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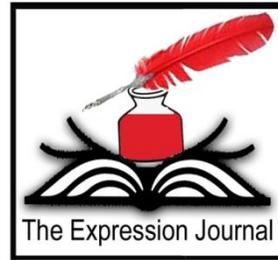
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DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS AS REFLECTED IN THE NOVELS OF

SALMAN RUSHDIE AND BAPSI SIDHWA

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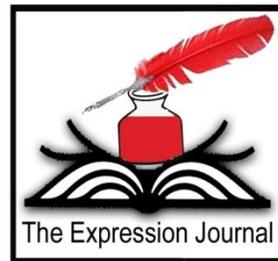
Abstract

Recently, there has been an outcome of many issues related with political and social cause with literature, diaspora is one such topic which has seen abundance of writings all around the world. Diaspora has been derived from the Greek word diaspor`a that means 'dispersion'. South Asia, known as Third world by the Western countries has seen a large scale of migration of people to U.S.A., U.K., Germany, France or other European countries for the sake of professional, economical or academic purposes. Since literature is the only medium of the expression of a person's experiences, there has been an abundance of diasporic literature in the past few years. Salman Rushdie, the Indo British novelist and the winner of Booker Prize has aptly penned the ache of migration, that of the loss of country, language and culture. Rushdie's stories inform the readers about the difficulties of coming into terms with a foreign culture. Pakistan born novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, who later moved to US is the writers of five good novels. She concentrates on the cultural difference between two countries in her novels. In my paper, I am trying to highlight the diasporic consciousness in the novels of these two internationally acclaimed novelists.

Key-Words

Diasporic Literature, South Asia, Migration, Third World, Experiences, Foreign Culture.

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Recently, there has been an outcome of many issues related with political and social cause with literature, diaspora is one such topic which has seen abundance of writings all around the world. Diaspora has been derived from the Greek word diaspor`a that means 'dispersion'. In English language it refers to the scattering of Jews to the countries outside Palestine after Babylonian captivity. Furthermore, the word expanded in its literal meaning and began to be understood as the migration from one country to another.

South Asia, known as Third world by the Western countries has seen a large scale of migration of people to U.S.A., U.K., Germany, France or other European countries for the sake of professional, economical or academic purposes. The last quarter of twentieth century has witnessed a sharp rise in the migration of people from South Asia to the Western world for the upmentioned reasons. Besides, there was also an urge of better options in standard of living. Since literature is the only medium of the expression of a person's experiences, there has been an abundance of diasporic literature in the past few years. These writers are unable to detach their minds from the land from where they belong. There is nostalgia in these writers that colors their works. There is also a concern for homeland which they have left behind.

"The diasporian authors engage in cultural transmission that is equitably exchanged in the manner of translating a map of reality for multiple readerships. Moreover, they are equipped with bundles of memories and articulate an amalgam of global and national strands that embody real and imagined experience."In this way diasporic literature is a major part of contemporary literature because of the global understanding it imparts to the readers. Sometimes it also helps in depicting the genuine problems of any country. It is 'imagined experience' but the fundamental of this imagination is rooted in reality.

Some terms that are usually associated with diaspora are like exile, alienation, nostalgia, despair, dislocation, abandonment and disintegration. But at the same time it is also truth what Aizaz Ahmad opines. He says, "Diasporic

writings are to some extent about the business of finding new Angles to enter reality; the distance, geographical and cultural enables new structures of feeling. The hybridity is subversive. It resists cultural authoritarianism and challenges official truths.”(126) In the contemporary scenario Diaspora has become an effective tool of postmodernism by means of which the big voice of Master Narratives could be challenged. Those living on the margin, who feel exiled and alienated from their roots and find no place of their own, can effectively discharge their voice.

Topographically, South Asia is surrounded by Western Asia, Eastern Asia, Central Asia, Southeastern Asia and Indian Ocean. According to United Nations geoscheme, that divides the world into regions, countries that comprise Southern Asia India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Afghanistan. South Asian Diaspora is one of the world’s largest Diasporas. Contemporary South Asian Diaspora is mainly voluntary. It is to the countries like Germany, France or other European countries for professional or academic reasons as explained earlier. It is not the forced one as in 18th and 19th century for indentured labor. South Asian diasporic consciousness, as any other diasporic consciousness, consists of an experience of ‘in-adjustment’ in the new country. Since they do not regard it as their true homeland, there is a feeling of alienation from it. But at the same time they have a doubt that they are not accepted by their original land and there is an alienation from their land too. The situation for them is like they belong to no place. In a land where one ceases to connect with imparts more loneliness to the immigrant. The difference of culture deepens and so deepens the nostalgia and isolation. Says Tasleema Nasreen:

My world is gradually shrinking. I, who once roamed the street without care in the world, am now shackled. Always outspoken, I am now silenced, unable to demonstrate, left without the means of protesting for what I hold dear. (web)

In Diasporic consciousness the sense of loss, nostalgia, alienation, isolation, shock, is inter-connected with each other. They all come from the feeling of disconnection from the new place.

