



INDIAN DIASPORA: TRACING ROOTS AND PHASES

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora is a term used for large scale migration from the country of origin to another countries, either voluntarily or due to some compulsions. Diasporic writing has been increasingly receiving academic and disciplinary recognition. It emerged as literary genre. A large number of people have migrated from India to various lands under forced migration or self imposed exiles. Some of them have made a mark in the field of writing. These immigrant writers reflects their attachment to home country and also their feeling of alienation.

KEYWORDS: *Diaspora, Alienation, Immigrant, Roots, Phases, Indentured, Exile.*

INTRODUCTION

Diaspora literature is a vast field of study, which covers major part of literature produced in any language. It is an umbrella term for all the literary works written by author living outside their native country. It is collections of writings by all dislocated writer who come under one roof create an archive of their own. They are connected to one another in terms of experiences and share the opportunity to express them at one common platform. Diasporic writers despite being away from their native lands write about their homeland and native culture. Some of the basic characteristics of diaspora writers are multiculturalism, hybridity and globalization. Diaspora literature can also see as collection of pollinated seeds from native land. The pollination in terms of homogeneous characters of a particular culture or society may be voluntary or forced. The migration from homeland for any reason causes pain and sense of alienation. In diasporic literature the imagination of the writers is painted with glimpses of the reality and personal experiences. The memories and nostalgia play the most important role in the creation of diasporic work.

The diaspora writings are the record of the experiences of the diasporic communities living in varied sociocultural settings. The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration is, economic, social, political no matter whether they migrate for trade and commerce as religious preachers, as

laborers convicts or guest worker in search of better life and opportunities, have shared common experiences. Diasporic writing has developed its own theoretical position privileging a double vision. The experience of migration varies from person to person depending upon the levels of education, age, background and point of entry. But neither dislocation nor absorption can e total there has to be an ongoing involvement with reality. Post colonialism is often referred to as the theory of migration but it does not help one to approach and interpret diaspora writing. An analysis of themes of work of Naipaul may provide incites in to various approaches to Indian Diaspora writings.

Diasporic literature mainly focuses on themes like discrimination, cultural shock and reverses cultural shock, problems in adjustment and assimilation, identity crises, displacement, dilemma, depression, hybridity and generational gap. Combination of words, phrases or idioms of homeland is frequent in diasporic literature. Migration has become a famous phenomenon among Indians as well. In addition, many people are aware of cultural diversity and migration, as result of globalization and technical development. English education in India which commenced during the colonial period and continued through the post-colonial India has now become eminent among the majority of Indian's. Thus the diasporic Indian writing in English literature is a significant in



conveying the experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora to the readers of English literature.

DISCUSSION

Tracing Roots

The history of Indian immigration does not only date to landing to the shores of South East Asia. The migrated peoples carried with them proud legacy of ancient culture and civilization dating back to millennia before Christianity or Islam and that's where history began in pre-historic times. So to track their roots, we have to go deep in to history and capture the early spirit and civilization on these evolved cultures along the riverbanks mountain and jungles.

Not only physical ruins of the Indus valley civilization in Mohenjodaro and Harappa regions, there is another intangible civilization that is still alive with us, it is every where alive with us. This gives our life a meaning, a depth and vision. It carries our prayers, our ceremonies, customs, rituals, our daily life, our food, our music, our thoughts, our identity and our Indianness. The Spirit of Indian culture and civilization is also inscribed in the cave paintings of Ajanta, the temple sculpture of Elora, Elephanta caves. Our culture sometimes manifest itself in the rocky temples of Mahabalipuram, South of Madras, in the temple of madurai, in the ruins of Nalanda in the Buddhist temples of Sanchi and many more impressive Buddhist monuments spanning across China, Japan, Korean and South East Asia. We will meet the intangible Indian culture and civilization. The spirit and message are unbeatable in their profundity and meaning, unfortunately they have been kept sealed and made inaccessible to the rest of the non Asian world. They have not been packaged structured, broadcast, marketed and communicated to the world. Maybe Indians are shy about their culture and philosophy.

Today, at the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, we gathered together to celebrate the meeting of diaspora. Somewhere deep inside our mind, heart is attached to motherland. It is the spirit of this civilization that we are proudly celebrate our immigrant forefathers left their home in difficult circumstances and at different time to disperse in to different part of the world. At that time their motherland caught by Moghuls and the British. Colonialism, exploitation, misery, famines, unemployment, poverty, despair and desolation are the main reasons to migration. So, forced by circumstanced people felt they had to left their motherland to build better-homes for their children.

People migrated to other parts of the world, but they did not leave India with empty hand. They carry with them Indian culture and its memories. That was the baggage to long survived them. They have added a set of new rhythm, new idea, idioms, fresh colors, flavors and originality and variety the

world's cultural heritage. PIOs struggled hard sacrificed, suffered and contributed honour to their motherland and their country of adoption. Emboldened by the eternal spirit of Indian culture civilization which they passed on the successive generation their combative spirit and their commitment to Indianness lives on in the mind of the NRIs and PIOs gathered here to celebrate the PBD. We have to pay tribute to the first generation migrated peoples who dared to cross the seven seas, facing unknown land and to hold our culture to improve the lives of their family. They succeeded largely due to their indomitable spirit to struggle, to strive, to work hard and to live an honest life and to save and sacrifices made by them.

