

Diasporic Discourse in South Asian Canadian Context

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Abstract: The study highlights the diasporic consciousness in the works of South Asian Canadian writers and the influence of their movements on their works. It also deals with the characters they have adopted in their works and life like experience of their character too. The movement which they experienced and the process of assimilation they are experiencing from the beginning of their life is well articulated in their works and also use of some words and the phrases shows that there is some sense of belongingness they feel from their ancestors past and their past. The undermining of history is repeatedly done by South Asian Canadian writers very creatively and proficiently in their works. They have their own use of the language and have standpoint that can be assumed as counteract of English. They vividly tell the story; the language which they use is influenced by the colonialism, with diminutive and straightforward sentence. With the narrative language technique, they preserve the historical, cultural and religious inheritance.

Keywords: assimilating, emigration, identity, socio-culture

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the civilization we get a story of movement of human race from one place to another in search of food, shelter and safety. The term given that time to the human race was nomads but with the alteration of time the movement remain the same but terminology for the same is continuously changing and the new settled human race particularly called to be belong from the diasporic community. Whether belonging to America and settled in Britain, person from Britain settled in America and being from India settled in Canada, they all belong to the diasporic community who have their own experience of their country and some experience of settling and assimilating in new land. The difference in migration of that time and now is that the human have become more civilized and the divisions of the world into the bordered territories which many persons claim to be their territory and several laws and rules are being enforced to enter that particular area and too the human race now know about their rights and their ability. So the word migration, immigration, emigration and Diaspora came into existence and now a day it is most used term in the literature studies as everyone is diasporic in one way or other whether it is interstate movement, intercity movement, or movement outside your country. These varying reasons have led to the creation of a variety of diasporas such as labour diasporas, student diasporas, military diasporas and refugee diasporas. Scattering, as Homi K. Bhabha notes, becomes a gathering:

I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and émigrés and

refugees [...]. Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status—the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man. (Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” 291)

Diaspora is generally referred to as significant ethnic population living outside their original homeland, sharing common bonds and ensuing developments in their culture and ethnic identity. Diaspora is the term associated with various ideas and images which results in avowal of an identity and on the other hand fear of losing that identity. Diaspora can be considered as one of the popular term in current period which apprehensions numerous discourses prevalent. It widely covers all the other aspects of migration, illegal immigration, repatriation, exile, refugees, assimilation, multiculturalism, hybridity. Diaspora defines milieu of diversity: of culture, histories, times, languages, people and places. And in this work will focus on the diasporic literature of how it focuses on the various issues of diaspora and how grips the diasporic issues in the work of major writers. The diasporic production of cultural meanings occurs in many areas, such as contemporary music, film, theatre and dance, but writing is one of the most interesting and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global and problematize national, racial and ethnic formulations of identity. (Ashcroft 218)

The English word “diaspora” is derived directly from the Greek word *διασπορά* /diasporā/, meaning “a scattering.” It is composed of the preposition *δια* (/dia/

“through” or “between”) and the verb σπειρω (/speirō/ “to sow” or “to scatter”). From the original particular reference to the scattering of (above all) Greek, Jewish, and Armenian people, diaspora has become to signify more metaphorical journeys of people from their initial homes to other places of dwelling and working. Here I do not attempt an overview of diaspora in its multiple forms but rather aim for a discussion of literature concerning the emergence of the Indian diaspora in Canada and the United States.

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall, 401–2.) Identities are not only made in a day but it is refreshing and recreating itself into a new amalgamating identity with varied facets of both the culture. It should not be fixed and stagnant as with the change it must have to be change. In its transformational quality, diaspora is typically a site of hybridity which questions fixed identities based on essentialisms. Being an amalgamation of diverse cultural materials, backgrounds, and identities, it nevertheless differs from other types of heterogeneity, implying at the same time a markedly asymmetrical relationship between the different elements of a given fusion. (Kuortti and Nyman, *Reconstructing*, 2.)

As Anderson reminds us, the imaginary dimension of community should not, however, be confused with imaginary or fallacious, for there is no community that is not “imagined.” (Anderson, *Imagined*, 6.) The given diaspora comes to be seen as the community as no community is there which is not undergone the process of imagining, at the same time creating new marginalities, hybridities and dependencies.

