspora (188). This hyphenated identity explicitly lights upon the immigrants who face two simultaneous identities. Thus, they could not root to either of the countries and that works as an invisible backdrop of rootlessness.

Similar attitude can be seen in the voice of Sudesh Mishra. In his article "From Sugar to Masala: Writings by the Indian Diaspora", Sudesh Mishra defines two theories on diaspora: Sugar Diaspora and Masala Diaspora. He opines that it is important for 'rethinking' of the concept "home" within diaspora from the period of diasporic writers Seepersad Naipaul to Meera Syal. He says "as this (home) occurs against the backdrop of the global shift from the centring or centripetal logic or monopoly capitalism to the decentering or centrifugal logic of transnational capitalism. Whereas for the Sugar Diaspora 'home' signifies an end to itinerant wandering, in putting down the roots, 'home' for the masala diaspora is linked to the strategic espousal of rootlessness, to the constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscape"(294).

M.L.Raina, in his article "Home, Homelessness and the Artifice of Memory", says, "Dislocation can occur as a physical movement from home into alien territory forced by war and persecution. Displacement and exile have enjoyed a special privilege in literature. Bereft of the soul, estranged from the familiar, banished from the community, expelled from the home country, lost in the Diaspora – such tropes have formed a constant axle of poetry and



novels for centuries” (18) . He also quotes Boym who opines on diaspora thus: “Diasporic intimacy does not promise a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and the homeland.. Just as one learns to live with alienation and reconciles oneself to the uncanniness of the surrounding world and to the strangeness of the human touch, there comes a surprise, a pang of intimate recognition, a hope that sneaks in through the back door in the midst of the habitual estrangement of everybody’s life abroad”(19).

Somadatta Mandal quotes Sudesh Mishra in the article “The ‘Desh- Pradesh’ Syndrome: Texts and Contexts of Diasporic Indian Writing in English”. Sudesh Mishra has differentiated diaspora into the Old and the New. The old diaspora confines to the people who had ‘semi-voluntary flight’ to non-metropolitan colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam and Guyana, and the New diaspora confines “ new immigrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centers such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain”(38). Arif Dirlik comments on the ‘New Diaspora’ as, “New Diasporas have relocated the self there and other here and consequently borders and boundaries have been confounded. And the flow has become at once homogenizing and heterogenizing; some groups share in common global culture regardless of locations while others take refuge in cultural legacies that are far apart from one another as they were at the origin of modernity.”(352). Mandal also quotes other critics who classify diaspora as forced and voluntary. One of them is Vinay Lal, a critic and scholar, who calls it the “diaspora of labour” versus the “diaspora of longing”. Mandal says that the older diasporic writers would feel ‘unease’ in the strange country comparing to new. He brings in V.S.Naipaul’s lines from a novel, “We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves.”(38)

Veena Noble Dass categorises expatriate writers into two. The first category are the writers who are born in India and settled outside India. The second are the writers who are born outside India and settled in India. The common factor that one can find between them is that they select themes relating to Indian culture and tradition and loss of identity. She says, “When an Indian English writer comes in contact with an alien culture, he becomes aware of his rootlessness, and there by the inadequacy of his mission. He feels that he is a stranger, a foreigner and an expatriate. Confrontation with the west leads him to a discovery of his own country, of his own self. The concept of Indianness forms an identity for these Indian expatriate writers.”(39)

Jasbir Jain opines: “Diasporic writing too is double- faced: there is the preoccupation with home for a variety of different reasons, but there is also the cultural representation of a society...But the major tasks which are incomplete are the attainment of equality, the inability to do away with ghettoisation, and to ensure the presence of a dynamic culture of origin....The other extreme is the minority which is denied of the privilege of belonging.



