

Chapter-5

In almost all the cases the expatriate face contrasting cultures and feeling of alienation, which was then followed by the attempts to adjust and to acclimatize, either from a separate identity as a racial group or be assimilated. These are reflected in the writings now generally placed under the umbrella of "expatriate writing" or "writing of the Diaspora". It is also true therefore that diasporic writing is full of the feelings of alienation, love for the homeland - a double identification with the original homeland and the adopted country, crisis of identity, mythic memory and the protest against discrimination in the adopted country. 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 reason might be the fact for the male writers the literary journey starts outside while for the females it starts with the family. No doubt, lots of imagination comes into play to bring up a masterpiece and that the works of a women Diaspora writer writing on diasporas are not a representation of herself or even the true reflection of the entire culture as is portrayed in the stories out of imagination. Indian women writers have reported that it is all too often assumed their writings reflect their personal lives.

While many do draw upon personal experiences for material, they justly resent the foisting of personal interpretations on their writings. They equally resent the intertwining of their public image with their domestic realities. Women writers from all cultures and races have contended that they are regarded as 'women writers' and not simply as writers. And the fuel for such

imagination, motivation, themes, situations and other important aspects on the diasporas by the writers who themselves belong to the same category is believed or can be concluded to arise out of situations faced by themselves. Emergence of women Indian writers on the literary scene has been recent, it may be merely "the flavour of the moment" which accounts for their current popularity regarded as feminist writing. The fact that so many Indian women writers appear to be concerned with portraying the same themes makes them an easily recognisable new group of writers on the global literary scene.

However, it does ironically limit their scope, because having built up an image of what Indian writers work contain, there is now an expectation amongst readers that this genre must feature such themes and no others, and there is an increasing danger of Indian Diaspora literature becoming a stereotyped literature.

Alienation, identity, homelessness, issues related to race and gender, memory and representation of memory etc. emerge as major thematic concerns of diaspora. My research topic is "Women in South Asian Diasporic Writings: A Study of Select English Fiction". It is the study of various issues of diaspora as reflected in a novel of selected South Asian women novelists. The study helps to understand different societies, their customs, religions, etc. within South Asia and of the countries where the characters migrate in the selected novels. I have investigated diaspora in the selected works of the women writers of South Asia, viz. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The selected novels are as under

1. *Brick Lane* (2003) by Ali, Monica.
2. *Meatless Days* (1989) by Sara Suleri Goodyear.
3. *The Vine of Desire* (2002) and *Arranged Marriage* (1995) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
4. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2009) and *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri.
5. *Fault Lines: A Memoir* (1993) by Meena Alexander.
6. *Anita and Me* (2004) by Meera Syal.
7. *What the Body Remembers* (1999) by Shauna Singh Baldwin.

The study is proposed to understand narration of various issues such as alienation, marginalization, cultural insularity, social disparity, racism, ethnicity, gender sensitivity, etc. in the novels.

This study focuses on the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri and Meera Syal from India, Sara Suleri Goodyear from Pakistan, and Monica Ali of Bangladesh. These writers have explored the meanings of diasporic existence in their works and through their characters have upheld the diasporic sensibility. In this, I tried to explore various notions and thoughts on Diaspora and attempt an answer to the initial question, what is a Diaspora? The introduction of the research topic understands “Diaspora” as a broad term that encompasses several thoughts and understandings into this human phenomenon. Diaspora begins not with travel but with settlement. Diaspora is a state of human existence; if human existence, then only a diaspora. People settled in a different state within the homeland have now come to be recognized as a metaphorical extension of Diaspora. What

emerges from the various fiction and the diasporic writers' plumbing into the depths of this phenomenon is that Diaspora is also a state of mind.

So long as the migrated people find themselves in a state of exile, they are diasporic. The diasporic people transcend beyond borders but stay connected in the mind. Their state of alignment with the past life and past home keeps their past world around them in the new land, which is at once the desired and spurned locale. This is because most diasporic subjects recognize the gains that they have received as a result of their shift; however a major portion of the diasporic subjects find themselves misplaced and deprived of their roots once in the new land. William Safran suggests that Diaspora is characterized primarily by the relationship between the dispersed people and the original homeland to which they hope to return. Robin Cohen has proposed typologies of Diaspora that distinguishes not only between voluntary and forced dispersal, but also between the conditions of acceptance and acclimation.