People of India have been migrating to other countries for various reasons. Though Indians are not reputed to be very mobile people, their presence abroad can be attested from a days of remote antiquity. In spite of the fact that crossing sea was considered as a breaking proscription in India, a large number of Indian crossed the sea in different periods of history. In ancient India shipbuilding was a flourishing industry. Thus the myth that Indians are land locked people who fear crossing black waters has been proved wrong. Relics of Indus valley civilization found at Harappa and Mohenjodaro indicate that people had business relations with foreigners about 3000 years before the birth of Christ. The journey of Indians can be divided in to three broad phases.

Phases of Diaspora

1. Pre colonial phase
2. The colonial phase
3. The post colonial phase

1-The Emigration in Colonial phase-

The first evidence of Indian migration is in 5th century BC when the colonists from western India settled in Ceylon, which was finally converted to Buddhism during the reign of Ashoka. A few Indian merchants found their way to Malaya, Sumatra, Java and other parts of South East Asia and settled there permanently, often marrying native women. Brahmins and Buddhist monks followed them. Thus Indian religion, Buddhism and Hinduism, Indian philosophy and thoughts influenced the whole of South Asia in a way that gradually leavened their indigenous culture, until, by 4th century AD Sanskrit became their official language and as large maritime empire arose. The wonderful monuments serve as memorials of those periods prove its greatness. The Buddhist Stupa of Borobudur in Java, or the Saivite temple of Angkor in Cambodia, and certain Hindu Customs which are a part of life in Thailand, where they celebrate Geeta Jayanti even today. Sanskrit names still in use in Java, survival of version of



Ramayana legend in Indonesia are enough to prove Indian migration to these countries.

Indians migration to the East is exhibited by the fact that the distinctive civilization of China, Korea, Japan and Tibet is shaped by the assimilation of Buddhism in their culture. Monks, traders and wayfarers took Bhuddism through central Asia to China, from Tibet to Mongolia and Japan about 2000years ago. India's ties with Malay go long back to a distant past and the presence of Tamilians in Indonesia predated the arrival of Dutch colonizer. Indians sailed to the island of Madagaskar and settled there. Hindu element was found in the population in North West and West, and intercourse was maintained between India and Northern Madagaskar.

Long before the discovery of Mediterranean trading routes, Indian traders went deep in Indian Ocean to discover new trading routes up the east coast of Africa., South East Asia and the area that now comes under the term middle east. There was a thriving trade across the Indian Ocean through centuries and the signs of Indian settlements can be seen in Zanzibar, Ethiopia and along the African coast. The contact of the Palas Bengal with the Sailendra kings of Indonesia and the expedition of the South Indian Cholas that vanquished the great Indonesian empire of Sri Vijaya are repeatedly referred to by the scholars. The trade with East Africa, however, led to a permanent Indian settlement there. The research on the Pre-colonial Indian diaspora is scant and sketchy. Even the available data are scattered in historical works.

2- The colonial phase-

Though Indian emigration has been taking place for centuries but never before in history India witnessed such massive movement of people from in history India witnessed such massive movement of people from India to other parts of world as in 19th and 20th century. Migration during this period started with the migration of Indian soldier to various British colonies who accompanied their masters to participate in different wars. British India during early 19th century the large scale migration happened mainly due to the recruitment of labor under indenture scheme to different plantations all over the world belonging to the colonial masters.

Mainly three type of Indian emigration are identifies in this period;

1. Indentured labor emigration
2. Kangani and Maistry labor emigration
3. Passage or Free emigration.

The indenture was a form of contract labor. The contract is fixed for five years of work in a particular plantation and the owner of the plantation paid the laborer as per the contract both cash and kind. After the five years of specific contract, the laborer is free to work everywhere in the colony. The indenture contract either to return back to the

motherland with the money earned under a subsidized passage or continue to stay on entering into another contract to work as indenture labor and subsequently buy a piece of land for cultivation when it is affordable. This provided the opportunity of producing tropical, agricultural product like spices, rubber, coffee, tobacco, cotton and sugar. They set up huge factories and plantations with the help of slaves coming mainly from African countries.

The labor intensive plantation needed workers and India became largest suppliers during 19th and 20th century large numbers of Indians were taken to various places like Mauritius, the Caribbean island, Malaya, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, Burma, Ceylon, Fiji and Africa. Under the indentured labor was sent for five years. In 1870 convention was sent for 5 years. These agreements were part of all Imperial plans in return for acquiring some territory or extending influence in other region.

The laborers recruitment under Kangani or Maistry system from Madras presidency were legally free as they were not bound by any contract or fixed period of service. These system which began in the first and third quarter of the 19th century, were abolished in 1938.