The migrations are often from developing country to developed countries. South Asian countries are developing countries. The material luxuriates are not in abundance in these countries. While the developed countries offer physical luxury to a great extent. The difference is not only in terms of physical aspects as infrastructure and lifestyle but also in terms of social aspects as culture and societal norms. The migrated person could strongly sense this disparity between his native country and the new country. The migrations are often from developing country to developed countries. He/she compares and contrasts the two countries. This brings in him an imbalance, a disadjustment that prevents him from settling down completely.

The diasporic writing of South Asia has multiple hues of emotions and feelings in it. that It is full of feelings of alienation, love and concern for homeland, nostalgia, dispersion and sometimes depression due to dejection, a dual identity with original homeland and adopted country, identity crisis, search for self in a foreign place, a struggle to save the oneself from being dissolved inthe culture of strange people. Besides, there is also a feeling of revolt against discrimination in the adopted country. There are several writers that are venting out their feelings in this way. They wish to let the world know what lies beneath the glossy surface of extravagance that is part of their lives. Diasporic writing is also a voice of those living on the margins and who are dispossessed.

There are many writers, who have earned name and fame in the West but by birth or by origin are South Asian. There is a long line which includes- Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati

Mukherjee, Bapsi Sidhwa, Hanif Qureishi, Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Moinuddin, Qiasra Shahraz, Sara Suleri, Khaled Hosseini, Taslima Nasreen, Monica Ali, Daisy Abbey and many others.

Salman Rushdie, the Indo British novelist and the winner of Booker Prize has aptly penned the ache of migration, that of the loss of country, language and culture. Rushdie's stories inform the readers about the difficulties of coming into terms with a foreign culture. His Booker Prize book *Midnight's Children* (1981) is an allegory that deals with the history of India from 1910 to the declaration of the emergency in 1976 through the eyes of Saleem Sinai, born on the stroke of Midnight August 15, 1947. The story is set in the backdrop of real historical situations and incidents. "*Midnight's Children* was a symptom of his own status as a migrant writer living in London and trying to capture an imaginary homeland through the imperfections of childhood memory."

In his famous book, *Imaginary Homeland*, he has discussed the problems faced by the immigrants and the people living in exile, their sense of loss and their urge to reclaim what was lost. He observes:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles and emigrants expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt... the writer who is out of country and even out of language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his being present in a different place from his past, of his being elsewhere.

Even his *Satanic Verses* (1988) seems to be the outcome of the dilemmas and indecision of diaspora. The book was banned in several parts of the world and a fatwa was issued against him. Rushdie once told about his loss of faith that nothing could fill. This loss of faith could have taken place because of his loss of roots and motherland. The disconnection with the knowledge of one's roots often proves negative for his psyche. The blasphemous lines could be a result of same negativity. The bringing up definitely make a difference. Bapsi Sidhwa opines about the impact of foreign living and language on writing:

...there's this whole new body of writers who live in England, let's say, or perhaps in France, who writes about their countries, be it Africa. Be it in the Subcontinent, and their way of presenting things, their whole slant on the world and their part of the world, because they're living in a foreign country and they've adopted another country, does change. It somehow alters. There's less compassion. There is less realism, and they start seeing their backgrounds the way the West has been seeing them. They see them through almost pitiless glasses, not tempered with tolerance and compassion. They paint the whole image with the faults and the better points, and they bring out a human fabric, the condition of people there in its entirety, rather than just one aspect. (207)

Pakistan born novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, who later moved to US is the writer of five good novels, *The Crow Eaters*, *The Pakistani Bride*, *Ice-Candy Man*, *An American Brat* and *Water*. She concentrates on the cultural difference between two countries in her novels. *An American Brat* (1993) is the fourth novel of Bapsi Sidhwa. It tells the story of a young Pakistani girl, Feroza Ginwalla and her adventure in America. It is a story based on Parsi consciousness. It is an account of a Pakistani immigrant to the United States, who struggle to blend dual cultures and thereby to discover herself. In this novel, she centralizes Parsi community and examines several themes of vital importance to Parsis in the last decade of the twentieth century. In depicting the expatriate experience,

Sidhwa has tried to juxtapose the first and the third world perceptions. Not only the issues which are basis of this novel are identity crisis, quest for security in the Parsi psyche and influence of the patriarchal society.

