



Diaspora With Reference to V.S.Naipaul

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Abstract: The great writers of Indian English fiction like Raja Rao, Mulraj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, had a strong dedication to expose cruel realities of life to effect the desired change in society. Nationalism, Partition, Poverty, Peasantry, Subjugated Women, Rural-Urban Division, East-West encounter, Feudal Practices, Casteism, and Communalism were some of the themes quite closer to their hearts. All of them are well known for realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian life.

Key words: Indian Diaspora, Communalism, Language and cultures

Narration

Writers of the Indian Diaspora have been at the centre stage in the last decade chiefly because of the theoretical formulation being generated by their works. Language and cultures are transformed when they come in contact with the others. These writers are often pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. However, looking at the diasporic literature in a broader perspective it is seen that such literature helps in understanding various cultures, breaking the barriers between different countries and also it helps in spreading universal peace.

Diasporic or expatriate writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures. Theories are generated and positions defined in order to construct new identities which further negotiate boundaries and confines that relate to different temporary and spatial metaphors. This movement causes the dislocation and locations of cultures and individuals harp upon memories.

Diasporic writers live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. This aspect is brought out very beautifully by Bhiku Parekh who states: The diasporic Indian is "like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world" (106)

The chief characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt etc. The diasporic writers turn to their homeland for various reasons. For eg. Naipaul who is in a perpetual quest for his roots turns to India for the same. Rushdie visits India to mythologise its history. Mistry visits and re-visits India for a kind of re-vitalization and to re-energize his aching soul. Bharati Mukherjee's childhood memories harken her time and again. All the same it is necessary to realise the importance of cultural encounter, the bicultural pulls which finally helps in the emergence of the new culture. The



diasporic writings also known as the 'theory of migrancy' helps generate aesthetic evaluation, negotiate with cultural constructs and aid the emergence of a new hybridity.

The diasporic writings have also helped in casting a new aura around global India and have also contributed in building a novel image of India abroad. All this helps in strengthening bonds between various countries and they begin to relate through historical, cultural, social, traditional and economic ties. There are many other landmarks created by the diasporic literature. It has helped to understand and form potentials and core competencies. Access made available to educational, social, professional opportunities and political empowerment. It has made possible the removal of all kinds of limitations and barriers of traditional, cultural, linguistic etc. It ignites and synergies common and shared values in addition to coalition building among the social and political diaspora. In addition to strengthening, it also enhances ties and bonds with others countries. To mention a few are the neighbouring countries including Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and other Asian Countries. Diasporic literature also helps countries to bring about a strategic partnership based on prosperity, security and commitment to freedom and peace. These are actually a very few features to name. If planned and monitored positively, diasporic literature can also aid to fight larger evils such as terrorism, drug trafficking, environment degradation, combating the spread of contagious disease and actually fighting many other common political and social hurdles. Looking at it optimistically, diasporic literature also helps in creating good will, a cordial

relationship and in spreading values, virtues and universal peace. Shri A.B.Vajpayee speaking on his expectations from the Pravasi Bharatis ie. N.R.I's said:

"What we seek is a broader relationship, in fact a partnership among all children of Mother India, so that our country can emerge as a major global player. We value the role of people of Indian origin as unofficial ambassadors providing a link between India and the rest of the world".

No doubt, many of the Indians have left their motherland to seek anchor in various other countries. The reason for this movement ranges from indentured labour to seeking better prospects. In the past, the Indians were intellectually fed on the thoughts of Dickens, Scott and the likes. Today, people all over the world are being nourished by the writers of the Indian diaspora namely V.S. Naipaul, Rushdie, Mistry, Vikram Seth, Mukherjee, Vassanji etc. The European voyagers, travelers, traders and the orientalist rediscovered the cosmopolitan culture of India. The writers of the Indian diaspora, through their literary contributions have greatly enriched the English literature. They have been aiming at re-inventing India through the rhythms of ancient legends, the cadences of mythology, the complexities of another civilization, cultural assimilation and nostalgia. They dive deep into the realms of imaginations and the ocean of memory to paint something quite different and distinct from that portrayed by fellow novelists. The writers of the Indian diaspora write about India painting the vastness and the complexities of the home country which contains everything in multitudes – multiple truths, multiple crisis, multiple



realities and this diversity is portrayed for the world wide reading public.