Acceptability – both emotionally and politically- by the culture and country of adoption is an important aspect of all migrations.”(31-33). As per Gina Wisker, a diasporic writer “finds him/herself in the position of representing the marginalized through his or her fiction”(Jeena 3)

Jasbir Jain, in her paper entitled, “The Indian Diasporic Experience”, says that Diasporic experience, in literature, has both ‘plus and minus points’. The ‘positive aspect’, she says, is that “diasporic experience reflects the several tributaries of our history which come together to constitute a whole and allows us to see not merely an imagined pristine glory but also the compulsions of our past... histories of diaspora act like myriad mirrors which reflect on our notions of Indianness, Indian history and identity...Location and connectivity both are important. ... a fact that both post colonialism and postmodernism are the direct products of diasporic interventions in the cultures of the host countries as well as the countries of origin.”(78). The negative aspect is that “the diaspora acts like buffer; its greater visibility renders us invisible. It obstructs our view and silences our voice. And in the creative act we need to be wary as to how it uses our experience, our reality, our history.”

Sareen S.K, in his paper entitled, “A Home everywhere: The Consciousness of Diasporic Belonging”, points out that there are four major movements that go around the Indian migrants. They are “(i) the indentured labour that built for the Empire. (ii) the seekers, who went mainly to the West in search of security, freedom or identity (iii) the aspirants, who went again to the West in search of opportunities and prosperity, and (iv) the re – migrators who, for self –preservation, had to move from where they had arrived, from India to another locale such as the Uganda, to UK and USA and the Fijians to Australia.”(82)

Vijay Agnew brings out Athias’s six criteria that define a diaspora such as dispersal and scattering, collective trauma, cultural flowering, a troubled relationship with the majority, a sense of community transcending national frontiers, and promoting a return movement. As for Athias, there is no definite ideal diaspora and there is no need of the presence of all of these elements to define it, and there is also no hierarchy among them.

CONCLUSION

Whether it is the western theory of diaspora or the eastern one, it can be unambiguously said that all those theories are laid on the basis of the reasons that migrants have for their migrations. The theories that are discussed in this article are evidences for it. One can apply these theories to any immigrants from any part of the world and can find that they suit all immigrants in one or the other aspect. But still one cannot deny that the Indian diaspora has much specialty in itself as there is the existence of a vast difference between the cultures of the Orient and the Occident. When it comes to define the term ‘Diaspora’, it can be also



explicitly said that it is a difficult task. But still all diasporic theorists strive to define it in their own ways.

REFERENCES

- Dahiya Bhim S. “ Some thoughts on Diasporic writing and the Politics of Difference”. *Contemporary Diasporic Literature : Writing History,Culture,Self*. Ed. Manjit Inder Singh. New Delhi: Pencraft International. 2007. (30-36)
- Dass, Veena Noble. “The Expatriate Indian Writing in English”. *The Expatriate Indian Writing in English*.Ed. T.Vinod and P.Shailaja. Vol.2. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2006.
- Giri, Bed Prasad. “The Literature of Indian Diapsora: Between Theory and Archive” *Diaspora: A journal of Translational Studies*. 16. ½ (2007): 243 – 253. Project Muse. Web. 24 March 2015.
- Jain, Jasbir. “ Rethinking the Diaspora of Hyphens, Hybridities and Translated People” *The Expatriate Indian Writing in English*.Ed. T.Vinod and P.Shailaja. Vol.2. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2006.
- Mandal, Somadatta. “The Dsh- Pradesh Syndrome: Texts and Contexts of Diasporic Indian Writing in English”. *Contemporary Diasporic Literature: Writing History, Culture, Self*. Ed. Manjit Inder Singh. New Delhi:pencraft International,2007.(37- 48)
- Mishra,Sudesh. “from Sugar to Masala: writings by the Indian Diaspora”. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* .Ed. A.K.Mehrotra. Delhi: Permanent Balck, 2003. (276-294).
- Nandan, Satendra. “Diasporic Consciousness” *Interrogative Post- Colonial: Column Theory. Text and Context*. Eds. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukerjee; Indian Institute of Advanced studies,1996.
- Nelson, Emmanuel S. Ed. *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. West,Conn: Greenwood Press,1993.
- Raina,M.L. “Home,Homelessness and the Artifice of Memory” *Contemporary Diasporic Literature : Writing History,Culture,Self*. Ed. Manjit Inder Singh. New Delhi: Pencraft International. 2007. (15-29)