The diasporic South Asians are not merely assimilating to their host cultures but they are also actively reshaping them through their own, new voices bringing new definitions of identity. It is also concentrating on the South Asians Diasporic writers reflecting the far-reaching social changes in the status of the diasporic communities living there and what and how much change have been taken from 1980s to 2000 in South Asian context. It also focuses on the Image of India through their eye and through the character the writer creates. Indian diaspora is one of the contemporary scattering that has a history of its own, which not only includes with it the region Republic India itself but Pakistan and Bangladesh itself. In the words of Nikos Papastergiadis,

Identity is defined as hybrid, not only to suggest that origins, influences and interests are multiple, complex and contradictory, but also to stress that our sense of self in this world is always incomplete. Self-image is formed in, not prior to, *the process of interaction with others*. (Papastergiadis, *Turbulence*, 14)

Immigration to Canada began in the 1790s *the first immigration wave* during 1899–1913 “brought nearly 1000s of South Asians” to the Canada. In 1908 the number of South Asians was around 5,000.²⁷ (McMahon, “Overview,” on-line.). And that time mostly immigrants were the, “Sikh farmers from the Punjab region”²⁸ (Minato, “South,” 1.) After 1909 the immigration rules were constricted in Canada and it followed that “[b]etween 1909 and 1943 only 878 Asian Indians were allowed to enter.”³⁰ After increase in the number of immigrants from South Asian countries resulted in aggression towards them during 1913-1939 as a result many left country resulting in decrease of population of South Asian immigrant. “Attitudes to the Sikhs were also harsh in Canada, where racists “made their lives hell” and “succeeded in halting immigration from Asia by deploying popular prejudices and mobilizing white opinion against the newcomers.” (Cohen, *Global*). The *second immigration wave* in the United States was after the World War II, when restrictions were reduced, and by “1971, approximately 67,295 South Asian residents inhabiting in Canada. (Applied, “Peopling,” on-line). In Canada during 1962 and 1967 *third and largest immigration wave* occurred after the legislative reforms. It showed a huge increase in the number of immigrants to study and work and created a great difference between immigrants immigrated before 1965 and after the period. Gurleen Grewal states “those who came after 1965 do not have much connection to the early history of Indian immigration.”³³ (G. Grewal, “Indian-American,”) During 1996 South Asians in Canada were limited to 670,600 but in 2001 it increase to 917,100. (Statistics Canada, “Canada’s,” on-line.)

The census not only shows the number but it also give strength to the voice of immigrants, as it is a comprehensive process of assimilation. The large number of Sikh Community and South Asian population growth during the three waves of immigration is truly a noteworthy assorted multiethnic minority. The obstacles are manifold, and Uma Parameswaran comments on them in the Canadian context by saying that,

Supported by neither the ethno-centric community nor the larger community, literary efforts of the Diaspora are stifled at birth while the publishers, of course, prefer the marketability of negative stereotypes. (U. Parameswaran, “Home,”)

Despite all these difficulties, there have been some indications that South Asians are trying to whittle out an interstellar of their own within the Asian Canada. This has been happening in literary fields also as some of the South Asian Canadian authors are noticeably writing the world of their own that are the assimilation of their own as well as the adopted land. They adopt underlying approach of questioning the precondition of migration, assimilation and creating hyphenated identity. Yet the situation has changed during the past decade for South Asian diasporic writing. According to Ketu H. Katrak, “South Asian American writers in English

are among the newest voices in a multiethnic Asian America.” (Katrak, “South,” 192.) Although there have been various changes in the diasporic work but what remain same is the issue of identity and cultural identity.

2. Conclusion

This rift between past and present, between memory and reality is what gives poignancy to diasporic nuanced writing. These works show an astonishing level of assimilation. The diasporic writers finds themselves most at home in their adopted country with context Parameswaran firmly believes that “home is where the feet are, and we had better place our heart where the feet are” (Writing the Diaspora, 216). The most of the diasporic writers experience single, double and triple diaspora they experience the qualms of it and refers that it is impossible to call yourself completely belonging to any particular place as every place has left some impact on them that their identity has become a hyphenated identity. Claiming themselves belonging to all the country they spent more than decades and adopting the socio-culture of that particular place should not be considered wrong as they molded themselves in all the lands and expresses their love for all the places in their writing which also shows some fragments in the identity of their individuality. Parmeswaran clearly proclaim “going beyond the hyphen without erasing it” (Writing the Diaspora, 204).

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