It is interesting to note that the history of Indian diasporic writing is as old as the diaspora itself. The first Indian writing in English is attributed to Dean Mohamed, who was born in Patna, India. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794. It predates by about forty years the first English text written by an Indian residing in India. Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'Imaginary History' A Journal of Forty-Eight hour of the year 1945 published in 1835. The first Indian English novel, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, was to be published much later in 1864. It proves that the contribution of the Indian Diaspora to Indian English writing is not new. It is also interesting to note that the descendants of the Indian indentured laborers in the so-called 'girit colonies' have mostly favored writing in English. Writers like Sree Prasad Naipaul and later Shiva Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul, Cyril Dabydeen, David Dabydeen, Sam Selvon, M.G. Vassanji, Subramanian, K.S. Maniam, Shani Muthoo and Marina Budos are important contributors in this field.

V. S. Naipaul's characters like Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsumair from *The Mystic Masseur* are instances of persons who are generations away from their original homeland, India, but their inheritance gives them a realization of their past. They become examples of the outsider, the unhoused, for 51 the world to see. Naipaul's characters are not governed by actual displacement but by an inherited memory of dislocation. For them, their native land India is not a geographical space but a creation of the imagination. Their predicament can be explained in

Rushdie's words as he remarks; "-- the past is a country, from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity." (Rushdie, 1991:87)

Literature of old generation of diasporic Indian writers like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhari, Ved Metha,, mainly look back at India and hardly ever record their experiences away from India as expatriates. It is as if these writers have discovered their Indianness when they are out of India. Evidently, they have the benefit of looking at their homeland from the outside. The distance offers detachment that is so required to have a clear insight of their native land. Gradually, the old diaspora of indentured laborers is replaced by the new diaspora of International Indian English Writers live in the market driven world. These writers register their away from India experiences and even if they look back at their motherland it is often in a melancholic tone rather than nostalgia. These modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two different classes. One class includes those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been raised since childhood outside India. They have had a vision of their country only from the outside as an alien place of their origin. The writers of the previous group have a factual displacement whereas those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have created an enviable corpus of English literature. These writers while portraying migrant characters in their fiction investigate the theme of displacement, alienation, assimilation, acculturation, etc. The diasporic Indian writers' portrayal of



dislocated characters gains immense significance if seen against the geopolitical background of the vast Indian subcontinent. That is exactly why such works have an international readership and a lasting appeal.

Two of the earliest novels that have effectively depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. These novels reveal how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of 1960's isolates the character and deepen their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife and Jasmine* depict Indians in the US – the land of immigrants both legal and illegal – before globalization got its momentum. Salman Rushdie in his novel *The Satanic Verses* approaches the metaphor of migration by adopting the technique of magic realism. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* depicts Tilo, the protagonist, as an exotic character to reveal the migrant's anguish. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* shows the extent of rootlessness encountered by character born and brought up on a foreign land. Amit Chaudhari, in his novel *Afternoon Raag*, portrays the lives of Indian students in Oxford. These writers also depicted the positive aspect of displacement. There are benefits of living as a migrant, the opportunity of having a double perspective of being able to experience diverse cultural modes. It is often this advantage that enables diasporic Indians, particularly of the second generation; face the dilemma of dual identities. Such ambivalence produces existential anguish in their psychology.

The ranks of second generation diasporic Indian writers like Meera Syal, Shashi

Tharoor, Hari Kunzru, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. have faithfully demonstrated the lives of both first and second generation immigrants in the US. This is possible because big issues like religious discrimination and racial intolerance are no longer the main concern of these writers. What matters now in the present world are the small things. Little unappreciated things gain enormous significance in changed conditions. It is here that the different reactions by Indian, westerns and diasporic characters towards similar situations are bound to differ only apparently. It reveals that the inner needs of all human beings are the same.

