



**Epitome : International Journal
of Multidisciplinary Research**

ISSN : 2395-6968

QUEST FOR IDENTITY AS MAJOR THEME IN THE INDIAN DIASPORIC WRITING: A STUDY



Dr. M. R. Jare

Vice-principal, Head, Department of English,
S. M. Joshi College, Hadapsar, Pune -28

ABSTRACT:

The concept 'Diaspora' transmits sense of break up, dislocation. It was used initially for the dispersal of Jews when they were forced into exile. However, today it has come to mean any large public of a specific country or state living outside its own nation & sharing some common bonds that give them an ethnic identity & consequent bonding. Diaspora literature includes a notion of a homeland, a home from where the dislocation occurs and a complex set of negotiation and exchange between the nostalgia & desire for the homeland. This research paper will try to explore quest for identity as a major theme in the Indian Diasporic writing. The characteristics of Diasporic literature are Cultural, religious & class conflicts, ghetto, ethnicity, double displacement, rethinking home, problem of an assimilation, historical belonging & spiritual affinities, a strong sense of linguistic hybridists, imaginary homeland, nostalgia & identity crises or search for

identity, but the present attempt will focus more on the problem of identity & its quest. As a result of wide variety of themes in Diasporic Literature, today it is considered as a main stream literature. Some major writers or contributors are the global paradigm shift, since the challenges of postmodernism to overreaching narratives of power relations to silence the voices of the dispossessed, these marginal voices becomes more loud, audible & even found a current status of privileged. Due to all this, the avant-garde, writers & advocates of Diaspora literature like Salman Rushdie, Aravind Adiga, V. S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukharji have been read and appreciated throughout the world. In fact, Diasporic existence always forces loneliness & a sense of exile on the individual often leading to a sever identity confusion of a writer.

KEYWORDS: *Diasporic Identity, Hybridity, Nostalgia, Immigrant, Homeland, Displacement etc.*

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction:

Etymologically the word identity is derived from Latin root word 'Idem', means sameness or continuity. The term includes the social role, personal traits and conscious self-images. It is the real "me". It is flowing throughout the Diasporic writing. Diasporic literature explores the identities formed in multiple places, language, religions and cultures of 'Homeland' and 'Host land'. Indian Diasporic writing has acquired a new Identity due to the mutual process of self-fashioning and increasing acceptance by the adopted country. Diaspora creates an encounter between languages, culture, thoughts which produces what Homi Bhabha theorized a 'hybridist'. This is captured by Diasporic authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukharjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, etc. Diaspora's try their best at first to keep their own identity in their own community. However, outside of their community their social identity is lost due to their migration from their homeland to adopted country. It poses the question of social and personal identities. He has to create new Identity with his own intellectual, physical and political abilities. He is identified as an expatriate or immigrant or transnational. Though, there is difference between expatriate, immigrant & transnational as an individual. In the present these words are used interchangeably to denote a person living in the country other than his/her genes. Diasporic fiction arrests the two of their regular experience: expatriate and motherland. Entirely, diasporic fiction is an effort to transfer between these two oppositions. The writings of exiled/immigrant writers undertakes two moves one temporal and one spatial. It is as Meena Alexander puts it, "writing in search of a homeland."

Quest for Identity in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger':

The plot of the novel **The White Tiger** provides a channel for Balram to alter his caste. All through the book, there are references to how Balram is very dissimilar from those he grew up with. He is referred to as the 'White Tiger' that is also a sign for autonomy as well as individuality. He is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one who acquired out of the gloom and establish his technique into the brightness. Finally, he works his way out of his low social class as well as conquers the social obstacles that limited his family in the history. To climb up the social ladder, he sheds the weights and limits of his history and overcomes the social obstacles that limit him from living life to the fullest that he can. The novelist voices regarding how Balram is in a rooster coop and how he ruins free from his cage. The novel is somewhat of a memoir of Balram's journey to find his freedom in contemporary day capitalist civilization.

