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NURTURING ROOTS IN FOREIGN SOIL: “THE CHANGING FACE OF NATIVITY IN INDIAN DIASPORA NARRATIVES”

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ABSTRACT



Indian Diaspora Literature, embodies the works written by the Indian authors outside their native country. The works reflect the life of Indians settlers of three generations in other countries from early 19th Century to the present times. It captures the saga of Indians, who moved as forced migratory laborers to volitional migratory professionals in the host lands. The works portray the sufferings of earlier generations and the successful life of present Indian diaspora generations in the foreign lands. This genre resonates experiences, nostalgia, thoughts, challenges, conflicts, complexities and perspectives of all diaspora generations, thus, making it the core elements of Indian Diaspora writings.

The Indian expatriate authors, both from earliest times to present, represent a varied experience of dispersion, leading to the emergence of vibrant artistic expressions that are characterized by their exceptional level of elegant writings. The writers often grapple with the native themes of identity and belongingness but the recent works by contemporary writers are projecting the changing face of nativity theme in their narratives.

The vital aspects of one's country, such as attire, cuisine, social set-up, culture, language, relationships, religion, traditions and customs, showcase the essence of nativity. These aspects are very well captured in the earlier Indian diasporic works as emblematic, but in the recent past we can witness a shift, we find acculturation as the main theme, which echoes and overshadows the nativity aspect. There is a perceptible paradigm shift from the geographical cravings to nurturing their roots in the foreign soil by their diasporic sensibility. To understand this change we need to understand the aspects dealt in Indian Diaspora writings from its pedigrees to the present.

This paper examines the changing outlook of nativity aspect in Indian Diaspora Writings and also acknowledges the fact that in the last few decades, Indian diasporic English writing has received a lot of appreciation and accolades in the universal literature because of its appealing themes.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Hostland, Identity, Nostalgia, Nativity, Acculturation, Adaption, Migration*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora Literature stands as a distinct genre which reflects the works written by the authors who endured nostalgic past of homeland and braved the promising future of hostland. This genre resonates experiences, thoughts, challenges, conflicts, complexities and perspectives of the first-generation, the second-generation and the third-generation writers. The Indian Diaspora narratives have gradually revealed a shift in the portrayal of diasporic facets from generation to generation. There is a perceptible paradigm shift from the geographical longings, the psychological cravings to diasporic sensibility. To understand this transformation, we need to understand Indian Diaspora writings from its pedigrees. As far as our knowledge goes, the word "Diaspora" comes from the Ancient Greek concept "dia speiro", meaning "to sow over" (to disperse) found in Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible. By dispersion or diaspora, it states the movement of people from one place to another.

But there is a progressive shift in the meanings of the term "diaspora" over time. The term has journeyed from "slavery of laborers to migration of professionals and entrepreneurs", "alienation to assimilation", the "perplexing to evolving notion of identity", the concept of "home to shared home". This encouragement to reposition or change in the meaning of nativity commonly consists of manifold components like attractive determinants, ranging from the fiscal, socio-cultural, political, spiritual, or other considerations. Most likely, these reasons likely incorporate remunerative occupation opportunities, enhanced educational and intellectual opportunities, a fitting governmental atmosphere, lifestyle

renovation, cultural evenness, refuge seeking, commerce and commercial matters, obligatory faith, globalization scopes and overall technical development.

The maximum luring affluent international locations which acquire more migrants include, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. India had the most people living abroad in any country in 2020, according to the UN's latest data published in the World Migration Report 2022. Just under 17.9 million born in the country were recorded as Living overseas as of the mid-year.

Diaspora is a subject that sparks extensive discussions in the realms of politics, economics, educational research, and social issues. Within the educational field, scholars have delved into various aspects of diaspora literature, including language, genre, authors, and themes.

English literature encompasses a wide range of literary works, including poetry, prose, novels, theatre, and various other narratives. The study of diasporic themes and characters within this realm is a significant aspect. The diasporic literary work produced by immigrants has gathered a momentum and stands as a separate genre. In the last few decades, Indian diasporic English writing has garnered immense recognition, appreciation and accolades in the realm of global diasporic literature.