The great writers of Indian English fiction like Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, had a strong dedication to expose cruel realities of life to effect the desired change in society. Nationalism, Partition, Poverty, Peasantry, Subjugated Women, Rural-Urban Division, East-West encounter, Feudal Practices, Casteism, and Communalism were some of the themes quite closer to their hearts. All of them are well known for realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian life. Taking departure from the first generation of Indian English novelists, the postmodern Indian English novelists have concentrated on a completely new set of themes which are wide ranging and inclusive as the life in the age of globalization is immersed in the emerging issues of globalization and subsequent multiculturalism, feminism, queer theories, diasporic sensibility, glamour, consumerism, commoditization, upward mobility, erosion of ethical values are some of main issues raised by contemporary novelists and short stories writers.



This paper is mainly focused on the diasporic thread of V.S. Naipaul in the context of cultural identity. In order to be a true national or West Indian, Indians had to be Creolised or to mimic the white values, which the Indians thought as the degradation of their civilisational and cultural values and ethos, hence making the Indians un-nationals or anti-nationals without any kind of national consciousness in the eyes of the Creoles, whites and blacks. But with the gradual progression the West Indian society was led in the path of pluralism with the recognition of Indian values and ethos and Indians began to be perceived as having national consciousness if not nationalism. But for an individual or writer like, V.S. Naipaul, who is twice or thrice born, having an ancestry in India, born in the West Indies (Trinidad), a dwelling in the metropolis (England),_ courting a diasporic consciousness and possessing an exilic sensibility, it becomes very complex to bind him and analyse his works or writings. In this chapter, keeping the diasporic framework in mind an attempt has been made to examine some of the early writings of V.S. Naipaul, basically focusing on the struggles of Indians, their identity quest, occupational mobility, cultural confusion of the West Indians, especially, Indians, other socio-cultural dimensions of the West Indian society and Indians' encounter with the other West Indians in the West Indian socio-cultural setting. At the same time the diasporic and exilic sensibility of V.S. Naipaul, as that of Indian West Indians, has also been pointed out.

When Naipaul first ventured into his writing career his material was not "sufficiently hallowed by a tradition"

(Naipaul, 1976: 27)_ Though Naipaul could stake a claim on the English language, yet he realised that the English literary tradition with its alien mythology could never be his. And for Naipaul living in the closed boundary of the Indian community there was nothing which he could call a literary tradition and the West Indian or Trinidadian values were never liked by him. His father's stories found a way out of the problem for Naipaul and introduced him to a world of writing sensibility with the different nuances of writing, and this endowed him with a starting point. Naipaul's interest and aspiration of becoming a writer was, in the first place, something that had come to him from his father, who was a journalist, which occupation was unusual for a Trinidad Indian of his generation. Opening up an exciting world to Naipaul, his father's stories in a way compensated for Naipaul's lack of tradition. With finding a model for his work and discovering a literary tradition in his father, Naipaul set about establishing his identity by ordering his experiences through his writing.

Naipaul as a postcolonial novelist with a diasporic contemplation, recording and analysing various nuances of the colonial as well as diasporic people, situates his novels in colonial, ex-colonial and diasporic settings and provides a perceptive account of the complexities and intricacies inherent to such societies. The sense of alienation, identity crisis, paradox of freedom and the problem of neocolonialism in the ex-colonies are the major themes that emerge from a reading of his novels. The early novels of Naipaul deal exclusively with the colonial society of Trinidad, the island of his nativity, and are preoccupied with the themes of dispossession, homelessness, alienation,



mimicry and the search for an authentic selfhood. Naipaul's personal experience of being a displaced member of a marginalised community in Trinidad provides him issues and essences for his writing and the characters in his novels are continually in search of an identity and home representing Naipaul's as well as the Indian diaspora's search for selfhood. Being an Indian by ancestry, Trinidadian by birth and English by intellectual training and residence, Naipaul is indeed a man with a broader perspective and this multiple heritage places him in a position that makes it possible for him to render a detached account of his subjective experiences.