This novel reflects how our economic scheme nowadays creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big separation in civilization. It limits opening, social mobility, strength, and other rights and pleasures that should be given to all. Balram's mission to becoming an entrepreneur shows the oppression of the minor caste structure and the superiority of the higher caste. He tells the tale of how India still has a class system and political and economic corruption is still present. He shows the country of India in which a person elevated on the caste system may entice people such as police officers with currency to cover up murders, disturb political opponents by rigging votes and money, and have privileges such as shopping in a shopping center especially for those of high social and economic importance. He also shows the side of India in which those who are born into shortage and low castes may everlastingly remain there and so will their

children. He is a rare exception, as he experiences both sides of the caste scheme and manages to go up the social stepladder.

Balram, the innocent village boy from Laxmangarh goes to New Delhi and works as a driver. When he is mortified by his masters, he learns dishonest practices and bribing money to buy politicians and policemen to kill and loot. Then he decides to kill his master and steal the money and become an entrepreneur. His thirst for freedom made him to do so. So his actions make the viewers think about the Indians and many types of aspirants as well as frustration they represent.

Quest for Identity in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children':

Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children* roams among three countries like Salman Rushdie. However he fails to find a suitable place to breathe in. The novel is a tale of dislodgment and rootlessness that is caused by moving. Many of the characters in the novel are immigrants travelling from this coast to that coast. They are in search of some "fictitious homelands" and evidently, the author identifies himself with his migrant characters.

In the process of searching the homeland, Rushdie as well as his characters lost their roots, routes and identities. All *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, Shiva, Padma, Parvati face a problem of identity, disintegration of disposition, geographical as well as cultural dislocation. As Rushdie, explains: When the Indian who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost.

In *Midnight's Children*, he portrays this trauma of fluid identity. In his first travelled country, Saleem turns out to be a dog. As a result, his body has gone fully unaffected, the only sense on the go being his sense of odor. He is devoid of sentiment as well as reminiscences. His fellow soldiers start calling him 'Buddha' because there hung around him an air of great antiquity, though he is twenty four year old at that juncture. Here the novelist has presented him as the small-scale version of all the diasporic groups. Through him the novelist tries to depict that what sort of treatment is meted to immigrants in the newly inhabited territories. Saleem, being the ambassador of his maker, expresses the outlooks that the novelist senses while living in an adopted land.

Quest for Identity in V.S.Naipaul's 'A House for Mr. Biswas':

V. S. Naipaul is deeply involved in the colonized people's quest for order & identity. He makes such aspects as central in his novel. 'A House for Mr. Biswas' is partly autobiographical one. It deals with the strains of troubled past and the attempts to find a purpose in life. Mr. Biswas, the prominent character of the novel, tries to liberate from dependence by searching a house for him. The novel depicts Mr. Biswas' struggle to safeguard his own identity in the heterogeneous environment and his attempt to create an authentic and ethnic selfhood. Being autobiographical novel, we can experience the similitude in the life of Mr. Biswas with the life of Naipaul himself. He himself experienced exile and alienation while living in Trinidad which is portrayed through the character of his protagonist.

The novelist depicts the search for individuality of a protagonist, Mr. Mohan Biswas. The protagonist lives in an unstructured social environment. It also describes the experience of a refugee of Trinidad by diverse places and to the haven of Spain. The life of the hero Mr. Biswas imitates the dilemma of a disconnected, migrant whose total life passes in a wish to uncover his

roots and to reach a genuine identity in the civilization. The life of the protagonist replicates the life of the novel, whose experience of exile reflects the unquenched will of identity.

At the concluding point, the readers find an optimistic approach on the part of the novelist in his dealing with the problem of identity crisis. The quest is tedious and exhausting one, but at the end the protagonist is successful in having a house he can call his own/self.

