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Crisis of Identity in Diasporic Writings

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With modern age travelling to alien lands and setting there did not remain a taboo. It was due to one's circumstances during British times when people were forced to seek their livelihood as labourers in alien countries. They settled at far away places when they were not able to come back. People from different lands mingled there brought by their colonial masters and a new culture and civilization developed out of this interaction. Homesickness and longing for home was the common emotion shared by all. They tried to assuage this feeling by naming the alien places after the familiar places at home and hence in those wild island everything changed names as per the inner feelings of the migrant labourers. This was forced migration but with changing times people resorted to migration willingly. They went to foreign land to study or in search of better income. But one thing remains common with them, the longing for their roots and nostalgia for home. In the process of changing atmosphere outside the home and totally different culture and values they clung to their identity. This quest for identity in alien lands shaped their reactions and is reflected in the writings of writers settled abroad.

The men are engaged in struggle for making their life successful financially. They have to bear the cultural shock, the changed circumstances outside their houses and indifferent or hostile attitude of people in a foreign land forces them to assert their supremacy more emphatically at their homes. The women however are deadly stressed; they are not only experiencing the cultural shock of immigration, but they are also caught in the emotional turmoil arising out of the conflict in the free western culture outside their homes and traditional mind set of their husband and in-laws. This conflict of western and traditional values is portrayed in various immigrant writers e.g. C.B. Divakarni's has highlighted the fears and anxieties faced by immigrant women in alien land. In her novel *The Mistress of Spices* she highlights the conflict between the traditional and modern values. The grand daughter Gita is not ready to sacrifice her life and feelings for orthodox ideas of his grandfather. There are certain common themes in Indian diasporic writings. The Indian diasporic writers have common history and common culture. Their religious and spiritual values are also commonly shared. When they land in an alien land they have to encounter the similar problems of cultural shock, identity crisis, racial discrimination and panic reaction experienced their of. The feeling of alienation is commonly shared by all the Indian diasporic writers but every writer reacts individually to curb this feeling.

V.S.Naipaul with his novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* occupies a places of pride. In Indian diasporic writings where *A House for Mr. Biswas* becomes a symbol of his quest for establishing his identity. The house is not merely a place to live in for him, it becomes a symbol of asserting his freedom out do Tulsi's clutches. The feudal family setup of Tulsi's and crushing of his feelings for his family and for his individual liberty in the process of abiding by the rules setup by the head of family make him so obsessed with the ides of owning his own house, however dilapidated its condition, taken him over completely. This quest for identity can be seen in Jhumpa Lahiri's novels as well. In her novel *The Namesake* the name Gogol becomes the symbol of Son of Ashoke which he hates initially. In the process of establishing his identity as an

American he discovers his own identity as Gogol and accepts his name with dignity. The conflict of western culture and traditional mind set brings many confused reaction in the beginning but the inner self is always at variance with the outer self and the quest for identity makes the migrant protagonist restless. The feeling of alienation is curbed only after finding a symbol to assert one's identity. For female characters the pull and pressures of traditional values at home and atmosphere of liberty, freedom and scientific discoveries outside bring about a conflict in their minds but this conflict is resolved with a sensible compromise between the two in the novels of women diasporic writers. C.B.Divakarni's *The Mistress Of Spices* is the example of this. This conflict of values, feeling of alienation and struggle for survival are various responses of migration and the protagonists react differently to establish their identity. Jhumpa Lahiri's Gogol and Ashoke in *The Namesake* and back in 60-70's Naipaul's Mr. Mohun Biswas all have one thing in common, an urge to establish their identity. When Ashoka is wounded in a train accident he is reading the story of Gogol, with many broken bones he is not able to wave or call, he has a page torn of the book in his hand and he has only one way to attract the attention of medicos that is to drop the crumbled page in his hand. This makes it so important emotionally that he names his son after the writer. When his wife is in the hospital for delivery she remembers that back home in Bengal she would have been with her parents to deliver the child while in this foreign land she was alone: "Ahimsa thinks it is strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die". (*The Namesake*). This longing and nostalgic memories of home, homesickness and alienation are common experiences of migrants. Ashoke has special emotional bond with name Gogol "being rescued from that shattered train had been first miracle of his life. But here now reposing in his arms weighing next to nothing but changing everything is the second" (*The Namesake*, 2.15)

V.S.Naipaul is himself a migrant settled abroad and his novel *A house for Mr. Biswas* portrays the feeling which are his father's first hand experience. These are not entirely autobiographical in detail regarding the incident but alienation and homesickness and need to establish identity underlying the various incidents is the same. This is confirmed by his Noble Prize acceptance speech, "Intuition led me to a large book about our family life." Mr. Biswas was jinxed from his birth, when he is born a pundit prophesies that Mr. Biswas "will eat up his mother and father". When he migrates to another country to earn his livelihood and marries a daughter of his boss he is always trying to win favor of his laws, "he held his tongue and tries to win favor" (188): But in spite of all his efforts to gain favor, he was treated with indifference rather than hospitality. This indifference pained him so much that he remarks while talking to his son, "I am just somebody- nobody at all" (279), all this makes him yearn for his freedom and his identity. He wants to own a house and in house becomes a symbol of his identity for him. He cannot rest till he achieves his identity.

Migration was a truth of many labourers in post colonial times in countries like Trinidad etc. and in the days of global communication it has become the reality of many middle class men being uprooted in the lure of dollars. They earn more in their adopted land after immigration but the same homesickness and longing for roots become their reality as well. The need to establish identity and the various modes to overcome this identity crisis is still the same.

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