Naipaul is unsparingly critical in his observation and interpretation of the ex-colonies and he exposes the inadequacies of such societies, which he believes to be the outcome of the unconscious acceptance of the nuances and values of the colonising culture. The colonial nature of the West Indian as well as the Trinidadian society marks Naipaul's rejection of his birthplace, in his own words it was, "unimportant, uncreative and cynical" (Naipaul, 1969: 43). As an immigrant society Trinidad consists of "various races, religion and cliques" (Naipaul, 1969: 45). The Trinidadian society is a fragmented one, comprising of heterogeneous people, whose presence in the island was purely an accident of history. Commenting on the manufactured nature of West Indian societies Naipaul observes in *The Middle Passage*: "The West Indian colonial situation is unique because the West Indies, in all their racial and social complexity, are so completely a creation of Empire that the withdrawal of Empire is almost without meaning" (Naipaul, 1969: 152-153). Nationalism or national

consciousness was impossible in the West Indies due to the lack of a common West Indian identity. Moreover, there was not even any anti-imperialistic feeling among the Trinidadians; on the contrary, it was rather their "Britishness", their "belonging to the British Empire" that gave them a sense of identity (Naipaul, 1969: 45).

The West Indian writers' criticism of V.S. Naipaul basically stems from the note of rejection that pervades the novels of V.S. Naipaul and they believe and claim that novels which expose the inadequacies of underprivileged societies like the West Indies should employ a sympathetic approach. Clarifying his position as a writer and at the same time lamenting the fact that West Indian writers have failed in their responsibility towards their society. Naipaul claims in *The Middle Passage*:

"Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands. Here the West Indian writers have failed. Most have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices of their race or colour group. Many writers have displayed a concern, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness" (Naipaul, 1981: 73).

Hybridity constitutes one of the central strands in the discourse of diasporic writing, especially in regions like the West Indies, which is a home to multi-racial or plural societies. Racial and cultural hybridity constitutes of incongruous combinations of relationships, mentalities, genders, classes, nationalities and ethnicities, drawn up from the far off peripheries into the centre. Hybridity that has been



'politicised,' hybridity as division and separation, carries greater significance in diasporic discourse. In other words, hybridity (in racial as well as cultural models), involves an antagonism and coalescence, a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation. Lambasting Naipaul for turning "his back on the hybrid half-made colonial world," Bhabha sees in Naipaul's reading of the "English book his cringing for western attitudes towards colonialism." Bhabha illustrates his assessment of Naipaul's negative, sterile attitude to the formerly colonised world: "The values that such a perspective generates for his own work, and for the one colonised world it chooses to represent and evaluate, are visible in the hideous panorama that some of his titles provide: 171e Loss of El Dorado, The Mimic Men, An Area of Darkness, A Wounded Civilisation, The Overcrowded Barracoon" (Bhabha, 1993: 107).

In the diasporic discourse especially that of the West Indies, the question and the positioning of cultural identity has to be seen and understood against several diverse issues of race, nationality, colonialism, and the way it has become problematized. Cultural identity in the diasporic discourse has to be defined in terms of a shared culture, a sort of collective true self hiding inside other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. The other most vital aspect is the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced diasporas. The history of transportation, slavery and indentured migration holds the prominent key in understanding and comprehending the forgotten

connections, the rift of separation central to the West Indian experience. The ruptures and discontinuities which constitute West Indian uniqueness provides significant dimension in exploring and examining the notions of cultural identity in a diasporic framework. Diaspora, is therefore, a scattering of the seed in the wind, the fruits of which are a new creation and a fight to survive. Every diasporic movement holds a historical significance, as it carries within itself the kernel of the nation's history. Diaspora is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. There is an element of creativity present in the diasporic writings and this creation stands as a compensation for the many losses suffered.

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