II. INDIAN DIASPORA LITERATURE: SHIFTING DIMENSIONS:

The idea of dispersion holds much meaning in Indian English literature, for it covers the entangled historical and cultural journeys that have been undertaken by the Indian diaspora across different



epochs. Migration, loss of identity, uniqueness and search for a sense of belonging have been extensively explored by Indian writers in their works.

The Indian expatriates, both from earliest times and present, represent a varied experience of dispersion, leading to the emergence of vibrant artistic expressions that are characterized by their exceptional level of elegant writings.

Within the Diaspora, there are three distinct groups of Indian English literary writers: those who ventured to foreign lands as the pioneering generation and long for their ancestral homes, the transitional generation who were born to immigrant parents abroad and find themselves in a state of uncertainty or perplexity, and the contemporary generation who no longer yearn for their motherland but have cultivated a profound understanding of what it means to belong.

According to Uma (2007) the life of a diasporic person can be divided into four phases. In the first phase, one is nostalgic and homesick and feels a bit scared in the strange land. The second phase is the phase of adjustment to the new environment. In the third phase people get involved in the ethno-cultural issues. The fourth phase is the phase of proving their existence by participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (1)

The initial wave of Indian writers who relocated from India to various countries embarked on a literary journey that authentically captures their unique encounters, personal identity, and the obstacles encountered in adapting to a new cultural milieu. These talented

wordsmiths played an indispensable role in molding the literary panorama of the Indian diaspora. The literature created by immigrants mainly expresses the emotional experiences of writers who face the challenges of navigating between two cultures or enduring discrimination based on race. These literary pieces serve as a platform for expressing the hardships and struggles faced by individuals in such unique circumstances.

The writings of first-generation Indian diaspora writers are enriched and made complex by their native aspect. This adds depth to their narratives, providing readers with a glimpse into the diverse experiences of individuals as they navigate the trials and triumphs of migration and cultural adaptation. The year 1864 marked the publication of the pioneering Indian English novel titled *"Rajmohan's Wife"* by Bankimchandra Chatterjee. The literature produced by these generation of Indian diasporic writers, such as Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhari, Ved Metha, Bharati Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, signifies the emergence of the initial wave. These writers primarily reflect upon their experiences as expatriates and their connection to India.

From past to contemporary times, characters like Mohan Biswas from V.S. Naipaul's *"A House for Mr. Biswas"* and Ganesh Ramsumai from *"The Mystic Measure"* find themselves residing far away from their native India.

Some other remarkable works include Dutt's *"Meghnad Badha"*, Toru's *"Ancient Ballads"*, Romesh



Chunder's expert translations of Sansar as *"The Lake of Palms"* and Madhavi Kankan as *"The Slave Girl of Agra"*, these works truly showcase the talent and dexterity of these first-generation Indian authors. The earliest novels that have effectively depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *"Bye Bye Blackbird"* and Kamala Markandaya's *"The Nowhere Man"*, *"Manhattan Music"* by Meena Alexander. In the works of V. S. Naipaul, we encounter fascinating characters such as Mohan Biswas from *"A House for Mr. Biswas"* and Ganesh Ramkumar from the *"Mystic Masseur"*. Their hearts and minds were always filled with vivid memories of the land they left behind many generations ago.

These individuals are living generations removed from their ancestral homeland of India; however, their heritage still holds a profound significance in their lives, serving as a constant reminder of their past experiences and cultural background.

As Geetha Ganapathy-Dore suggests, "Postcolonial is defined sometimes with regard to history, sometimes with regard to ideology, sometimes with regard to geography, sometimes with regard to writing, sometimes with regard to reading and at other times with regard to teaching" (2).

The writers who delve into their own experiences often convey a deep longing for their homeland, embody a tangible sense of displacement in their literary works, evoking a sense of nostalgia and capturing the essence of India's beauty, traditions, and memories. At the same time, they skillfully depict the hardships of adjusting to a new cultural environment and the profound feeling of loss that accompanies leaving one's native land behind.

Writers skillfully portray these themes by delving into the complexities of family relationships, highlighting the significance of cultural heritage, and exploring the tensions that arise as traditions intersect.