Diasporas live in one country as community but look across time and space to another. The migrant Diasporas and their descendents experience displacement, fragmentation, marginalization and discontinuity, in the cultural discourse of the subject countries. They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland, its physical location, history, festivals and achievements. Diaspora is all about the creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture, either composite or plural. Diasporic writings are constructed not on the principles of harmony but on the principles of simultaneity. The principle of

simultaneity displays ‘the core’ human predicament in the countries of the West and the East.

One can be diasporic even while staying in his own home the home can become exile (Hasina in Ali’s *Brick Lane*), a man can become a diasporic as his wife connive with her children while they defy their father (Chanu in *Brick Lane*). It explores the difficulties in the formation, adherence and non-adherence of dispersed identities among its characters through the process of unhoming. The novel is pursuing two points thoroughly. The first is the expansion of the home through the process of unhoming and the other is the adoption of the dislocated character as a counter-hegemonic representation of the diasporic individual. I find out that *Brick Lane* traces the journeys of various characters in space and time, as they in turn journey through the transformations of their selves. For instance, we note the journey of Nazneen, an eighteen-year old girl, who is displaced from her homeland in Bangladesh to Towers Hamlet in inner London, following her marriage to Chanu and how she copes with her dislocation. Chanu has been living in London for several years and is a character who inhabits a space of permanent dislocation which can also be interpreted as being in a state of transit. The other man in her life Karim is a second-generation migrant born and brought up in London, though seemingly British, he cannot be seen as rooted in the host nation as his ideologies and choices are found appropriating the homeland Bangladesh in very subtle ways. The rich variety of the circumstances surrounding these characters is underlined by three focal points: home, unhome and dislocation. One cannot assure that these common

characteristics of diaspora are available in all the works of diasporic writers. Based on the theme of writing, diaspora writers can be divided into two types: writers whose works focus on their home country and writers whose works talk about the settled country. The first type of writers locates their work in their home country in order to criticize it or to portray their home country and its culture to the foreign readers or use their work as a tool to remember their home country. The second type of writers locates their works in the settled countries to reflect the changes they undergo or to tear the mask of multicultural nations, by portraying its discrimination towards them, or to show their developed condition in the settled countries. The end of the *Brick Lane* is utopian. It is an allowance of return: Nazneen and her daughters almost join Chanu in Bangladesh, yet in their final decision to remain in Britain this more traditional migrant's return is forgone for the more radical return to the place in British society which their presence has afforded them and which they are entitled to claim as right.

In the first generation immigrants, however, migration creates alienation, nostalgia of the past and rootlessness at the place of migration as he or she is still clinging to the cultural beliefs, practices, norms, of the homeland, which Makrand Paranjape observes as, “there is a clinging to the old identity and a resistance to making a transition” (61). It is this sense of loss that Bhabha calls as displacement or dislocation which creates a position of ‘live in between’ or ‘living on the border’ which Bhabha discusses in his *The Location of Culture*. The displacement also gives rise to the concepts of

double consciousness and un-homeliness, which are the major features of diasporic situation.

The research is limited up to three countries of South Asia. Novelists from South Asian countries viz. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives have not been included. Only, women novelists have been selected and out of many works by these authors, I have focused on only my point of hypothesis. The first chapter titled “Introduction: Diaspora: South Asian Diaspora – South Asian Immigrant Women in the West” realizes the South Asian diaspora as a close knit pattern and largely connected to its locale. The SAARC countries, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives which comprise the South Asian diaspora is one of the major diasporic groups in Britain and in spite of the presence of seven countries, the diasporic subjects have certain common characteristics due to their historical past.

However the first four countries have the largest number of people migrating to Britain and make for a major part of ethnic majority in the UK. Another important feature noted is that South Asia survives as a group and sticks to its South Asian identity rather than crumbling down to its sub-parts and even deters from merging into the body of the West. This chapter looks into the various definitions of Diasporas and finds a sense of inherent contradictions in the definition. None of the attempts to theorize diaspora or the experiences of the same is self-sufficing. This is because the experiences differ from time to time, from generation to generation and as per their gender and stages in the diaspora. While etymologically, the word means to

sow or scatter, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, describe diaspora as communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through migration, immigration, or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion. The reaction of the immigrants to their land of origin, vary with their stage in the diaspora. While the first generation diasporic people long to get back to their homeland and a sense of crisis taints their being; the second-generation group of diasporic people does not suffer from a state of being in exile.