Anita Desai's 'Bye Bye Black Bird' Quest for Identity:

Anita Desai explores the issue of identify in terms of individual, social, racial and national identity. Adit, Dev & Sarah suffer from fragmented psyches because they tend to define themselves through a limited sense of self and external reality, ignoring or suppressing many other aspects of their existence. The novelist is famous for her literary presentations of isolation, loneliness, immigration etc. The novel is divided into three parts. They are first 'Arrival', second 'Discovery' and third 'Recognition & Departure'.

Dev has come to England for higher education. He starts to live with Adit & Sarah. He is disturbed when he finds Indians insulted in both public and private places. In the second part they become changed persons & begin to feel the charm of the country. In part three, Adit once comfortably settled in England becomes then home-sick. Desai depicts the battle of the settlers who can't protect their ethnic origins and struggle to raid new roots in foreign land and in the end turn out to be estranged.

Dev's identify crisis in the novel results from the wide gap between his ideal picture of England and the reality that stares him kin the face. Dev's essential self-esteem and dignity is threatened by the unfamiliar ambience of English life. Standing on the margin of existence in England, devoid of family, job and an entry into the charmed circle of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, he falls back upon his Indian identity. The novelist's acute psychological insight juxtaposes the attraction he feels for many aspects of English life with his increasing frustration and anger that finds an outlet in his England – bashing from the secure and stable Indian identity that no one can deny him. It is his unconscious revenge upon England for its failure to live up to his ideals and accept him in his own right.

Quest for Identity in Jhumpha Lahiri's 'The Namesake':

Jhumpha Lahiri is one of the leading figures in female writers, who wrote through her own experiences of various parts of the globe as an immigrant. She has represented the Diaspora features of homelessness, dislocation and alienation through the character of Ashima in The Namesake. She examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to explain the details of immigrant psychology and behavior. The novel depicts the life and struggles of Ashok and Ashima Ganguli, two first-generation immigrants from West Bengal (Kolkata), India to the United States, and their American-born children Gogol and Sonia.

The title of the novel reveals the struggle of Gogol, son of Ashok and Ashima. They are Indian and migrated to the United States of America to acquire identity in the culture where Gogol is born and brought up with his unusual name. Names do have some meaning in India. A lot of practice is done when a child is named in India. Generally, Indian children have two names one domestic and the other an authorized one. Domestic names are for the kinfolk and neighbors and consociates. Gogol feels sandwiched between the country (India) of his parents and the country (U.S.A.) of his birth. His father tries to maintain ties with their home country and tries hard to

inculcate the values of the home country in their children. Gogol is absorbed more of the lifestyle and culture of his natal nation. But the country of his birth also does not accept him entirely and he keeps struggling for cultural identity which sways between two countries. He discovers himself reasonably an alien to both of the nations. In India he is an American and in America he is an Indian. Steadily, he begins to know the exceptional nature of his name which generates complications with his identity after he matures.

Lahiri in her novel depicts the expatriates who are oppressed by two cultures the native land and the alien land and seems to be forever in a state of flux belonging and not belonging and in the country of migration. Her works read between the lines the evolving worldwide culture in its multidimensional form. The second generation of diaspora experiences some cultural displacement, feeling of in-betweenness and hybridity, however, the central points that marks their self is ethnic integration in the land of birth or adoption. Therefore, the expatriates get crossbreed individuality. Gogol experiences all uncertainties of his parents who have not yet been able to integrate into the land of adoption. Ashok and Ashima Ganguli and their children Gogol and Sonia are all expatriates continually altering from former to contemporaneous. Ashima is surrounded by loneliness suffers from displacement with the new born baby and spends most of the time crying and depressed

On her own with Gogol for the first time in the silent house, suffering from sleep deprivation for worse than the first of her jet lag, (Ashima) sits by three sided window in the living room on one of the triangular chairs and cries the whole day.....(34)

She was like majority of expatriate woman who are reluctant to adopt the culture of the host country. Gogol was troubled by his unusual name; he is relieved when he changes his name to Nikhil. He begins to feel that he was reborn. The novel probes into the inner psyche of characters and brings out stirring and teasing sense of identity by clash of cultures.

