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Dialectics of Longing and Belonging in Indian Diaspora: A Recontemplation

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Abstract:

Diaspora is the movement, relocation, migration, spreading or scattering of people away from a traditional or ancestral homeland. As the term *Diaspora* implies, it concerns people who are “scattered” away from their original homes to “gather” in some other time and other place in a foreign country, forming new communities. A variety of forms of displacement, such as exile, Diaspora, and relocation, have been effectively investigated in both postcolonial theory and literary texts. The question arises how and why these facts, particularly as they are related with colonialism and its outcome, have become vital centre of postcolonial contemplation. The present paper articulates the various shades of Diaspora, the hyphenated identities, the roots preceding over routes, space between home and location, the Indian Diaspora has become a major force, no longer an anguished state, giving an altogether new global identity to homeland.

Keywords: Diaspora, relocation, scattered, exile, identity.

The term Diaspora may be an umbrella term for émigré writers, but it conceals the discrepancies in their backgrounds as well as contexts. There is no chaste belonging, there is no wholesome Diaspora. There are types of belonging and displacement, affirmation and defiance of individuality, similitude and distinction. Many contemporary narratives are extolled by prototypes of relocation, departure from household territory in seek of alternate futures. This journey between old and new, the motherland and metropolis is distinct by moments of break, defeat, and revival as corporeal, socioeconomic, rational, and linguistic boundaries are traversed. In contemporary narratives that explore such actions, the grandmother, a carrier of the mother line of culture, signifies an association amid old and new, a basis of person and his memory, and a medium for innovation and replacement.

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A variety of forms of displacement, such as exile, Diaspora, and relocation, have been effectively investigated in both postcolonial theory and literary texts. The question arises how and why these facts, particularly as they are related with colonialism and its outcome, have become vital centre of postcolonial contemplation. Although Diaspora has indisputably brought about extreme changes in the cultures, epistemologies and politics of the post-colonial world, whether the special accent on displacement--as contrasting to belonging, is true to the postcolonial condition, remains an issue. Diaspora is regarded not as a particular phenomenon but as conventionally dissimilar and heterogeneous in its features. The transnational mobility of persons may be the result of necessary or intentional relocation, of self-exile or removal. The issue is, how the Diaspora writer relates to his native soil and culture of origin and how far is this relationship convincing.

The speculative innovations of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, James Clifford and others have in recent years vitalized postcolonial and Diaspora studies, attempting traditions in which we understand 'culture' and developing original traditions of philosophy. Edward Said states, "You always feel outside in some way." (172) Rushdie has been termed as Indian outside India in *Imaginary Homelands*. Naipaul who is not at home anywhere, constantly travelling, where do we place him?

The concept of Diaspora has been inexhaustible in its awareness to the real-life movement of people, whether these migrations have been in the course of choice or compulsion. Migration is observed in terms of adjustment. Diaspora is a concept which is far from being defined. It is a term which may have its roots in Greek, is used customarily to concern to a historical fact that has now passed to a phase of time that usually presumes that 'diasporans' are those who are settled forever in a country other than the one in which they were born; thus this term loses its aspect of irreversibility and of exile. Diaspora communities visualize themselves as a national, ethnic, linguistic or other form of cultural and political construction of collective membership living outside their 'home lands'.

Indian diasporic writers may be classified into two groups. First, those who have spent a part of their life in India and have passed the baggage of their local culture abroad, thus their speech, behaviour and thinking interferes in their cross-cultural communication. The second group comprises of those who have been bred outside India and know their country from outside being nostalgic for their place of origin, often themselves finding rootless. Both groups of writers explore the theme of displacement; depict dislocated characters thus reflecting a global theme. The perception of diaspora, in particular, has been creative in noticing the 'people on the move' in their real life, the question of relocation may be by option or compulsion. However, migration is linked with adjustment and construction – adaptation to changes, dislocations and transformations, the building of new forms of knowledge and ways of viewing the world.

The Indian diaspora has been formed by a dispersion of population. This intermittent immigration traces a secure pattern if a telescopic view is taken over a period of time – from the indentured labourers of the past to the present day IT technocrats. Indian diaspora is divided into two phases, old and the new. Today it constitutes an important, and in some respects unique, force in world culture. The origin of the modern Indian diaspora lies mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation into the British Empire. The old category included indentured peasants going to plantation colonies of Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, in late nineteenth and early

twentieth century. The new category includes post modern dispersal of new migrants dislocated to new lands in thriving metropolitan areas like Australia, US, Canada, Britain, etc.

The narratives of the elder age group of diasporic Indian writers like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Balachandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhuri, and Ved Mehta first and foremost look back at India and rarely document their experiences away from India as expatriates. It becomes evident that these writers discovered their 'Indian-ness' when they were out of their motherland. The lack of involvement gives them the impassiveness and insensitivity that is so essential to have an apparent insight of their native land. In that sense, through their wording, they help to discover India. Makarand Paranjape notes "that instead of worshipping the leftovers and relics of a now inaccessible homeland as the old diaspora of indentured labourers did, the new diaspora of international Indian English writers live close to their market, in the comforts of the suburbia of advanced capital, but draw their raw material from the inexhaustible imaginative resources of that messy and disorderly subcontinent that is India. These writers record their way from Indian experiences and even if they look back at their homeland it is often in an elegiac tone rather than with nostalgia." (251-252).

In the field of literature, diasporic writing comes from the margins, entering the arenas that it is allowed to occupy. The marginal status of diasporic writers is expressed by the terms expatriate, expellees, exile, diasporic, refugees, alien residents, and immigrant, migrant, hyphenated, dislocated, NRI, displaced communities, ethnic minorities, etc. There has been a steady flow of novels and short stories from Indian writers residing abroad. Their hyphenated identities and split worlds are expressed through their works. As is normal that one initially writes about one's experiences, the works of diaspora focus on the issue of dislocation. They write about their present home embracing their roots and their past i.e. their *homeland*. Extremely sensitive about Indian cultural background, they connect to Indian identity, history and culture despite the fact that they have received it from their parents or by reading about them. Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Pico Iyer, Amit Chaudhuri, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Chandra, Kiran Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, Shani Mootoo, Bharati Mukherjee, David Dabydeen, Jhumpa Lahiri and Hanif Kureishi are some of the writers contributing to Diaspora literature. They apply a framework based on trauma, mourning, spectres, identity, travel, translation, and recognition.

Indian writers have made significant contribution and the list of noted young writers continues to grow. There's been a steady flow of novels and short stories and young writers are expressing their 'hyphenated identities,' their 'splintered worlds' issues of Indian identity, in their works. Anita Desai comments in an interview in the Spanish journal *Lateral*, "It's become strong in the last ten or twenty years. When I started to write it certainly wasn't. There was just a few of us who were writing in English; we had a lot of problems in finding publishers, there were very few readers, and no one seemed very interested at all in our work. I think things changed very dramatically – and I can put a date to it: it was 1980 – when Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*, and it had such a huge success in the West."

Peter van der Veer states, "The theme of belonging opposes rootedness to uprootedness, establishment to marginality. The theme of longing harps on the desire for change and movement, but relates this to the enigma of arrival, which brings a similar desire to return to what one has left." (7) He further states, "Those who do not think of themselves as Indians before migration become Indians in the diaspora." The best known writers from India live abroad – Naipaul, Rushdie, Desani, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Raja Rao, Kamla

Markandaya, Anita Desai, etc. The texts of diaspora writers reflect journeys between source cultures and target cultures, between homelands and Diasporas until the two overlap and merge.

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