The original notion of the diaspora came up with the forceful exodus of the Jewish community fraught with the “collective trauma” (Robinson 82) of the banishment and exile. However with time the meaning of the word has expanded to include all people that are living outside their homeland. Diasporic experience is an incomplete and ever-growing process as the modern experience is taking shape everyday. Diasporic persons are encountering themselves in a new way in the context of changing socio-economic conditions.

The second chapter “Women in Diaspora” which is also called Diasporic Women, depicts conditions of women how they are living in diaspora. A struggle for an identity among women has been the theme of many contemporary authors but still the outcome is not so obvious. I find that there are many women who are not positively aware of their oppression, who find it natural to do all domestic work themselves, to care for their children almost completely on their own. The sense of identity is never specific for immigrants as a unit or a whole. On the contrary, the identity varies according to race, class, gender and individual experience of racism as faced

by the immigrants. Identity crisis however is not of this world or that. People of the Indian sub-continent have found more crises in their native land of origin (during Partition, ethnic wars, riots between religious communities, etc.) than when living in Britain.

Among the first generation writers who have migrated after 1980, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Sunetra Gupta are prominent. These are postcolonial immigrants writing mainly about the diasporic issues of home and nation, personal and gender experiences as they are influenced by feminism and postmodern developments. Some of them have migrated independently either for pursuing higher education or career. Woman's experiences are at the focal point in their writing. In the category of second-generation writers in the new millennium, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, are some notable names. Writings of these women writers are centered on the themes of cultural identity, hybridity caused by generation gap, tussle between parents and children of the migrant communities. Thus, the diasporic issues seen through the eyes of a woman writer as well as their personal experiences of exile and migration are dealt with in the fictional works of these women writers. Along with the men writers these women writers touch upon immigrant problems like nostalgia, alienation, home and host situations, identity and dislocation etc., from a woman's point of view. However, the female perception differs from the male perception of writers like Salman Rushdie, Rajarao, Amitav Ghosh etc.

Most of the women writers have expressed this feeling in their interviews and writing. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, states that, “I started writing only after I had left India. I think distance gave me a better perspective of things, of women caught in an oppressive social system, of conflict between cultures and ways of life”. For Meena Alexander writing is a mode of self-expression and a mark of identification in the state of dislocation. She finds that there is a violent tendency to curb the art of Asian American in USA. Hence, her writing has a purpose, “of evoking a chaos, a power equal to injustices that surround us. Writing for younger generation women writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, is an exploration of their diasporic situation and self-expression. They are trying to connect themselves to their ancestral home and also give expressions to the predicaments of the second generation i.e., the children born to the immigrant parents.

The problems of adjustment between parents and children, hybrid and plural identity are some of the issues voiced in their writings. Secondly, some women writers combine the elements of the two worlds, which are contrasting. These elements are the myths, folklore and cultural aspects of their motherland and adopted land. In this memory plays an important role and sometimes it creates an exoticism about their motherland which attracts the attention of the foreign racers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, combine the elements of east and west in their novels. Though they recreate their homelands in their writing like male writers, the portrayals of women are

different as they present the lived experiences of women's world. Perspectives from gender become important in their writing rather than dealing with the critique of politics, history and other subjects related to the nation as their male counterparts do. A recurring theme in many of the novels of the Indian diaspora women writers of the recent years is an exploration of a woman's identity, a study of herself. There is, in the novels of all the women writers- old or new, a marked pre-occupation with nostalgia, dream and introspection. Trends in recent fiction unmistakably indicate how the new novelists are trying to tread fresh paths and this is the surest sign of the continued vitality of an art.

In the third chapter "Woman Back Home", which is also called remembered women, I tried to explore why remembering is compulsory. Who are remembered women? Why remembering is important? Then I find out that remembered women are those who remain stay back and struggle for their identity, for a place in the new world often becomes the ethnic of immigration existence.