Assimilation into a new society poses significant challenges as individuals strive to uphold their connection with their native roots. This endeavor can manifest in diverse ways, encompassing linguistic hurdles, cultural misinterpretations, and instances of discrimination. Several writers from the Indian diaspora give into the political and historical backdrop of their homeland, probing into the repercussions of occurrences such as partition, sovereignty, or political turmoil. These aspects aid in gaining a more profound comprehension of the characters' origins and driving forces for plot development. In the realm of modern diasporic Indian writers, comprises those who have been raised outside of India since childhood, perceiving their country solely from an outsider's perspective as a foreign land of their ancestry. Writers belonging to this category while those in the latter group grapple with a feeling of rootlessness. Remarkably, both sets of writers have contributed to an impressive body of English literature. Within their works, these authors delve into themes such as migration, estrangement, assimilation, and cultural adaptation through their portrayal of migrant characters.

The writings of the second generation of Indian diaspora authors delve into the concept of nativity from a unique standpoint. Unlike their predecessors who may have personally undergone migration, these writers are typically born and raised in foreign lands. As a result, their works showcase an intriguing blend of cultural influences as they navigate the



complexities of their dual identity, fusing elements from their Indian heritage with the cultural backdrop of their adopted nations.

Many second-generation writers delve into the theme of dual identity, grappling with the complexities of belonging to both their ancestral culture and the culture they were born or raised in. The recurring themes of searching for a sense of home and questioning where they truly belong are prevalent in their works. For them, home becomes a mere figment of imagination instead of a nostalgic memory. It's no longer a tangible space, but rather a fleeting notion. When it comes to the writings of the second generation, language plays a significant role in capturing their sense of belonging. Despite growing up with English as their main language, they often delve into the complexities of preserving or abandoning their native languages and how this affects their cultural identity by naming the characters, places, dress, food, rituals with Indian names.

The positions of second-generation diasporic Indian writers like Meera Syal, Hari Kunzru, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Akhil Sharma, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai is noteworthy.

Uma Parameswaran, Ashish Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Neil Bissoondath, and M. G. Vassanji are esteemed individuals within the community of modern diasporic writers. They belong to a younger generation and have chosen to make Canada their new home, showcasing their remarkable talent through their literary works.

Pico Iyer and Gita Mehta, both hailing from the British diaspora, stand out as two emerging authors in the United Kingdom. Anjan Appachana, hailing from India, has moved to the United States. She delves into the intricate lives of sophisticated, knowledgeable women from the urban milieu in *"Incantations"*. Through their lens, she sheds light on the intricate dynamics of 64 gender connections, revealing their entrapment amidst the clashing forces of age-old customs and the fast-paced modern era.

Some literary works by various authors such as Neil Bissoondath's *"Exploring the Depths of the Mountains"* and *"On the Brink of Uncertain Futures,"* Jhumpa Lahiri's *"The Moniker," "Unfamiliar Terrain,"* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *"Sibling of My Soul"* and *"The Fortress of Fantasies,"* Kiran Desai's *"Commotion in the Guava Grove"* and *"The Bequest of Defeat,"* and Akhil Sharma's *"A Compliant Patriarch"* and *"Domestic Existence."* These authors have created captivating literary pieces that explore into various themes and the realms of individuality, feminism and cultural legacy.

In contemporary Indian literature in English, writers have tended to explore multidisciplinary fictional themes. The contemporary diaspora is driven by a desire for modernity, willingly taking to a journey of diasporic mobility. Unlike forced migration, these individuals choose to relocate, often fueled by their status as highly educated elites in their fields. Through their efforts to assimilate into new cultures and establish transnational identities, the New Diaspora is making a significant impact on driving nations towards globalization and modernization.