Emigration from India did not cease with abolition of indenture and other system of organized export of labor. There was steady trickle of emigration of member of trading communities from Gujrat and Punjab to South Africa and those from South East Asia. Most laborers immigrated to East Africa to work on the construction of railroads. The immigrant was not officially sponsored. They were free in the sense that they were not bound by any contract.

Major part of migration to the regions in South East also began in the middle of the 19th century. Though, here also Britishers sent Indians to work in their plantation in Burma, Malya and Singapore. Large part of the migration towards southeast was voluntary. Indians began to enter in to Phillipnes after the American occupation in 1998. Indians went there as a trader who wished to set up small business and set off chain of migration from their home region. Indians had traditional role in court circle in Thailand, which got reduced in the colonial era. Many Indians reached there from Malaya and Singapore, while merchants from India joined them. They were settled mainly in urban centers and were involved in mining precious stones and trading Indians arrived in Singapore just when it was established as trading post. Indians travelled from the French territories of Pondicherry to the Indo-China region and became a recognizable minority in South East Asian Countries.

Migration to Australia took place in phases. The first wave of migration started during the early part of 20th century when both Australia and India



were under the British colonial rule, The Indians who initially entered in Australia were mainly Shikhs and Muslims from Punjab region. These earlier immigration had moved there to work on Banana plantations.

3- The Emigration post-colonial phase-

In the post world war 2 period, migration of Indian labor and professionals has nearly worldwide phenomenon. The third stream of migration to the developed countries like Britain, USA and Canada began during the half of the British Raj. Major migration to these countries took place after Indian independence. This migration took place after Indian independence. Major migrations were mostly Sikhs from four or five districts of Punjab. Indians found jobs on the railways, in farming and dairy work. As more Indians joined, they took to working on the farms and orchards. A major change in the immigration policy occurred with 1965 amendment in the immigration and nationality act of the USA. The Indians who moved to America in the late 1960s and 1970s were highly qualified individuals and till the 1980s the Indians were a professional class dispersed throughout the suburbs, living among other middle class people.

The Indians had traveled so far in search of better opportunities. Many of them belonged to small peasant's families; they had to mortgage their lands to pay land revenue. The land was mortgaged or sold to finance the journey in expectation that remittances would improve financial condition of the family. Today Indians in the USA, Canada are one of the largest among the groups of diaspora community. The migration in the post –colonial period was entirely different when compared with earlier forms of migration the earlier forms of migration the pre-colonial and colonial phases. In this phase migrants are from the middle-class, with instruction in English and were skilled. The educational system in the post-independent India was patterned after the British and American educational systems. The system produced professionals who outnumbered the availability of the jobs that can observe them. In a situation dominated by underemployment and unemployment, the prospective migrants were attracted with the available opportunities abroad. This led to kind of professional migration often termed as 'brain drain' facilitated with the rapid transformations in the transportation and communication.

Indians were compelled to leave their people owing to hunger, poverty, unemployment and exploitation at the hands of their British Masters. Some migrated to earn bread while others field to escape from the cruelties of the British. The experiences were bitter and it affected the migrants in many ways. They received inhuman treatment on ship in addition to this the ships met with unexpected calamities like epidemics, hurricane, fire and heavy

rainfall causing death in thousands. The terrible experiences grew all the more terrifying after they landed on the indentured workers were allotted to their planters, whose overseer marched them to the plantations where they would work for five years. The Europeans firmly believed that the coolies deserved harsh treatment and hence the Indians were subjected to all types of cruelties and atrocities.

Even in the difficult working and living conditions on the plantation, the Indians tried to maintain their adherence to some customs. Religion and its rituals gave some meaning to their lives in the harsh new world and helped them to preserve their identity. They also tried to recreate lost familial connections by forging new relationships with their shipmates and tried to rebuild their lives in the unfamiliar surroundings. Some migrants return to India with their saving, through the majority had little to save from years spent working in the colonies. Some worker managed to save, especially if they attained a position of responsibility like Sardar or Carpenter. Some made money through gambling, others through money lending.

In Trinidad, the indentured workers had the hope of acquiring a patch of land to farm for them. In the early days of indenture, most of the workers return to India, but some Indian settlements began growing and opportunities for small jobs, market gardening or farming came up, the migrants stayed back. In the sugar colonies of Trinidad, Fiji and Guyana Indians settled permanently and became sugarcane farmers. By 1912 the demand for abolition of indenture became a part of nationalist struggle in India. Gopal Krishna Gokhale the leading nationalist introduced a resolution for banning indentured immigration on 4th March 1912.

CONCLUSION

Overall we saw their is great Transformation in the cultures of the migrated peoples. Though their physical or geographical position is de-localized, their social and cultural bond remain same. They still attached to old memories of their culture from which their living pattern have emerged. We observe that the Indian diaspora as a large and distinctive group which has its origin in the British colonial subjugation of the rural Indian population. It is not only disturbed of the traditional , social structure but created the indenture and Kangani forms of labor that led to large scale migration of the Indian .

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