Quest for Identity in Bharati Mukharji's 'Jasmine':

'Jasmine' is a tale of an Indian lady. It begins with her birth and then initial life in a little settlement in India. It further relates her emigration to America and her struggle to search for herself and further it goes on to turn into an American. Jasmine continues beyond the realization of the prediction indicating repositioning of the stars and the heroine's gaining enough strength for a peripatetic transformation from a meek submissive Indian wife to a strong independent Indo-American woman who lives mostly in the now and the present and stops worrying about the future and is indifferent to the past. After her marriage with Prakash her husband gives her a new name Jasmine. "He wanted to break down the Jyoti as I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name; Jasmine....Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities." (77)

After reaching USA, within a week Jasmine gives up her shy side of personality and dresses up on a jazzy Tshirt, tight cords and running shoes. With the change in clothes comes the change in the culture so much so that the intrinsic qualities of her personality start disappearing. With this change she moves from being a "visible minority" to being just another immigrant." The shift of the protagonist's identity from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane to Jase is indicative of the passing of one persona and an appearance of a new but it does have positive-implications. The protagonist does not see her 'Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration, now it is seen as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated.'

It is difficult to know the real self of Jasmine because the fluidity of herself emerging from one experience to another erases the edges of her identity. The recurring reference to the broken pitcher indicates the death of Jasmine's different selves. While talking to Dr. Mary Webb Jasmine admits that as a Hindu she believes in rebirth though with different meaning in time-context. Jasmine has seen that the Indian immigrants live a meaningless life and are forced to bury their native identity. On the whole the novel projects the strength of a woman to fight and adapt to a brave New World and not the damaging effects of immigration. To conclude, as Long jam Monika Devi points out:

Bharati Mukharjee's Jasmine is the movement of Jasmine's life towards achieving true identity. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. Even when the protagonist goes through the obstacles and attains self-awareness a new identity and overthrows her past life.... Mukharjee has employed metamorphosis transformations in the life of Jasmine in the process of her search of her true identity. (252)

Conclusion:-

The Indian Diaspora plays a significant role in reflecting the complexities of diasporic experiences in literature. It aims to examine the displacement and the nostalgia for their homeland and alienation caused by displacement or dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identity. Diasporic writers tend to portray the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. The spirit of exile and alienation enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in English Diasporic literature. It can be seen that the desire for belonging and quest for identity is one of the premier themes of diasporic and post-colonial writers. These writers give clear message to people who are quite keen on dreaming of settling with strong aspirations for a better future on a foreign land without realizing that this displacement demands greater adaptability in terms of both climate and culture. However, in spite of several miseries that are being faced by the immigrants and emigrants one productive result of this itinerant is that, the boundaries that were existed between the countries have been demolished.

REFERENCES

- Braziel, J.E. "Diaspora: An Introduction" OUP: New Delhi, 1996
 Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994
 Rushdie Salman. Midnight's Children. London: Vintage Books, 2006
 Adiga, Aravind . The White Tiger. India: Harper Collins, 2008. Print.
 Bhattacharya, Sowmya. Review: The White Tiger, by Aravind Adiga Tales from the shadowy side of booming India. 11 Apr 2008.
 Naipaul, V.S. "A House for Mr. Biswas" Penguin: New Delhi, 1992
 Anita Desai, Bye, Bye Blackbird, New Delhi: Orient paper Books, 1980)
 Lahiri, Jumpa. The Namesake, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2003. Print
 Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine [New Delhi; Penguin Books (India), 1990].
 Long jam Monika Devi, Search for Identity in Bharati Mukharjee, Jasmine in Journal of Literature, Culture and Media, Vol. IV 7&8 Jan-Dec 2012
 Abrams M.H., A Glossary of Literary Terms, Ed. VII, New York, Cen gage Learning, 2010.
 Dhawan, R.K. Writers of Indian Diaspora. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001.
 Website- <http://books.google.co.in>