The prominent writers like Jhumpa Lahiri in her *"Interpreter of Maladies"* and *"The Namesake,"* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni novels such as *"The Mistress of Spices"* and *"Sister of My Heart"*, Vikram Seths notable works *"A Suitable Boy"* and *"The Golden Gate,"*

Arundhati Roy, debut novel *"The God of Small Things,"* Roy has also been involved in various social and political causes. Salman Rushdie a globally acclaimed author known for works such as *"Midnight's Children"* and *"The Satanic Verses"*, Kiran Desai novel *"The Inheritance of*

Loss," Rohinton Mistry known for his novels like *"A Fine Balance"* and *"Such a Long Journey,"*

Anita Desai's *"Clear Light of Day"* and *"In Custody,"* Amitav Ghosh's the Ibis Trilogy (*"Sea of Poppies," "River of Smoke,"* and *"Flood of Fire"*) are perfect examples of immigrant narratives.

In this era of worldwide integration, existence is filled with numerous fresh challenges such as pluralism, parity between genders, diverse viewpoints on sexuality, an intensified awareness of cultural uprooting, magnetism, excessive consumerism, the commodification of everything, ascending in society, and the gradual deterioration of ethical values. These are fundamental concerns that contemporary writers of concise narratives frequently explore within their literary masterpieces. The subjects tackled by these writers mirror the extensive and all-encompassing essence of our interconnected world. We are transported to a world where the lives of characters are intricately woven together through the vast web of technology. It's a place where people from all walks of life, whether

they reside in prosperous nations or those still developing, seamlessly integrate technology into their daily routines. They effortlessly navigate through online services like the worldwide web, email systems, instant messaging platforms, and file sharing networks

Contemporary authors such as Anita Rau Badami, Shashi Tharoor, Himani Bannerji, Rana Bose, Saros Cowasjee, Rienzi Cruz, Lakshmi Gill, Surjeet Kalsey and several others are part of this contemporary literary circle.

Contemporary diaspora literature from a myriad of Indian languages, including Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Sindhi, Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi and more, are making waves worldwide. In recent times, Benyamin's *"Aadujeevitham,"* also known as *"Goat Days"* in its original Malayalam, stands out as a shining example of exploring the deeper aspects of the diaspora experience. It captures the reader's attention with its poignant and resonant portrayal. Deepak Unnikrishnan book *"Temporary People,"* a work of fiction about Gulf narratives steeped in Malayalee and South Asian lingo. In *"The Light We Give,"* Simran Jeet Singh expertly reveals the pathway to inner contentment and overall fulfillment by infusing ethical principles into our daily lives. Through engaging insights and relatable examples, this enlightening read illustrates the power of incorporating conscience-driven choices to attain both personal joy and a more joyful existence. This insight researches captivate the challenges of living in an age of global connectivity, where emerging issues such as multiculturalism, gender equality, identity, living beyond borders, attraction, consumerism, products buying or selling



goods, social ups and downs dominate primarily as part of the immigrant works. Consequently, it is evident that the paths of different generations have modified the themes of nativity to reach the ultimate goal of satisfaction and tranquility in the two eras of diasporic literature.

CONCLUSION

The changing face of Nativity in Indian Diaspora Narratives has clearly witnessed that, the pioneering generation yearned for their ancestral homes, and the transitional generations nurtured the profound understanding of what it means to belong. The contemporary stories utilize narratives that challenge nostalgia, and they do not fixate on the past unlike ethnic authors.

Thus, first generations works give the testimony to the fact that the vital aspects of one's country, such as attire, cuisine, social set-up, culture, language, relationships, religion, traditions and customs, showcase the essence of nativity, which is impeccably captured as emblematic, but in the recent past we can witness a shift, we find acculturation which echoes and overshadows the nativity aspect. This makes us to understand that these narratives showcase not only the geographical longings, the psychological cravings but also reveal diasporic sensibility in all fields.

Nevertheless, Indian Diaspora literature strengthens the bond between Indians abroad and Indians in India, and also makes the world aware of our rich cultural and social heritage. In this way, Indian Diaspora literature on a broader level helps the readers to break the barriers among countries

and spread livelihood and universal peace. At the same time, it can't be denied that through these narratives, that Indians have always shown greatest sense of adjustments in foreign countries from the time immemorial. Thus, expatriate literature has played an important role in shaping rich storytelling, contributing significantly to global literature and providing new insights. And many writers have become mainstream contributors to global literature.

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