The fourth chapter "In-Between women" display the multiple strata of 'hybrid' Asian female identities to negotiate a path between their dual 'homes' and conflicting situations: their struggle for integration. They have

firmlly located their narratives within the dynamics of contemporary gender and racial politics, highlighting the questions of ethnicity and female selfhood.

I tried to explore the knowledge of diaspora elements and about the nation from the observation of different characters through their experiences especially of South Asian countries. It also throws light on the current global issues and provokes to think seriously about their solutions to maintain global harmony and make life peaceful. Another important feature revealed in the fiction is chosen is that in most of them there is a sense of continuation of lives, a retreat into somebody else's self, a reliving of the earlier identity thereby ensuring a place in somebody else's history. Nazneen's sister, Hasina in *Brick Lane*, had fled home to realize the colourful dreams of adolescence. Though happily wed, Nazneen's peace loving, educated, middle-aged husband fails to satisfy her until she steps out on the trodden path of her sister. She too ends up living a life all her own heedless of any male companion. Meena in Syal's *Anita and Me* begins as a transgressor but ultimately courts the culture of her mother and the other Asian girls in the locality. Another prominent feature of diasporic writing is that in most of the fiction the story though centering on the protagonist, it is not the story of an

individual's strife to make a place in the new land or the homeland. Instead, the story touches upon the lives of several characters who are all pitted in the diasporic situation and share different reactions to the Diaspora. Several experiences come together to form a pattern and amidst this pattern the writers eke out an experience, shapeless yet conspicuous. As the novels, represent nations and cultures of various countries viz. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, USA, UK, and Canada the thesis adds some new perspectives on issues of immigrants through the experiences of different characters and gives some new understanding.

The place of the diaspora writers is interesting. They are in away a link between their ancestral home and their new home. They translate 'India' to the West and at the same time open the West before the readers back home. Their portrayals of their marginalization, rejections and the stories of the insults they have suffered in the foreign country are sent back home. The responsibility to tell the true story is on their shoulders. The diasporic writers draw special attention for the reason that they belong to a special category of writers who are by default credited with multiculturalism and transnationalism. Among diasporic writers, the women writers draw special attention as their sensibility, consciousness and perceptions provide

altogether different magnitude and rather vivid perceptions of those fragments of human realities, which are characteristically specific to the writings of diasporic writers. The fact that the women's writing has been considered an integral part of creative writing in the 20th century literatures of the world; the women writers from the Asian subcontinents have made their presence felt significantly on account of their exposure to the world outside their homeland as well as their grounding and orientation in the cultural traditions of the homeland. Before talking about the women writers of India, it is very important to know how women, facing all odds from the society, started expressing themselves through their writings.

Indira Gandhi, perhaps the most successful woman in public life makes a very poignant statement in *Eternal India*:

Woman must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn't allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast-moving events. The solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into home nor escape from it.

(Gandhi: 03)

When the term migration is referred in the context of diaspora, in the scenario of theory or politics, one may often talk about Homi K. Bhabha or some other writers and about their migratory experiences. Bhabha is always quoted as a migrant from Bombay to Britain and who now lives in America. This consideration also has a national perspective where Bhabha's identity is equated with the feeling of nationality. Can migration be always a shift from one nation to the other? Why it can't be a regional or local shift? When theories focus beyond the borders, why should they marginalize the issues sprouting within the borders as local and regional which never demand the touch of diaspora?

The past few years have witnessed a proliferation of inquiry into the global Indian diaspora, exploring the historical evolution of the complex identities of the twenty million people of South Asian origin living outside the subcontinent. The literature and cultural texts of the Indian diaspora have become an important touchstone for examining the ways in which Indian diasporic identities are produced, resisted, contested and manipulated in various ways across time and space. The research argues that works of diasporic literature, written by women who are diasporics, open up a space where one can view women's identity within the diapora as a realm of

dynamic dialogue. The energy created by that dialogue propels a reinterpretation of gender roles and promotes a gendered vision of diasporic identity. In this globalised world, diaspora has gained currency and so also diasporic writings. British South Asian female writings are widely included in critical discussions throughout the literary and cultural discussions worldwide.