Feroza, who is a Lahore, based young Parsi Pakistani girl, is send to America for a three-month vacation by her family to broaden her outlook. It is so because she was becoming more and more conservative because of the Pakistan's rising tide of fundamentalism, during the reign of the late President Zia-ul-Haq. But her family fails to realize that Feroza's journey to USA will make her completely modern and it will be difficult for her to adjust herself according to the Parsi tradition and culture. As Novy Kapadia observes:

Bapsi Sidhwa shows that the journey to the USA was supposedly a learning process but instead it makes her 'too modern' for her patriarchal and seemingly liberal family. So in this novel of self-realization, the self-awareness that Feroza Ginwalla acquires, ironically isolates her from her Parsi heritage. (188)

Feroza, who was a traditional and conservative Pakistani girl, became a modern American girl, unable to fit in her Parsi society. There are many incidents in the novel where Sidhwa has tried to highlight the expatriate-experience. Feroza was very ruthlessly interrogated by the custom Officer on the airport of America. The scene was so embarrassing and humiliating that she wept badly in front of the Officers. She was made to feel as if she has committed some crime. It is so because she belongs to the Third World, if in her place it would have been somebody from the West than the scene must have been different.

One of the other issues which she has highlighted in the novel is the 'culture shock.' The people of the Third World and basically of the Indian sub-continent have a craze to go abroad, mainly to the Western countries for educational purposes or for making money. But when they go there, they see a clash between the culture of East and West. This is what is called 'culture shock' which immigrant from the Oriental world exhibit in the Occidental world. In an interview to Naila Hussain, Sidhwa says:

The book deals with the subject of 'culture shock' young people from the sub-continent have to contend with when they chose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generates between the families 'back home' and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. (19)

So in this way, Sidhwa has highlighted many problems which People from South Asian are facing in the Occidental countries. It is no doubt that Diasporic writers have given a new dimension to the Indian writing. In fact it is because of the Diasporic Indian writers that Literature of India is becoming World famous. Salman Rushdie was the first Indian to receive Booker prize for his book, *Midnight Children*. He was also awarded Man Booker prize. Arundhati Roy received the Booker prize for her book, *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Arvind Adiga for his book, *The White Tiger*. V.S. Naipaul the Indian born Caribbean writer received the prestigious Noble prize. They have made the Indian English Literature the face of the Indian writing. But the Western World is more interested in the Oriental life rather than the Literature. A certain kind of writing is needed to please the readership of the West, and this is quite known to many writers. As Shashi Deshpande says:

One thing is undeniable, that success abroad comes with strings attached. While it is no longer true that the West is not interested in Oriental life, there is no doubt that this life needs to be presented in a particular manner to make it interesting enough. (46)

It is a commonplace of modernism that the exiled writers benefits from his or her uprooting, and that what is left behind is seen more clearly from a distance, while the new abode is seen in a sharper focus than its indigenes can manage. This rule, however, seems only to apply to Western writers: the rest are only too likely to find themselves categorized as one of Gayatri Spivak's 'privileged native informants'— thus rendering themselves 'inoperative within the Third World literary discourse' (outcast indeed) which Amin Malak has defined as 'critical (at times severely critical) of its cultural roots, yet... militantly committed to them. (184)

But in the case of Diasporic Writers of the Indian subcontinent, who belong to different ethnic groups, community and culture that it is difficult to clearly define their cultural identity. There are many examples—Salman Rushdie, who after the publication of *Satanic Verses* gained entry in both India and Pakistan's lists. Similarly, Bapsi Sidhwa, being a Parsi is equally famous in India and Pakistan, Khaled Hosseini, being a Pashtun is known both in Afghanistan and Pakistan and in the same way Taslima Nasreen gained fame in both Bangladesh and India with the publication of her controversial novel, *Lajja*.

There are many writers of the subcontinent, who because of living according to Western taste and expectations have lost touch of their own country. Example can be given of Bharti Mukherjee, who sees herself now as an American immigrant rather than an expatriate. There are different response regarding her book, *Jasmine*, by Indian and Western readers. While many Indian believe that the character of the protagonist of the novel is not very much influence by Oriental character or Indian womanhood but on the other hand some American readers have responded with enthusiasm to what they see a realistic account of Indian womanhood. Rani Dharker maintains that each of the transformations of that novel's 'protean heroine... is a stereotype of an Indian woman as imagined by a Westerner. (9)

It is no doubt that the Diasporic Indian writers are making Indian writing more visible through the world, but are they genuinely trying to depict the emotions which are tied to one's own motherland. Or are they true in highlighting various problems resulting due to immigration. Or now it has become a winning formula, to go abroad, write a book relating various ethnic, racial, economic & other problems of your country, and get it publish there. So you'll become a writer with international name and fame. Your book will be among the bestselling book of the year you'll receive many prestigious awards & prizes. You will also be patronized by the western countries. No matter your country and your people are against you because of their criticism, whether they ban you or lead an exiled life but these countries will support you till you keep on criticizing.

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